

**TITLE: DON JUAN  
BY LORD BYRON***Produced by Audio Connoisseur**Performed by Charlton Griffin*

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Total running time: 15 hours, 29 minutes

**SYNOPSIS:****CANTO I**

Don Juan lives in Seville with his father José and his mother Donna Inez. Donna Julia, 23 years old and married to Don Alfonso, begins to desire Don Juan when he is 16 years old. Despite her attempt to resist, Julia begins an affair with Juan. Julia falls in love with Juan. Don Alfonso, suspecting that his wife may be having an affair, bursts into their bedroom followed by a “posse concomitant” but they do not find anything suspicious upon first searching the room, for Juan was hiding in the bed. However, when Alfonso returns on his own, he comes across Juan’s shoes and a fight ensues. Juan escapes, however. In order to avoid the rumors and bad reputation her son has brought upon himself, Inez sends him away to travel, in the hopes that he develops better morals, while Julia is sent to a nunnery.

**CANTO II**

Canto II describes how Juan goes on a voyage from Cadiz with servants and his tutor Pedrillo. Juan is still in love with Julia, and after a period of seasickness, a storm sinks the ship. The crew climb into a long boat, but soon run out of food. The crew decide to draw lots in order to choose who will be eaten. Juan’s tutor Pedrillo is chosen after Juan’s dog has also been eaten. However, those that eat Pedrillo go mad and die. Juan is the sole survivor of the journey; he eventually makes it onto land at Cyclades in the Aegean. Haidée and her maid Zoe discover Juan and care for him in a cave by the beach. Haidée and Juan fall in love despite the fact that neither can understand each other’s language. Haidée’s father Lambro is a “fisherman” and pirate who makes money from capturing slaves.

**CANTO III**

Canto III is essentially a long digression from the main story in which Byron, in the style of an epic catalogue, describes Haidée and Don Juan’s celebrations. The islanders believe Haidée’s father, Lambro, has died, but he returns and witnesses these revels. Towards the end of the canto, Byron insults his contemporaries William Wordsworth, Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It is in this latter section that we find “The Isles of Greece” — a section numbered differently to the rest of the canto with a different verse which explores Byron’s views on Greece’s status as a “slave” to the Ottoman Empire.

**CANTO IV**

Haidée and Juan wake to discover that Haidée’s father, Lambro, has returned. Lambro confronts Juan and attacks him with the aid of his pirate friends. Haidée despairs at losing her lover and eventually dies of a broken heart with her unborn child still in her womb.

Juan is sent away on a ship and ends up at a slave market in Constantinople.

**CANTO V**

Juan is in the slave market. He converses with an Englishman, telling of his lost love, whereas the more experienced John says he had to run away from his third wife. A black eunuch from the seraglio, Baba, buys Juan and John, and takes the infidels to the palace. He takes them to an inner chamber, where he insists that Don Juan dress as a woman and threatens

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him with castration if he resists. Finally, Juan is brought into an imperial hall to meet the sultana, Gulbeyaz, a 26-year-old beauty who is the sultan's fourth, last and favorite wife. Full of stubborn pride, he refuses to kiss her foot and finally compromises by kissing her hand. She had spotted Juan at the market and had asked Baba to secretly purchase him for her, despite the risk of discovery by the sultan. She wants Juan to "love" her, and throws herself on his breast. But he still has thoughts of Haidée and spurns her advances, saying "The prisoned eagle will not pair, nor I/Serve a sultana's sensual phantasy." She is taken aback, enraged, and thinks of having him beheaded, but breaks out in tears instead. Before they can progress further in their relationship, Baba rushes in to announce that the Sultan is coming: "The sun himself has sent me like a ray/To hint that he is coming up this way." The sultan arrives, preceded by a parade of damsels, eunuchs, etc.. Looking around, he takes note of the attractive Christian woman (Juan), expressing regret that a mere Christian should be so pretty (Juan is a *giaour*, or non-Muslim). Byron comments on the necessity to secure the chastity of the women in these unhappy climes — that "wedlock and a padlock mean the same."

#### **CANTO VI**

The sultan retires with Gulbeyaz. Juan, still dressed as a woman, is taken to the overcrowded seraglio. He is asked to share a couch with the young and lovely 17-year-old Dudù. When asked what his name is, Don Juan calls himself Juanna. She is a "kind of sleepy Venus ... very fit to murder sleep... Her talents were of the more silent class... pensive..." She gives Juanna a chaste kiss and undresses. The chamber of odalisques is asleep at 3 AM. Dudù suddenly screams, and awakens agitated, while Juanna still lies asleep and snoring. The women ask the cause of her scream, and she relates a suggestive dream of being in a wood like Dante, of dislodging a reluctant golden apple clinging tenaciously to its bough (which at last willingly falls), of almost biting into the forbidden fruit when a bee flies out from it and stings her to the heart. The matron of the seraglio decides to place Juanna with another odalisque, but Dudù begs to keep her in her own bed, hiding her face in Juanna's breast. The poet is at a loss to explain why she screamed.

In the morning, the sultana asks Baba to tell her how Don Juan passed the night. He tells of "her" stay in the seraglio, but carefully omits details about Dudù and her dream. But the sultana is suspicious nevertheless, becomes enraged, and instructs Baba to have Dudù and Juan killed in the usual manner (drowning). Baba pleads with her that killing Juan will not cure what ails her. The sultana summons Dudù and Juan. Just before the canto ends, the narrator explains that the "Muse will take a little touch at warfare."

#### **CANTO VII**

Juan and John Johnson have escaped with two women from the seraglio, and arrive during the siege of Ismail (historically 1790), a Turkish fort at the mouth of the Danube on the Black Sea. Field Marshal Suvaroff, an officer in the Russian army, is preparing for an all-out final assault against the besieged fortress. The battle rages. He has been told to "take Ismail at whatever price" by Prince Potemkin, the commander-in-chief of the Russian army. The Christian empress Catherine II is the Russian head-of-state. John Johnson appears to Suvaroff (with whom he has previously served in battle at Widdin) and introduces his friend Juan—both are ready to join the fight against the "pagan" Turks. Suvaroff is unhappy with the women the two men brought, but they state that they are the wives of other men, and that the women aided their escape. Suvaroff consents to the women staying.

#### **CANTO VIII**

Juan and John join fearlessly and bravely in the savage assault on Ismail. They scale the walls of the town and charge into battle. The conquest of Ismail causes the slaughter of 40,000 Turks, among them women (a few of whom are ravished) and children. Juan nobly rescues a ten-year-old Muslim girl, from two murderous Cossacks intent on killing her, and immediately resolves to adopt her as his own child. A noble Tartar khan valiantly fights to the death beside his five sons, just as instructed by Mahomet, presumably to be rewarded with houris in heaven.

Juan is a hero and is sent to Saint Petersburg, accompanied by the Muslim girl, whom he makes a vow to protect. Her name, Leila, is only revealed in Canto X.

#### **CANTO IX**

Dressed as a war hero in military uniform, Juan cuts a handsome figure in the court of Catherine II, who lusts after him. She is about 48 years old (historically, actually 61 or 62 years old) and "just now in juicy vigor". He becomes one of her

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favorites and is flattered by her interest as well as promoted for it. “Love is vanity,/Selfish in its beginning as its end,  
/Except where ‘tis a mere insanity”. Juan still lovingly cares for the Muslim girl he rescued.

### **CANTO X**

Juan falls ill because of the Russian cold and so is sent westward to more temperate England. His job ostensibly is that of a special envoy with the nebulous task of negotiating some treaty or other, but it is nothing more than a sinecure to justify the Empress Catherine in securing his health and loading him with money and expensive gifts.

### **CANTO XI**

Juan lands in England and eventually makes his way to London where he is found musing on the greatness of Britain as a defender of freedoms — until he is interrupted by a Cockney mugger, demanding money with menace. Juan shoots the man and, being of strong conscience, then regrets his haste and attempts to care for the dying mugger. However, his efforts fail, and after muttering some last words the mugger dies on the street.

Later, Don Juan is received into the English court with the usual wonder and admiration at his looks, dress and mien although not without the jealousy of some of the older peers.

In this Canto, Byron famously makes his comment on John Keats, “who was kill’d off by one critique”.

### **CANTO XII**

Don Juan seeks out a suitable tutor and guardian for Leila, the orphan from the destroyed city of Ismail. He finds one in Lady Pinchbeck, a woman not unassailed by rumors on her chastity, but generally considered a good person and an admirable wit.

### **CANTO XIII**

Lady Adeline Amundeville and her husband Lord Henry Amundeville host Juan and others. She is “the fair most fatal Juan ever met”, the “queen bee, the glass of all that’s fair,/Whose charms made all men speak and women dumb”. Diplomatic relations often bring Juan (“the envoy of a secret Russian mission”) and Lord Henry together, and he befriends Juan and makes him a frequent guest at their London mansion. The Amundevilles invite numerous distinguished guests for a party at their country estate. The landscape surrounding the estate, as well as the decor within their house is described. This is followed by a mock-catalogues of the ladies, the gentlemen and the activities that they participate in. Byron sees this whole party as English ennui. The canto ends with all of them retiring for the evening.

### **CANTO XIV**

Juan acquits himself well on a fox hunt. He is attractive to the ladies, including the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke, who begins to flirt with him. Lady Adeline is jealous of the Duchess (who has had many amorous exploits), and resolves to protect the “inexperienced” Juan from her enticements. Juan and Adeline are both 21 years old. Lady Adeline has a vacant heart and has a cold but proper marriage. She is not in love with Juan, but the poet will only later divulge whether they have an affair (apparently not). The popular saying “truth is stranger than fiction” originates from this canto: “’Tis strange — but true; for truth is always strange; Stranger than fiction.”

### **CANTO XV**

Lady Adeline is at risk for losing her honour over Juan. Juan has a seductive manner because he never seems anxious to seduce. He neither brooks nor claims superiority. Adeline advises Juan to get married, but he acknowledges the women he is attracted to tend to be already married. Adeline tries to deduce a suitable match for Juan, but intentionally omits mention of the 16 year old and enticing Aurora Raby, a Catholic. Juan is attracted to her — she is purer than the rest, and reminds him of his lost Haidée. An elaborate dinner is described in detail. Juan is seated between Adeline and Aurora. Aurora has little to say initially, and thaws only a little during the dinner.

### **CANTO XVI**

Juan is smitten with the beautiful Aurora, and thinks of her on retiring. At night, he walks into the hall, viewing the gallery of paintings. He hears footsteps, and sees a monk in cowl and beads. He wonders if it is a ghost, or just a dream. He does

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not see the monk's face, though he passes and repasses several times.

The next morning in reaction to how pale Juan looks, Adeline turns pale herself, the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke looks at Juan hard, and Aurora surveys him "with a kind of calm surprise". Adeline wonders if he is ill, and Lord Henry guesses that he might have seen the "Black Friar". He relates the story of the "spirit of these walls" who used to be seen often but had not been seen of late. Lord Henry, himself, had seen the Black Friar on his honeymoon. Adeline offers to sing the story of the ghost, accompanying it on her harp. Aurora remains silent, but Lady Fitz-Fulke appears mischievous after the song. The narrator suggests that Adeline had sung this to laugh Juan out of his dismay. Juan's attempts to lift his spirits, as the house bustles in preparation for another feast. Before that, however, a pregnant country girl and other petitioners present themselves to Lord Henry in his capacity as Justice of the Peace.

At the banquet, Juan is preoccupied with his thoughts again. When he glances at Aurora, he catches a smile on her cheek, but is uncertain of its meaning, since Aurora sits pale and only a little flushed. Adeline goes about her duties as hostess, while the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke is very much at ease.

They retire for the evening. Juan thinks about Aurora, who has reawakened feelings in him which had lately been lost. After going to back to his room, he hears the tiptoe of footsteps again, after sitting around in expectation of the ghost. His doors open, and again it is the sable Friar concealed in his solemn hood. He pursues the friar up against a wall, and then suddenly notices that the "ghost" has sweet breath, a straggling curl, red lips, pearls, and a glowing bust. As the hood falls down, the "friar" is revealed to be the voluptuous Duchess of Fitz-Fulke.

## **CANTO XII**

A Canto that Byron failed to complete but added to in the run up to his death, it lacks any narrative and only barely mentions the protagonist. It is instead a response to his critics who object to his views on the grounds that "If you are right, then everybody's wrong!". In his defence, he lists many great people who have been considered outsiders and revolutionaries including Martin Luther and Galileo.

The Canto ends on the brink of resuming the storyline from Canto The Sixteenth where Don Juan was left in a "tender moonlit situation".

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