12. Masculinity, Misogyny and the Marketplace: Clare's 'Don Juan A Poem'

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On one face of John Clare's gravestone in the churchyard of St Botolph's in Helpston, are carved the words 'A POET IS BORN NOT MADE'.[1] In 1841 Clare wrote two poems which overtly react to the work of Byron, his own *Child Harold* and 'Don Juan A Poem'.[2] The latter begins: '"Poets are born"—and so are whores'. Clare is clearly referring to, and undermining, the proverb that was ironically to end up labelling his buried remains. In his early career Clare was marketed by John Taylor as a 'Peasant Poet', as a natural genius, as a Wordsworthian 'Child of Nature',[3] a policy which was to make its mark on the other face of Clare's gravestone in the chiselled words 'NORTHAMPTONSHIRE PEASANT POET'. If Clare's feelings about such marketing were always ambivalent, by 1841 they had become terribly problematic, to the point where he could conflate the making of a poet with that of a prostitute. Attacking the proverb which ended up on his gravestone and marked and marketed him for life, Clare suggests that a poet is no more 'born' a poet than a woman is born a whore; both are formed by circumstance, by society and by money.

This essay considers the ways in which 'Don Juan A Poem' represents poets and women, and how each representation informs the other. As Clare's poem is an explicit reaction to Byron's, I will also look at Byron's poem of the same name. The first rhyming word of Byron's *Don Juan* is 'cant':

> I want a hero: an uncommon want,
>   When every year and month sends forth a new one,
> Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
>   The age discovers he is not the true one;
> Of such as these I should not care to vaunt,
>   I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan,
> We all have seen him in the pantomime
> Sent to the devil, somewhat ere his time.[4] (I, 1)

Try and rhyme 'want', 'cant' and 'vaunt' and another word, less palatable even than cant, appears as an imposition on the rhyme sounds of this first stanza. It is an aural trick: Byron deliberately forces the reader to hear the word 'cunt' in the first rhyming word, especially when we back-track after hearing the longer vowel sound of vaunt.[5] Clare, it seems, picks up on this subtle aural complexity, and makes it a more explicit and central topic of his own 'Don Juan A Poem':

> Childern are fond of sucking sugar candy
> & maids of sausages— larger the better
> Shopmen are fond of good sigars & brandy
> & I of blunt— & if you change the letter—
> To C or K it would be quite as handy
> & throw the next away—but I'm your debtor
> For modesty—yet wishing nought between us
> I'd hawl close to a she as vulcan did to venus (ll. 33-40)[6]

Clare's cynicism here is staggering. As Vulcan (the outcast blacksmith god of fire, and Milton's architect of Pandemonium) the speaker sexualises the eating habits of children, and implies the hungry fellatory needs of women. He denigrates the decadence of 'shopmen' (who could be pimps) and then openly admits, via some crude linguistic trickery, that his desire for sexual gratification is reducible to the desire for cunt, and equal to a desire for 'blunt', which was the current slang for money. Women are thus reduced to voracious genitalia and associated, via the speaker, with an equally powerful hunger for money. This is an association that is supported by the frequency of the word 'whore' in the poem as a whole. The first stanza sets this theme:

> "Poets are born"—& so are whores—the trade is
> Grown universal—in these canting days
> Women of fashion must of course be ladies
> & whoreing is the business—that still pays
> Playhouses Ball rooms—there the masquerade is
> – To do what was of old—& now adays
> Their maids—nay wives so innoscent & blooming
> Cuckold their spouses to seem honest women (ll. 1-8)

The appearance of 'canting' has to have the underlying sound of 'cunting' implicit in it, as the subject here is whoring. Clare's narrator is open about the nature of writing verse in his day; he implies that he himself is a poet-whore, willing to sell his verse for money, and that writing poetry is cheap, commonplace, corrupt and diseased. The act of cutting off the proverb 'Poets are born, not made' highlights this poem's virulent opposition to Coleridge's conceptualising of 'natural genius'. As I have already said, Clare was marketed in his early career as a natural genius. But 'Don Juan A Poem' repeatedly asserts the significance of material effects upon the poet, who in material need is no different from anyone else in society. That economic conditions and conditioning have such a profound effect upon poets, turning them into materialist and commercial negotiators, is presented as a terrible shame. The impoverishment of contemporary poetry is reflected in the following stanza, as the narrator begs the reader for cash. Clare is clearly condemning himself as one of these poet-whores:

> Now i'n't this canto worth a single pound
> From anybodys pocket who will buy
> As thieves are worth a halter I'll be bound
> Now honest reader take the book & try
> & if as I have said it is not found
> I'll write a better canto bye & bye
> So reader now the money till unlock it
> & buy the book & help to fill my pocket (ll. 263-70)

Like a thief bound by the noose of the rope which will hang him, Clare is bound by the wishes of his audience. And like Byron, he acknowledges the power of his audience to make him or break him, while simultaneously portraying his relationship with the public as corporal punishment, as public humiliation, and as poetic death. The word 'canto' here is also caught up in the complex of sounds and meanings which echo through the poem—cant, canting, can't, cunt, cunning, coney—the implication being that each division of the poem, each canto, is available for sale to the highest bidder, who will be fooled into purchasing a disease-ridden exercise in empty cant. Byron's narrator is ironically open about the 'trade' of selling cantos; like Clare, he sells his poem as he goes along:

> Love, war, a tempest—surely there's variety,
> Also a seasoning slight of lubrication,
> A bird's-eye view too of that wild, society,
> A slight glance thrown on men of every station.
> If you have nought else, here's at least satiety
> Both in performance and in preparation,
> And though these lines should only line portmanteaus,
> Trade will be all the better for these cantos. (XIV, xiv)

The following stanza of Clare's (which concludes the poem in Tim Chilcott's edition *The Living Year 1841*) complicates yet further the 'canto' sound complex:

> Love worse then debt or drink or any fate
> It is the damnest smart of matrimony
> A hell incarnate is a woman-mate
> The knot is tied—& then we loose the honey
> A wife is just the protetype to hate
> Commons for stock & warrens for the coney
> Are not more tresspassed over in rights plan
> Then this incumberance on the rights of man (ll. 295-302)

This concluding stanza is the high bile-mark of Clare's poem, vented at woman and the institution of marriage. Twisting the normative associations, the speaker suggests that love is in fact the greatest root of pain in marriage. A wife is a 'protetype' (an original model) of hatred: she is hatred's prime example, perhaps its prime source. The editors of the *Later Poems* interpret the line beginning 'Commons...' in this way: 'i.e. women are often "trespassed" upon as unenclosed land is by farm animals or rabbit colonies by people in search of rabbits'.[7] This interpretation is not entirely right. The language does indeed suggest the idea of territory and 'rights', but the colloquial origins of 'warrens for the coney' include it in the 'cant/cunt/canto/can't' sound complex. Clare includes the idea of the countryside in this territorial version of female sexuality, reducing it again to the pudenda: the word 'coney' meant rabbit and the female genitals.[8] The wife is therefore the territory ('commons' and 'warrens') which is encroached upon by others: the wife's 'stock'– her

value, or use—is her cunt. As in *Hamlet*,[9] the 'countryside' is twisted into the '*cunt*ryside' of woman; the territory of the woman is an infringement upon the 'rights of man'. Her sexuality is an 'incumberance': it threatens because it is available to be 'tresspassed over'. Female sexuality, as it is represented here, embodies a threat because it allows any trespasser, and in doing so trespasses upon the rights of masculinity to define borders. The image of the rabbits is particular to this metaphor: they are popularly known for their procreative energies. The editors of *Later Poems* also omit the vital fact that the word 'warren' signified a brothel (and a boarding-school), and that the term 'cunny-warren' also signified a brothel. Another text is playfully referred to, Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791): women, in or out of wedlock, infringe upon the sexual and political rights of manhood. The model of marriage being the antithesis of love which Clare adopts in the above stanza is straight from Byron. The latter writes 'love and marriage rarely can combine' (*Don Juan,* III, v, line 3).

Byron's 'Dedication' to his *Don Juan* is characterised by contempt for other poets. The narrator attacks the celebrated lake-poets of his day (Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth) implying specifically that they write verse for cash:

> I would not imitate the petty thought,
> Nor coin my self-love to so base a vice,
> For all the glory your conversion bought,
> Since gold alone should not have been its price.
> You have your salary–was't for that you wrought?
> And Wordsworth has his place in the Excise.
> You're shabby fellows–true–but poets still,
> And duly seated on the immortal hill. (Dedication, 6)

Clare seems to have picked up on this portrayal of the famous poets of his day and the problems all poets face in their mediations with the marketplace. For the aristocratic Byron, the English Parnassus is inhabited by poets who are incapable of writing verse without writing to the order and desire of the buyer, with money as their muse: they have no financial freedom to do otherwise, and if they do take a position to provide themselves with security, they are to be condemned, like Wordsworth. Clare, like Wordsworth and

Coleridge, was well aware of the problems of having patrons, and of the volatility of the marketplace. The impossibilities of the negotiations the poet has to undergo to maintain a relationship with the marketplace bring us to the other possible reading of 'cant' in Clare, and that is the conflated 'can not' or 'can't', especially in Clare's manuscripts which so often lack punctuation. In Clare's 'Don Juan A Poem', a negation of ability, or a lack of possibility, has a very relevant implication for the narrator: the inability to write to the order of the marketplace. Back in 1822 Clare wrote to John Taylor of disappointing sales of *The Village Minstrel*:

> the old Vol had gone thro 2 editions ere this & I think a notice in the london agen of a New vol of Poems preparing is nessesary as a stimulant to revive the flattness of these for I am jealous of their ill sucess at least I feel somthing that tells me they dont go off like the others & I prevent that feeling as much as ever I can from damping my further exertions but I cannot help it doing so at some times—still Im determind in the teeth of vexation to surmount dissapointment by unwearied struggles—[10]

From the start of his career Clare was thus desperately vexed with—and sensitively aware of—a fickle marketplace. In the same letter he blames his 'fickle Hussey' of a Muse for not stimulating him to write. All of his artistic frustration with a neglectful marketplace, and its effects upon his writing power, informs 'Don Juan A Poem'. The third stanza is full of such frustrations and tensions:

> I wish—but there is little got bye wishing
> I wish that bread & great coats ne'er had risen
> I wish that there was some such word as 'pishun
> For ryhme sake for my verses must be dizen
> With dresses fine—as hooks with baits for fishing
> I wish all honest men were out of prison
> I wish M.P's. would spin less yarn—nor doubt
> But burn false bills & cross bad taxes out (ll. 17-24)

The speaker suggests here that his verses need 'dresses fine', as if his poetry

were a prostitute in need of tarting up, as it were, to catch the eyes, and cash, of the punters, thus forging a palpable link with the letter of 1822. The poet-whore has to put the bait of 'dresses fine' on his hook to provide a 'stimulant to revive the flattness' of sales.

The image of the prostitute wearing 'dresses fine' is linked with the M.P.s' 'spinning yarn' who are therefore implied as 'dressing up' their speeches; in other words, of talking fashionable rubbish, or cant. Clare's attacks on politicians are in some ways similar to Byron's, in that he shows no particular allegiance to any party: he writes, 'I wish the Whigs were out of office' and 'I'm weary of old Whigs' but also 'Ive seen a Whig & Tory / Turn imps of hell—& all for Englands glory' (ll. 66, 103 and 111-12). His reaction to political parties, and attacks upon individuals such as the shortly-to-resign Prime Minister Melbourne, suggest that Clare is attempting to write a poem situated very much in the hub of urban and capital life. Lord Melbourne—as plain William Lamb in 1812—had been made into a cuckold by his wife Caroline Lamb's celebrated affair with none other than Byron; Clare would have been well aware of this controversy.[11] Historical accounts confirm Melbourne's fawning intimacy with Queen Victoria, his passion for the royal court, and his fluid political allegiances.[12] Clare makes much of these popular views:

> Me-b-ne may throw his wig to little Vicky
> & so resign his humbug & his power
> & she with the young princess mount the dickey
> On ass milk diet for her german tour
> Asses like ministers are rather tricky
> I & the country proves it every hour
> W-ll-gt-n & M-lb–n in their station
> Coblers to queens—are phisic to the nation (ll. 81-8)

This stanza might indicate that one of the reasons for the attack on women in general in this poem is that the leading men of the day are seen by the narrator to be subservient to a woman, and a young one at that. Her reign is cast as incapacitation for man. The potency of the patriarchy is usurped by the governing matriarch, dismissed as 'little Vicky'. The 'phisic' that Wellington and Melbourne bestow upon the nation is undermined by its slang meanings

of sexual coition, gambling losses, hard punching and strong drink.[13] All of these meanings make sense in the context of the politicians' serving the nation, bizarrely enough, as they are all vice- or violence-oriented. The overall sense is clear: politicians do no good whatsoever for the state. They are as corrupt as the subjects they represent.

The recurrent image of the poet-prisoner is arguably as significant in this poem as the poet-whore. Somehow the poet-prisoner is both deeply embedded within society—understanding its mostly feminine core corruption from Queen Victoria through to whores—while being also alien to it, left out, locked up and not a participant in the masquerade of decadent and prurient society. The implication in 'Don Juan A Poem' is that corruption begins at the top. Queen Victoria becomes the lead in Clare's feminine figuration of corruption, which could be indicative of a broader criticism of the nation state itself. The fragility, deceptivity and sheer liability of female sexuality as represented in 'Don Juan A Poem' characterises the nation. In the matriarchy, the corrupt mother figure 'little Vicky' is implicated when the speaker asserts that the very word 'woman ... implies a whore' and is 'mans ruin'. If the head of state is ruinous, and her politicians 'withered stinking dead and rotten' (l. 96), the only authority the speaker might pin his hopes on is God. But the narrator links the nobility ('noble bastards', l. 64), the government, the Queen, Prince Albert, the devil and God in a way which implies they are all equally decrepit and culpable. The many hollow lines which begin 'I wish' are a parodic undermining of Byron's opening desire 'I want a hero'; the speaker of Clare's poem wants one too, but he has given up hope of finding one.

Clare's poem suggests that there isn't anyone who could be called a hero in 1840's England. Even God warrants some indirect criticism (see ll. 78, 92, 104). The politicians contrive a canting language which 'few can understand'; the implication is that they are criminals who could be punished by 'some good atorney' (l. 67). They undermine personal property and personal liberties. In abusing the nation's purse ('Whigs strum state fiddle strings until they snap', l. 57), they symbolically defile the queen. In defiling the queen, they cuckold every man in the state—destroying the possession a man (by implication) should have over the procreation in his marriage. The final words of the poem 'the rights of man'—of masculinity—are worthless.

The poem seems to suggest that if everything is for sale, then everything

has the objective of deceit and misrepresentation: be it sexuality, literature, gambling, medicine or politics, every aspect of society is diseased, corrupted and unoriginal. The next stanzas make it clear why Clare chose to adopt the work of another poet to continue: in contemporary society everything bears the stain of misuse and the tawdry, tatty quality of being second-hand and unoriginal. The poem's origins, in being openly unoriginal, reflect that society. The repetition of 'new' in the first line of the following stanza forms a double negative; the second 'new' is old—it is a copy of the first—and its appearance proves that the first 'new' is a sham. The half-rhyming consonance of 'Now' is old by the end of the line.

> Now this new poem is entirely new
> As wedding gowns or money from the mint
> For all I know it is entirely true
> For I would scorn to put a lie in print
> —I scorn to lie for princes—so would you
> & ere I shoot I try my pistol flint
> —The cattle salesman—knows the way in trying
> & feels his bullocks ere he thinks of buying (ll. 151-8)

The poem is likened by its narrator to objects associated with dependable honesty and security: a virgin-white wedding dress and newly coined money. The poem itself has already offered opposing versions of the intrinsic 'value' of both: the 'road to marriage is—"the road to ruin"' while marriage itself is a 'driveling hoax / To please old codgers' and an 'incumberance on the rights of man' (ll. 294, 287 and 302); and bills of payment can be 'false' (l. 24). The speaker duplicitously defends himself, after a fashion, colloquially suggesting both the limits of his ability and insight in saying 'For all I know', and hammering home that he 'would scorn to put a lie in print'. He suggests that, perhaps unlike other writers 'in print', he would be loath to write for royalty or riches. The first two lines of Byron's 'Dedication' to his *Don Juan* attack a poet whose status is built upon doing exactly what Clare's narrator claims he would never do: he works for royalty. 'Bob Southey! You're a poet, poet laureate, / And representative of all the race.' Southey was still laureate in 1841.[14]

Clare's speaker evokes a very Byronic image—the preparing of pistols—

but the image's association with a rich patron and print can only mean that before he publishes he makes sure his weapon is ready to spark. The word 'pistol' was colloquial slang, verging on euphemism, for the penis. The verb 'to shoot'[15] was available to Clare as a colloquial expression referring to the male orgasm. It is therefore a thoroughly masculine sexual image, and this interpretation is supported by the subsequent farcical punning image of a salesman feeling 'his bullocks' before a sale. The preparation then, before publication—before the sale—is a strutting and posturing of reassuringly masculine similes. The phallic 'pistol' is prepared, and the bullock is fondled. Either Clare is undermining by parody the pomposity of the Romantic-period writer (specifically the aristocratic Byron), or the poem reveals a problem for the male writer with performing in print. As the animal which is for sale is not a potent bull but a castrated 'bullock', it could be that the anxiety of going into print is an anxiety which affects the poet's masculinity. Although the pun made available to the reader via 'feels his bullocks' is 'feels his bollocks', in actual fact the bullock has none. This suggests that the poet is not only a whore for entering into negotiations with the marketplace via a 'cattle salesman', but also that he is a castrato because he is a poet. The image of the cattle-market returns us to the dominating figure of the poet-whore. The poet-whore is at the beck and call of the marketplace; the poet who writes for princes is patronised out of his artistic freedom; the bull without testicles is just live meat—he will not procreate—he is manufactured into sterility. The poet-whore is a prisoner of the public. In Clare's poem the whore is an image of powerlessness and degradation. If the image of the whore does have any power over the speaker, he is always repulsed by the attraction, and is violently misogynist as a result. She represents the manufactory of desire—a lie, an untruth, a deception of love. She is functionality without spirituality—she is castrated of love. As is the poet who writes verse 'to fill his pocket'.

Sonia Hofkosh considers Romantic masculinity's anxiety about authorship to be the result of that domain becoming increasingly feminised, and she traces the image of the prostitute in other poets' work, particularly that of Byron:

> ...the difficulty of being a writer in this culture repeatedly takes the form of prostitution. The prostitute figures the writer who depersonalizes the

> self-expression by marketing it; even more, her promiscuity, her failure to distinguish among men, vexes to its depths the foundation of self-expression—the logic of personality and property by which men determine what they are and what they own.[16]

Clare's poem parodies a poet explicitly seeking to foster interest from a buying public; as such it becomes a parody of poetry which is 'made' or determined by market forces. He makes us aware of the materiality of the work in the title; his only addition to Byron's title are the words 'A Poem', which maybe appear to reassure the reader that this is indeed literature, and worth buying. But like the prostitute, the poem's existence, and even its value, depend upon that same purchasing interest of the public; in this sense the poet and whore are both 'made' or *un*-made by the attention or neglect of the consumer. Byron makes it plain. The possibility of his continuing his poem is in the readership's hands:

> ...but whether
> I shall proceed with his adventure is
> Dependent on the public altogether.
> We'll see, however, what they say to this;
> Their favour in an author's cap's a feather,
> And no great mischief's done by their caprice,
> And if their approbation we experience,
> Perhaps they'll have some more about a year hence. (I, cic)

Byron is teasing his readership as if it were a child: be nice, and you can have more. His admission that the power is really in the market, not with the author, is significant. In a marketplace glutted with female authors, the male poet is threatened by enormous competition from a gender previously excluded from authorial property.[17] In representing women and poets as prostitutes, Clare is admitting not only that his gendered position as a male poet is under threat, but also that it has been disastrously compromised by market forces. The poem repeatedly forces the point that in such circumstances artistic endeavour can have no integrity. In asserting a continual parallel between the state of poetry and the state of society, the poem goes further to suggest that without meaning and integrity in its art, society is itself a meaningless

drudge of production and consumption. The repeated intertextual allusions to other poets and poems and the act of adoption of someone else's poem becomes a commentary on the state of the poetic product. The materiality of the poem—captured succinctly in the begging call to 'fill [the] pocket' (l. 270) of the writer—is a construct designed to portray poetry at its lowest ebb. And it seems that women are largely to blame.

Byron attacks literary women throughout *Don Juan*, for example:

> Oh ye, who make the fortunes of all books,
> Benign ceruleans of the second sex!
> Who advertise new poems by your looks,
> Your imprimatur will ye not annex?
> What, must I go to the oblivious cooks,
> Those Cornish plunderers of Parnassian wrecks?
> Ah, must I then the only minstrel be
> Proscribed from tasting your Castalian tea?
>
> What, can I prove a lion then no more?
> A ballroom bard, a foolscap, hot-press darling?
> To bear the compliments of many a bore
> And sigh, 'I can't get out', like Yorick's starling?
> Why then I'll swear, as poet Wordy swore
> (Because the world won't read him, always snarling),
> That taste is gone, that fame is but a lottery,
> Drawn by the bluecoat misses of a coterie. (IV, cviii and cix)

For Byron, women are the arbiters of fortune and fame for a male writer. The power they have is exercised in their triple roles of audience, critic and author. Women infringe upon the classically male territory of the inspirational Mount; so the male literary 'lion' king of poetry feels his power, and his masculine authority, is undermined. Clare's poem expresses similar concerns:

> I wish I had a quire of foolscap paper
> Hot pressed—& crowpens—how I could endite
> A silver candlestick & green wax taper
> Lord bless me what fine poems I would write

> The very tailors they would read & caper
> & mantua makers would be all delight
> Though laurel wreaths my brows did ne'er environ
> I think myself as great a bard as Byron (ll. 247-54)

The speaker wants the decadent and expensive trappings of a middle-class writer in order to write. These trappings are perhaps characteristic of the vain world which Byron parodies: Byron's narrator fears becoming a 'ballroom bard, a foolscap, hot-press darling'. In other words, he fears becoming the darling of the fashionable, and the female. Clare's speaker is critical of fashion too, but by pretending to nurse a desire to court the same fashionable readership—he calls them 'tailors' (possibly a pun on [John] Taylor's marketing policies) and 'mantua makers'. The vanities of fashion, which seem to have infected the manner of poetic production, can be flattered if the writer has the right equipment. In Clare's poem, it seems almost as if the writing equipment, or the paper on which the work is published, is more significant to the readership than the words written. This fear is expressed in Byron's words: 'taste is gone ... fame is but a lottery'. Clare's parodic poet also points to the whimsy of blind fame: after attributing the writing of great verse to the quality of the pen, the paper and the candle of the writer, the poet casually assumes Byron's status. And he is right to pick Byron for a poem about the degraded status of poetry: the latter had been incredibly famous, but his posthumous reputation by 1841 had dwindled dramatically. Clare's poem suggests that the deplorable state of contemporary poetry is represented in the vanity of believing that a good writing set will be enough; therefore the actual writing itself is of no importance. Byron writes that the bluestockings 'advertise new poems by [their] looks'; vanity, display and fashion are seen to be the significant factors in the contemporary degradation and feminisation of poetry. Both Clare and Byron had seen the enormously famous poet Wordsworth become embittered '[b]ecause the world won't read him'. Fashion turns away without any reason: 'fame is but a lottery'. If anyone does have control over the modern marketplace, it is the women both poets attack. The power of the new readership and authorship of women challenges, undermines and usurps both poets' sense of authorial masculinity. Perhaps, then, both poems point to the failure of masculine Romantic poetry to adapt to the feminisation of literature.

NOTES

For help with this essay I am grateful to Richard Cronin, Bob Cummings, Jane Stabler, Nicola Trott and Susan Wolfson. A longer version appears in my PhD thesis (Nottingham 1999).

1. Discussing the origins and use of this proverb, William Ringler writes: 'the earliest appearance, in any recognizable form, of the expression *poeta nascitur non fit* is in a commentary on Horace which now goes under the name of *Pseudo-Acro* ... Coleridge cited it when discussing the marks of "a natural poetic genius" in chap. xv of his *Biographia Literaria*.' William Ringler, '*Poeta nascitur non fit*: Some notes on the History of an Aphorism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2, no. 1, 1941 (College of the City of New York), 497-504.
2. The most extensive study of Clare's *Child Harold* appears in chapters five and six of Lynne Pearce's unpublished doctoral thesis, 'John Clare and Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle. Readings from John Clare's Manuscripts 1832-1845' (University of Birmingham, 1987). See also chapter 11, above. For a historical and biographical consideration of Byron's influence on Clare, see Anne Barton, 'John Clare Reads Lord Byron', *Romanticism*, 2, no. 2 (1996), 127-48. Edward Strickland's article 'Boxer Byron: A Clare Obsession', *Byron Journal*, 17 (1989), 57-76, on Clare's fascination with Byron adds to this historical criticism. Perhaps the most theoretically sensitive work on the literary relationship between the two poets is by Philip Martin, 'Authorial Identity and the Critical Act: John Clare and Lord Byron', in *Questioning Romanticism*, ed. by John Beer (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
3. See Taylor's Introduction to *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (London: Taylor and Hessey, Stamford: E. Drury, 1820).
4. All references to Byron's *Don Juan* refer to Volume V of *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).
5. I am indebted to Robert Kirkpatrick of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for this interpretation of the rhyme sounds of this opening stanza.
6. All references to Clare's 'Don Juan A Poem' are to *John Clare, The Living Year 1841*, ed. by Tim Chilcott (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 1999), recto pages 37-57. Chilcott's edition of the poem supersedes all previous editions in its chronological and textual accuracy. The order of the stanzas contrasts significantly with previous editions of the poem.
7. *Later Poems*, I, p. 90, note 38.

8. Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, ed. by Paul Beale (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 8th edn., 1984), used throughout this essay.
9. *Hamlet*, ed. by T. J. B. Spencer, (London: Penguin Books, 1980), III. ii. 125.
10. *Clare-John Taylor*, 8 February 1822; *Letters*, pp. 229-30.
11. Not only did Clare own a copy of Medwin's *Conversations*, but also *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries*, by Leigh Hunt (London: Henry Colburn, 2nd edn., 1828) and William Hazlitt's less than favourable criticism of Byron in his *Lectures on the English Poets, Delivered at the Surrey Institution* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1819).
12. See chapter 24 of *Melbourne* by Philip Ziegler (London: Fontana/Collins, 1976), pp. 336 ff.
13. Partridge, *Dictionary of Slang*.
14. Clare had criticised Southey for writing for Royalty long before. In his 1820s portrait of contemporary literary life 'The Bards & their Doxeys' he writes:

    While Southys old nurse of a doxys so tame
    & so fond of shoving her nose into fame
    That shed een nurse a monkey to prove her self loyal
    & sing him an ode if his title was royal (*Middle Poems* II, p. 91, ll. 19-22)

    A 'dox(e)y' is a beggar's wench.
15. Partridge, *Dictionary of Slang*.
16. Sonia Hofkosh, *Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 44.
17. Catherine Gallagher, 'George Eliot and *Daniel Deronda*: The Prostitute and the Jewish Question' in *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, ed. by Ruth Bernard Yeazell (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 43:

    Thackeray identifies two reasons for this historical conjuncture [of poet and whore]: the development of cheap serial publication (in which authors were often paid by the line) and the growth of a massive popular readership in the 1830s and 1840s. These conditions most directly affected what we now call popular literature, but the decreasing cost of publication, advances in education, and changes in copyright law made it impossible for any professional writer to claim to be independent of the marketplace ... The author, moreover, does not go to market as a respectable producer with an alienable commodity, but with himself or herself as commodity ... This combination puts writers in the marketplace in the position of selling themselves, like whores.