

Lords, Lackeys and the Blarney stone: Byron and Low Life.

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An inhabitant of Dublin in 1910, who was whisked forward to the Dublin of 2010, would not find the centre of the city much altered but might well be bewildered by two lost presences: animals, especially horses, and servants. These would have been nearly as omnipresent in 1910 Dublin as they had been in 1810 London, though both cities had largely electric trams by the early twentieth century. There would be a sprinkling of cars then but it was prior to their mass production after the First World War. Now, horses and servants have almost disappeared and neither seems likely to make an extensive come-back, though we cannot be sure of that. We have forgotten that they were once a necessary, accepted, and indispensable part of social life and human awareness and most certainly of Lord Byron's. This essay is about Byron and his servants in life and poetry.

The disappearance of servants means that we have lost important kinds of customary knowledge that shaped consciousness from childhood onwards. Peter Cochran has observed that nowadays it is very difficult to find an actor who can play an upper-class role—they do not know the accent or the mannerisms. A gesture is made to some aloof self-consciously superior person and that is as far as it goes. This would not have been the case in Byron's England where upper and lower classes lived cheek by jowl; for the upper classes depended upon the service of their inferiors and most of the lower classes depended on the living afforded them by their masters. Byron mimics Fletcher's way of talking for instance when he does a spoof letter to Hobhouse purporting to be by Fletcher announcing Byron's death. Byron is wholly familiar with Fletcher's idiom so he can play his part. Male servants in the eighteenth century, dressed in their master's cast-off clothes, often pretended successfully to be gentlemen in gambling clubs and elsewhere.

The sheer number of servants is the first thing to be noted. There was a distinct shift to female servants in the nineteenth century, perhaps in part because of the larger industrial use of men rather than women. Men servants always commanded higher wages and it was more prestigious to employ them; the more footmen who greeted an incoming guest, the better. Hence all manner of yokels were sometimes dressed up in livery for the arrival of an important visitor. Then the worry would be that the temporary footman would have no idea how to behave as such; footmen seen to have been paid more if they were tall. Their appearance—having well-shaped calves for instance—was an important factor in their employment and in their bargaining power. Nevertheless their status was increasingly distinguished in the latter part of the eighteenth century onwards from stewards, butlers and valets. The latter did not wear livery and were addressed by their surname. This was more prestigious than being addressed as the ubiquitous 'James'. Their strong calves doubtless came in handy since they were often used as couriers, running sometimes prodigious distances in a short time, and still sometimes ran alongside coaches much as the secret service walked and ran by the side of the pope mobile as it trundled along the streets of Edinburgh and London in the autumn of 2010

at about the same pace as a coach. Byron employed servants specifically designated as couriers though he sometimes used Fletcher for this purpose. In the nineteenth century, butlers (who by then had gained status in relation to other servants) wore a suit rather than livery but a suit that was clearly distinguished from that of their masters. Earlier, it was common for lady's maids, valets etc to receive the cast-off clothes of their masters. It is important—this goes back to Peter Cochran's point—that they could often play this part very convincingly. Byron alludes to this when he indicates that Zoe:

.... who, although with due precision
She waited on her lady with the sun,
 Thought daily service was her only mission,
Bringing warm water, wreathing her long tresses,
And asking now and then for cast-off dresses. (II, 182)

Servants are separate but they form a hierarchical social world. Senior servants had junior servants just as sixth-formers at Byron's Harrow had fags. Yet servants could move up within this hierarchy. This is documented in E. S. Turner's well known *What the Butler Saw* (1962) which P.G. Wodehouse—whose comic world would not function without servants—said was on 'a special shelf' in his library. Historically, comic worlds often depend upon servants—the comic Manuel in BBC TV's *Fawlty Towers* is in a long line from Menander to Molière to Chekhov. One of Turner's sources is *The Compleat Servant* (1825) which was written by Samuel and Sarah Adams. These were an enterprising couple of servants who worked their way up the hierarchy before and just after Byron's lifetime. On page thirteen we read that:

The author, educated in a foundation school, entered service as a footboy, in 1770, and during fifty years he served successively as groom, footman, valet, butler and house steward. His wife began as the maid of all work, then served as house-maid, laundry maid under-cook, housekeeper and lady's maid, and finally, for above twenty years, as housekeeper in a very large establishment.

Presumably combining the roles of 'housekeeper and lady's maid' together implies a smaller establishment. Servants preferred large ones where they had more power, more prestige, and there was more social life amongst the servants themselves.

We can compare the progression of Sarah Adams to that of Mrs Clermont. She wasn't married but then the French habit of calling someone over a certain age 'Mrs' was still common and thus avoided the unpronounceable 'Ms' of more recent times. Mrs Clermont began at the age of eighteen as a maid to Annabella's mother. Later she became a replacement to Annabella Milbanke's governess but acted as a maid who, unlike a governess would 'dress & undress her, & sleep always in her room & be always with her'. Clermont, who could read and write as could Samuel Adams and Fletcher, worked her way up from these lowly duties until she sat at the same table as her former mistress. She formally left service in 1811 but continued to visit Annabella 'as her Companion, to play at Chess, read etc'. Byron initially liked her but, through her considerable activities during the Separation when, as Annabella wrote, her 'constant

devotion to my welfare had kept her in Town' and she was in daily contact with her, he came to hate her. When Moore's life of Byron was published, she rather surprisingly admitted that 'I was treated by Lord Byron with more than the ordinary degree of politeness I might have expected.' It is, however, specifically, her promotion from service to equality which he singles out in the opening lines of 'A Sketch':

Born in the garret, in the kitchen bred
Promoted thence to deck her mistress' head;
Next-for some gracious service unexpress'd,
And from its wages only to be guessed--
Raised from the toilette to the table, where--
Her wondering betters wait behind her chair.
With eye unmov'd, and forehead unabashed,
She dines from off the plate she wash'd.

Hence, says Byron, 'She rules the circle which she served before.'(40)

This was perfectly true for, as Byron points out in the poem, both Annabella and her mother were frightened of Mrs Clermont who established her dominance when Annabella, as a baby, was ill with scarlet fever. We are in the territory of the sinister servant—Henry James's Miss Jessel, Daphne du Maurier's Mrs Danvers or Harold Pinter's and Dirk Bogarde's *The Servant*.

The clash, there, is between Byron's household and that of his wife. Just as King Lear's servants clashed with those of Goneril. But when two households unite, servants, too, are often attracted to one another.

This is true of Byron's most famous servant William Fletcher whom Annabella later described as 'of a timid & simple disposition—much attached to his master.' He was originally a tenant farmer at Newstead who eventually owned three cottages derived from his father. It was common to choose the squire's servants from local tenant farmers. William was initially chosen to be a groom, but after the dismissal of Byron's first valet, Frank Boyce, for stealing (he was sentenced to transportation, Byron tried to obtain clemency but he was sent to Australia) he was replaced as valet by Fletcher. Valets were more frequently found in bachelor establishments. Fletcher married a local woman Sally and had two children by her. These were significantly called William, after himself, and George Gordon after his master. His first wife died and he married again, none other than Ann Rood who was one of Annabella's servants. Byron called her 'Roody'. Annabella later tried to get her to testify against Byron but, presumably because of her dual allegiance, she refused. Annabella promptly said that she would never give Ann Rood a character reference which was essential for future employment elsewhere. When Fletcher went abroad with Byron after the separation, his wife stayed behind. She lost her own child but brought up Fletcher's children by Sally his first wife. Byron intervened several times to help their education. Annabella said that she did not trust 'Mrs Fletcher' because at the time of the separation, during which she was sometimes used as a go-between between the two, 'Fletcher writes to her "My dear—you know it is our *duty* to bring *man & wife* together!"—I suppose he means *themselves*.'

I said earlier that through the disappearance of animals and servants from common life, we have, whatever the advantages, lost kinds of knowledge. This is what I meant by that. Byron knew a great deal about Fletcher and Fletcher knew a great deal about Byron. They knew how the other talked and thought. What did Fletcher and Ann Rood talk about in bed?—Annabella and Byron most likely. Certainly it was Ann Rood who famously told her husband that she saw Annabella 'rolling round the floor in a paroxysm of grief at having *promised* to separate from Lord Byron'. Nowadays those who live on benefits in housing estates set up by local government and those who live on their considerable assets in gated communities do not encounter one another. There are television programmes which set up exchanges between families and schools representing both groups as though between the inhabitants of Papua New Guinea and New York. Novels and their readers largely exist in middle class world of the interiors of houses and the interiors of selves whereas poetry and drama traditionally have fed off hierarchical worlds made up of different kinds of people who interact publicly.

Another example of servant relationships is that of Fanny Silvestrini and Lega Zambelli. They were both in the household of Count Guiccioli. Fanny was a governess of his children by his first wife before he married Teresa. They became lovers and had children though they never married. When Byron and Teresa first met and were in the initial stages of their affair, Fanny Silvestrini was crucial. She acted as go-between, and arranged their secret meetings in gondolas etc. Byron wrote that 'by the aid of a priest, a chamber maid, a young Negro boy, and a female friend [i.e. Fanny who moved up as Mrs Clermont did) we are enabled to carry on our unlawful loves'. Fanny transferred to Teresa's household and her lover, Lega Zambelli transferred to Byron's who said that he was 'my secretary, an Italianism for steward or chief servant'. Byron did not like Fanny but came to rely on Lega who became his steward, ranking above Fletcher. It was very important to Lega, who had been a priest and was descended from a minor noble family, that his status was not confused with that of Fletcher. Later, after Byron's death, the two together set up a macaroni factory in England which eventually collapsed leaving Fletcher without money. He was for a while in a debtors' prison. Byron paid his servants above the going rate, at least in Italy and Fletcher was able to save quite a substantial sum of money out of his wages. Fletcher's son, William, knew Aspasia, the daughter of Fanny Silvestrini and Lega Zambelli, and fell in love with her when she was twelve. Later they married and emigrated to Canada. Lega initially tried to prevent it because he felt that his daughter was superior but then came round. Fletcher's son (William, not George Gordon) wrote some poetry unlike his dad, but like his dad's master.

The obvious other location for servant relationships is Newstead Abbey. Byron's mother's household was largely female. She was always cutting down on staff in order to save money, in large part to keep the poet going. Thus she would get rid of staff in the summer months but re-engage them for winter because you had to keep all the fires in the house going in winter to stop damp and that entailed quite a lot of servants. She inherited Joe Murray from the Fifth Lord Byron who took one of his servants, called

Hardstaff as his mistress, known locally as Lady Betty, and left her all his money when he died (he also shot one of his coachman and hurled the body on top of his coach). Lord Byron was a kinder employer than this—Teresa Guiccioli commented on Byron's noticeable indulgence to his servants. In this he was quite unlike his nasty father who treated his servants horribly and with violence. Joe Murray was not too happy with Byron's proposal that the two of them should eventually be buried together with Byron's dog under the high altar of Newstead Abbey. He did not mind being buried with his lordship, he said, but took exception to the dog. Murray must have been a capable servant—he acted as steward or butler (butlers only really become masters of the household in the Nineteenth Century)—but he had a habit of singing very ribald songs at inappropriate moments. When Newstead was sold, he lost his job but Byron saw to it that he had a pension. Then he was engaged by Colonel Wildman, Byron's school friend who had bought Newstead and did it up. The great refectory which was a dump in Byron's time—he used it for fencing practice—was to be restored and made into a very grand servant's hall. This delighted Murray who dreamed of presiding at the long table just as his master did in the Great Hall but unfortunately he died just before it was completed. But one sees again in this little story the mimicking of upstairs life by downstairs life.

Apart from Murray and the grooms, and Byron's valet, the Newstead household was female but Byron, of course, introduced a significant change. He replaced his mother's occasional servants, apart from the housekeeper, with young and pretty ones and gave them specific instructions. They were not to wear caps on their hair which they must wear long (this was an outrageous contravening of decorum not least because exposed long hair was the mark of the prostitute) and they were to wear muslin dresses—normally cotton dresses were used in the day time and muslin at dinner and onwards—muslin dresses were more clinging and more décolleté. So Byron's fictionalised account of Newstead Abbey in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is not far from the truth:

Monastic dome! Condemn'd to uses vile!
Where Superstition once had made her den
Now Paphian girls were known to sing and smile.

Paphos was home to a shrine of Venus, hence paphians =prostitutes. Byron refers to scores of 'pedestrian paphians' (*Don Juan* XI, 30) crowding the streets of the West End. There is something a bit shocking about this. Of course, it was quite common for squires to bed pretty maid servants.

Richardson's best-selling novel *Pamela* is about a servant girl who resists the squire's advances and ends up with being married to him. Richardson called this 'Virtue Rewarded' but Fielding, in his parody of Richardson's novel called *Shamela* suggested that she both provoked and resisted him in order to get him to marry her.

But Byron's is not a typical case of this pattern. Byron never behaved like a typical squire as John Beckett has shown in *Byron and Newstead: The Aristocrat and the Abbey*. He never had the sort of house to which other equivalent families were invited. In agreeing to dress as he asked them, the maidservants had already crossed a line which Richardson's Pamela would never have crossed. Byron was not on the Nottinghamshire circuit of country house visiting by choice—he only invited close friends to Newstead

and doubtless they would not be shocked by his Paphian girls whereas as anyone else would have been. The only time in his life, I think, that Byron presided over a household which invited guests was his palazzo in Pisa to which he invited Shelley and other English expatriates for dinners. Yet, within Newstead, a drama like that of Richardson's Pamela was played out. Byron had an amour with a servant called Lucy by whom he had a child, but then again with Susan Vaughan, whom everyone called Taffy because she was Welsh. She was both attractive and cunning and clearly wanted to be a Pamela. She made a pitch for Byron and gave herself airs above all the other servants from whom she wished to be distinguished. Byron must have been besotted with her for on one occasion he wrote her three letters whilst travelling by coach away from her (the letter-writing also reminds us of Richardson's novel). She wrote back to him complaining that his page, Robert Rushton, was seen disappearing into Lucy's bedroom. Byron smelt a rat, made enquiries and discovered that it was in fact Susan who was busy seducing Robert. So he dismissed her, which is something he very rarely did. He nearly dismissed Fletcher when he discovered that Fletcher had taken Robert Rushton to a brothel in London 1809 to initiate him. Yet he never sacked Fletcher who knew how to handle Byron. Fletcher was a wretched traveller, hated foreign food and any discomfort. Byron said that he was frightened of storms at sea, missed his wife, and set up 'a perpetual lamentation for beef and beer', so Byron was going to send him back from Spain in Byron's first trip abroad. But Fletcher made a tearful scene and Byron relented. Similarly when they moved to Pisa, Fletcher was allotted a bedroom but refused to go into it. He complained that it was haunted. Byron found him another one. Such details reveal that, though servants were often treated without consideration (Byron sometimes shouted at Fletcher especially in 1815-16 and in 1824) they often had more power than we think. A good servant in a large establishment would use the threat of going somewhere else in order to get a pay rise for instance. Byron was usually indulgent. On one occasion in Venice, two of his Italian servants were drunk and got into a fight, Pietro Gamba intervened, and one of the servants, Vincenzo Papi, stabbed him in the arm. Byron came in and calmed everything down, the servant flung himself at Byron's feet full of remorse but Byron dismissed him. Yet later he re-engaged him and he was there with Byron when he died in Greece. This incident was far more serious than Frank Boyce's theft, for Pietro Gamba was a count and brother of Byron's maîtresse-en-titre who was an acknowledged figure in high society, yet Byron was soft-hearted enough to take him back. I don't know how often Byron's servants got drunk. He would not have tolerated outrageous behaviour but I think the account we get in Canto III of *Don Juan* of Lambro returning like Beppo from his piratical travels is a clue. Lambro comes on his own house and, appalled, sees outside it 'a troop of his domestics dancing' and the 'servants were getting drunk or idling' (III, 29, 39). This is deliberately contrasted with Lambro's control over his own servants when he blows his whistle and twenty servants immediately rush in and arrest Juan.

Byron's household was more like that of Juan and Haidee's than Lambro's. Trelawney, always a liar but perhaps here telling the truth, describes how on the brig *Hercules* travelling to Greece he came upon

Fletcher making himself comfortable with a pot of beer and a large piece of Cheshire cheese. It sounds plausible but I do not know how Cheshire cheese arrived in Genoa. Nevertheless there was still something of Lambro in Byron's attitude to servants for, though being a professed devotee of liberty, he clearly admired discipline. His late tale, *The Island*, juxtaposes the discipline of British naval ships with the freedom of the isle of Otaheite where seems fulfilled

The wish—which ages have not yet subdued
In man—to have no master save his mood.

The poem, as usual in Byron, has it both ways, we are allowed a dream of freedom but shown also its impossibility and we have a grudging admiration for the necessity of law and order as symbolised by the British naval ships where, as we are told in canto II, 19 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 'the lone chieftain [i.e. the captain] who majestic stalks, /Silent and fear'd by all'. Byron here associates law and order with bravery—for 'Britons rarely swerve/from law, however stern, which tends their strength to nerve'. That is the British navy captain but it is also the Byronic hero such as like Conrad in *The Corsair* who keeps an absolute control over his followers—several are named (Juan, Gonsalvo and Pedro) by rarely talking and always walking slowly in their sight. Something of this self-control is in Byron who, after all, behaved as coolly as Lambro or Othello when faced with brawling violent servants.

Byron loved Scott's novels for all kinds of reasons. But one of the things that he liked was Scott's ability to juxtapose different worlds. In *Waverley*, for instance, the hero is in modern England reading romances, then he travels up to Scotland to Bradwardine castle—a real castle with a real Baron and a pretty Romance heroine inside it—but further still, on the horizon, are the highlands into which the hero is later taken. There he encounters a yet more romantic feudal clan world presided over by Fergus MacIvor who must be in part modelled on Byronic heroes. The novel mediates between these three worlds much as Byron as Childe Harold in Spain moves between modern political Spain, Romance Spain, and the world of modern warfare which has elements of both. When Byron first sees Ali Pasha's Tepelene in Albania, he sees a feudal world with 'a court, Slaves, eunuchs, soldiers, guests and santons' which is 'Within a palace, and, without, a fort.' (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, II, 56). I think that this excited him. He knew that Ali Pasha was a monster but he was a glamorous monster. And Byron fitted delightedly into that world. He was given a large military escort by Ali for when he travelled. It must be remembered that one did not meet Byron alone; he was always with servants, usually more than one. Like the Queen of England he did not carry money. If he dispensed charity, which he habitually did if he met anyone in need, it would always be Fletcher who gave it. In Albania, he travelled as a sort of military chieftain and the distinction between servants and soldiers was a blurred one. Footmen, for instance, originally carried swords but were forbidden to do so by English law in 1701. But when Byron was in Venice, he acquired one of his most famous servants who ostentatiously carried one. This was Tita Falcieri, who was originally his gondolier then promoted to footman. He was huge in size, about twenty-three years old and passionately devoted to Byron. He slept in Byron's coffin as his master's

body returned to England pickled in brandy. Eventually, he ended up as a servant of Isaac D'Israeli and then, after the latter's death, via the influence of his son Benjamin Disraeli, Tita got a job as messenger in the India Office. Tita wandered round with a long beard, a sash into which a sword was always thrust and sometimes pistols, sometimes a musket on his back. So when you arrived at the Palazzo Mocenigo and, having traversed the downstairs hall with all its animals (animals and servants—our two disappeared species—were the biggest single item in Byron's accounts in Venice) the door at the top of the steps would be opened by a man with a huge sword in his belt. He would take you to Byron. Hence you would encounter a poet and English gentleman abroad but also something of clan chief. From 1816 onwards Byron always had an all male household apart from the brief period where Margarita Cogni established herself as housekeeper in Palazzo Mocenigo.

Clan chief was a role that Byron played in Missolonghi in 1824 which was almost entirely a male world dominated by internal disputes and set up for fighting. Again, as with Robert Rushton, he had a page. It is striking that, when Byron left England in 1816, he again took Rushton as page with him, just as he had in 1809. This was, presumably a deliberate gesture which blurs the distinction between Harold and Byron since pages would have been common in a feudal world but began to die out in the eighteenth century. Pages, were supposed to be of aristocratic descent whereas Byron's were not. Rushton was sent home from Geneva, settled down and married twice.

Byron's new page was Loukas Chalandritsanos, with richly enlaid pistols and elaborately dressed. Loukas seemed to have played a version of Pamela's game. He did not respond to Byron's advances and, in return was lavished with gifts. But Byron also had a large household not perhaps totally unlike Ali Pasha's with a military guard of his own choosing, and five Suliotes stationed permanently outside his house, plus his own servants, and newly engaged Greek servants. He paid the wages of Pietro Gamba's valet and, finding out that he had tailoring skills engaged him for his whole household—kitting some of them out in new liveries. He behaved in effect like a benevolent ruler—clothing at his own expense, and to the indignation of the Greeks, some Turkish girls who had been left behind in Missolonghi and sending them to a Turkish bey under guard. Perhaps in part he was toying with the idea of being a benevolent king of Greece if the title was eventually offered to him as he knew was likely.

The livery that Byron's servant wore is quite interesting. Originally they wore the traditional livery of the Byrons, a claret coat with breeches, a scarlet waistcoat and silver lace plus two greatcoats, one for summer and one for winter. But later in Italy he kitted them out in sombre colours, brown, blue and grey—perhaps they wore different colours on different days. In Venice he had about sixteen servants because he had two houses and he needed a groom for his horses on the Lido. Usually he had in Italy (where he could for the first time live within his means since costs were very low) about six to eight servants even, when in Genoa, he inhabited a house with some fifty rooms. Part of it, of course, was inhabited separately by Teresa with her own servants. Byron's tame geese wandered freely in both parts of the house.

The switch to sombre colours for his servants may have been ahead of fashion. Byron himself habitually wore sombre colours and often in London a black coat with a white waistcoat—extremely unusual at the time and, it has been plausibly suggested, perhaps the main origin of the move to the customary gentleman's evening outfit in the later nineteenth century which consisted of black coat with tails and white waistcoat and shirt. Beau Brummel of course like understated colours and his taste was very influential (he said that his genius was in the wearing of clothes) but he did not, I think, wear black. Both Brummel and Byron were instrumental in the move from breeches to trousers. Byron had to wear breeches on certain occasions but hated to do so because of his lame leg and it is possible that one of his calves was less developed than the other. If squires sometimes seduced or even married maids, it was not unheard of for titled ladies to run off with tall footmen with well-shaped calves. Augusta Leigh's daughter, Medora, whether Byron's or not, eventually married Jean-Louis Taillefer, the servant of her lover, when that lover abandoned her.

We need briefly to consider the relation of servants in Byron's poetry to his real ones. The first thing is that there are quite a lot of them. And they are often named—in the *Corsair*, in *Manfred* (Manuel and Herman who have a whole scene to themselves), and in the plays, especially *Werner*. Donna Julia has a clever servant Antonia and gives her a vigorous speech with which I shall end this essay and Haidee has a servant, Zoe, described as young but older than Haidee and more robust of figure. A stanza is devoted to what she wears. She makes coffee and fries eggs whilst Haidee swoons over Juan, and then, when Haidee refuses to wake Juan to have it, she has to cook a new breakfast for him. Zoe is told by Haidee not to mention the fact of Juan to everyone. One of the most obvious features of servants is the extent of their knowledge of the private lives and secrets of their employers. Two of Shelley's servants, Elise and Paolo Foggi, suggested that he had a child by Claire Clairmont, though he probably did not. Byron believed the story and scholars still dispute its reference

What is striking, too, is Byron's decision to fictionalise his servants alongside Childe Harold. Fletcher becomes in Childe Harold's Good Night 'my staunch yeoman' who is 'thinking on an absent wife' i.e. his first wife Sally, and also of his boys who 'dwell near thy hall, along the bordering lake'. Rushton becomes 'my little page'. In a cancelled stanza, Fletcher is referred to as a vassal and this links, I think, with my earlier argument about Byron's yearnings to be a benevolent feudal lord which seems to be a chivalric version of his protection of smaller boys from being bullied at Harrow. This is at odds, of course, with Byron's complaint in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* that the restored monarchies after Waterloo are part of 'reviving Thralldom' and 'serving knees'. For all that, I don't think that Byron envisaged a world without servants as being necessarily better than one with them.

This fictionalising of real servants is uncommon. We may ask what other Romantic author would do this. It is striking that most people who know anything about Byron have heard of William Fletcher, Joe Murray, Tita Falcieri, and Lega Zambelli. Apart from Fletcher, there are pictures of all of them. Walter Scott had pictures made of two of his servants and the eccentric Yorke family at Erdigg Hall in North Wales, had a whole series of

servant portraits, but this is still most unusual. Byron paid for the painting of Murray.

Nevertheless more striking still is the elimination of servants in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*. Juan travels from Spain with servants but they are drowned or eaten and we don't hear of them again or of servants in Norman Abbey. Now that is odd since the traditional Juan figure in Tirso da Molina's and Molière's play and Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is always accompanied by a comic servant much like Byron and Fletcher. The servant may be complicit in seduction schemes or appalled by his immoral master as Regan and Cornwall's servants are in *King Lear*. But of course Byron's Juan is not a seducer. He has no stability as a traveller—unlike Byron who had Fletcher with him from the age of ten until his death. His strong Nottinghamshire accent must have been a permanent reminder in exotic places of provincial life and Newstead. Byron spoke to his English servants in English and his Italian ones in Italian. It must have been quite complicated. He took a German servant with him to Portugal, I don't know what happened to him, and he brought back two Greek servants when he returned, one of whom is named. I don't know what happened to them. Fletcher refused to learn Italian or any other language but picked up a sort of pidgin Italian after having been in Venice for a while—perhaps learned, like Byron, in bed, for Fletcher's compulsion to visit prostitutes is often mocked by the poet—even though the servant was only imitating his master.

Even more striking is *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The servants are there at the beginning but then are dropped altogether and we are told always that Harold 'wends his lonely way'. This is something that Byron himself almost never did. Shelley might go off on his own with a book and fling himself down by an Italian lake to read it or look at the sky, but Byron never did this sort of thing apart from lying on Peachey's tomb at Harrow and Churchill's tomb at Dover. In his various houses, he certainly spent long hours alone, reading or writing, but in public he was always with servants though he could dramatise aloneness and apartness when he wanted to. John Galt has a rather disapproving account of seeing Byron alone and aloof on the quarter deck of a ship. Harold on the other hand is a projection of this inner aloneness. It is at odds with another image of Byron that shows his awareness of the human needs of others—on the *Hercules*, William Fletcher who was never a good traveller, complained of there being nowhere to sleep. The boat had no cabin originally. One had been knocked together and a bed provided for Byron which was the only one on board. So Byron gave him his own mattress, wrapped himself in his cloak and sat down on deck to go to sleep. It is a revealing little story.

Byron described his conducting of *Don Juan* in this way: 'I rattle on exactly as I'd talk/with any body in a ride or walk.' (XV, 19 The Irish understand this ability to be conferred by having kissed the blarney stone. Byron undoubtedly had the blarney but my concluding question is what has the blarney stone to do with servants?)

It is a curious thing that recent research by Professor Kathryn Sutherland, widely reported in the media and available in an online archive, suggests that Jane Austen could not spell or punctuate well and that she spoke with a broad Hampshire accent. Doubtless such matters were less fixed then than they are in a modern academic world dominated by more

and more footling pedantry about the precise form of notes and less and less sterling scholarship in untrodden ways but it is still surprising. Who then turned her messy manuscripts into beautifully punctuated English prose? It seems to have been William Gifford who performed exactly the same function for Lord Byron, only Byron's spelling and punctuation were appreciably better, it seems, than Jane Austen's. But you would not guess from reading Jane Austen that she spoke with any sort of accent for no one is distinguished by their accents at all. Portsmouth is presented as vulgar in comparison with Mansfield Park but it is not linguistically different. Servants rarely speak in Jane Austen's world though Mr Darcy's housekeeper holds forth at some length about his kindness as an employer. But she does so in much the same idiom as other characters. Though Austen must have heard all manner of registers of speech, she uses, inimitably, only one.

Byron is not like this. If we try to imagine the sounds in Byron's houses in Venice, we would hear the chatter of Italian servants, Teresa to whom he spoke in Italian or perhaps sometimes French (in Genoa he paid for her to have English lessons at her request), the educated English voice with Irish intonation of a visitor such as Thomas Moore and the Venetian dialect spoken by some, but not all, of the Italian servants apart from Fletcher, with his broad Nottinghamshire vowels and pidgin Italian. This is something of a Pentecostal mix of lingos. The important point is that Byron is familiar with all of them and they all get into his poetry and his letters. Byron collects forms of speech and he certainly collected forms of low speech from servants but also the world of Gentleman Jackson—the famous boxer who taught Regency bucks how to fight. So Byron can artfully mix low and high registers in his verse. The most celebrated instance of such a mix is this:

Don Juan, having done the best he could
In all the circumstances of the case,
As soon as "Crown's 'quest" allowed, pursued
His travels to the capital apace;---
Esteeming it a little hard he should
In twelve hours' time, and very little space,
Have been obliged to slay a freeborn native
In self-defence:---this made him meditative.

He from the world had cut off a great man,
Who in his time had made heroic bustle.
Who in a row like Tom could lead the van,
Booze in the ken, or at the spellken hustle?
Who queer a flat? Who (spite of Bow-street's ban)
On the high toby-spice so flash the muzzle?
Who on a lark, with black-eyed Sal (his blowing)
So prime, so swell, so nutty, and so knowing?

But Tom's no more---and so no more of Tom.
Heroes must die; and by God's blessing 'tis
Not long before the most of them go home.---

Hail! Thamis, hail! Upon thy verge it is
That Juan's chariot, rolling like a drum
In thunder, holds the way it can't well miss,
Through Kennington and all the other "tons,"
Which make us wish ourselves in town at once; (*Don Juan*, XI, 18-20)

We notice the slang words of course, but they are juxtaposed with consummate skill with high words like Thamis—Latin for Thames—and then Kennington which is supposed to sound suburban hence it is situated between the lingo of the footpads and that of the West End. The latter is suggested by the word 'ton' as in 'le bon ton', that is to say the world of high fashion ('the town') of which Kennington, and any suburb that ends in 'ton' is not a part. That Byron is being snobbish here is shown by his natural inclusion of author and reader to form the 'us' who wish to get through the suburbs as quickly as possible in order to be somewhere more fashionable ('in town'). Offsetting this hauteur is Byron's delight in the vitality of the slang which he uses. 'Flash the muzzle' for instance means to show off your face and 'high toby spice' is robbery on horseback whereas 'spice' on its own is footpad robbery. Hence the praise is for someone who can carry out a daring highway robbery on horseback whilst not wearing a mask. The calculated effrontery of the action is suggested by the calculated effrontery of the language which is thrown in the face of the educated reader in a former Regency fashion which would have seemed indecorous in the 1820s. Jane Austen is not interesting in foregrounding such things linguistically though she is as interested as Byron in graduations of taste and vulgarity. But Byron is, and must have been since he arrived in Nottingham with a pronounced Scots accent, heard a Nottinghamshire low one—he said that the phrase 'flash the muzzle' came from a low song that he heard in his youth—and we may be reminded of the ribald songs that Joe Murray used to sing—and then on moving to Harrow, he was surrounded by upper-class educated English speech in which he soon became proficient. But low and regional speech, not least in the person of William Fletcher, accompanied him throughout his life. We must not exaggerate this. Byron did not think that all uneducated speech was intrinsically more vigorous than educated speech. He admired 'polish'. And doubtless, too, Byron got some of his slang from books such as Pierce Egan's *Tom and Jerry*. He was a well-read man and knew how to use books. But he was a listening man, too, who picked up words, cadences, and intonations. His ear was as much trained by listening to servants as by the language of the drawing room. I will end as promised with Julia's maid, Antonia, desperately trying to push Juan into a closet before Julia's husband returns:

What's to be done? Alfonso will be back
The moment he has sent his fools away.
Antonia's skill was put upon the rack,
But no device could be brought into play---
And how to parry the renew'd attack
Besides, it wanted but few hours of day:
Antonia puzzled; Julia did not speak,
But press'd her bloodless lip to Juan's cheek.

He turn'd his lip to hers, and with his hand
Call'd back the tangles of her wandering hair;
Even then their love they could not all command,
And half forgot their danger and despair:
Antonia's patience now was at a stand---
"Come, come, 'tis no time now for fooling there,"
She whisper'd, in great wrath---"I must deposit
This pretty gentleman within the closet:

Pray, keep your nonsense for some luckier night---
Who can have put my master in this mood?
What will become on't?---I'm in such a fright,
The devil's in the urchin, and no good---
Is this a time for giggling? this a plight?
Why, don't you know that it may end in blood?
You'll lose your life, and I shall lose my place,
My mistress all, for that half-girlish face.

"Had it but been for a stout cavalier
Of twenty-five or thirty---(Come, make haste)
But for a child, what piece of work is here!
(I really, madam, wonder at your taste---
Come, sir, get in)---my master must be near.
There, for the present, at the least he's fast,
And, if we can but till the morning keep
Our counsel--- (Juan, mind, you must not sleep.)" (*Don Juan* I, 169-71)

This wonderful speech shows a clever servant, worried about losing her own job, sympathetic to the lovers though exasperated by them, but in control of the situation. It was perhaps her idea earlier that Juan can best be hid inside Julia's bed for it is she who 'contrived to fling the bed-clothes in a heap'. This reminds me of the cunning of the eunuch servant Baba in the harem who dresses up Juan as a woman to avoid suspicion. But it is just as important that Antonia is also in control of her own language. The speech could only have been written by Byron I think and by someone who had servants and listened to them. Lords need lackeys just as lackeys need lords.

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Note: I have drawn my information for this essay mainly from E.S. Turner *What the Butler Saw*, Samuel and Sarah Adams *The Complete Servant*, Leslie Marchand's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, assorted biographies of which the best remains Leslie Marchand's three volume study (1959), Ernest J. Lovell's *His Very Self and Voice*, Doris Langley Moore *Lord Byron: Accounts Rendered*, Malcolm Elwin's *Lord Byron's Wife*, and, of course, from Byron's poems.

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