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A Monstrous Beauty: Performing Freakishness in Byron's *Don Juan*

By Tracey Colvin, University of Maryland

<1> In Lord Byron's celebrated work, *Don Juan*, the title character is described as being possessed of an enchanting beauty, an aesthetic appeal so intensely captivating that it becomes the object of seduction for virtually any woman with whom he comes into contact. Although beauty is rarely depicted as anything other than a decidedly positive attribute, Juan is a "monstrous beauty," a figure whose aesthetic perfection renders him a spectaclized body. This "beauty" forces Juan into a commodified and objectified position in consumer culture, one in which he appears more like a "freakish" or "disabled" body than he does an object representative of some aesthetic ideal. Juan's beauty falls victim to spectaclization just as easily as "ugliness" or "deformity." This figure should be viewed as "disabled" by beauty, and this use of "disability" requires proper explication of the meaning of this term when contextualized in this way. By bringing in some fresh perspectives on the unessentialized nature of disability in literature, we may hopefully view this concept through new lenses. I will investigate the criteria by which a literary figure may be rendered metaphorically "disabled," and what such "disabling" may contribute to our readings of texts, by scrutinizing Juan as a handicapped figure in the exploration of connections between the spectacle of this character's body and that of other performative "freaks" popular in the period in which this text was written. These include the Circassian Beauties of P.T. Barnum's stage, the socially-mobile and deformed entertainers of the Royal court, the disfigured Castrato opera singers, and the "monstrously" sexualized male figure.

<2>Before entering into a discussion of Don Juan as a figure of disability in context of "monstrous beauty," we must first establish how the term "disability" is to be applied to this and perhaps other texts. The concept of "disability" or 'handicap" becomes especially useful in the discourses of literary analyses and criticisms if we accept that this term has been and continues to be an unessentialized notion. While we may be able to identify Juan's "handicap" for the purpose of this argument as one that is of a "physical" nature (as opposed to mental handicap), the concept of physical handicap—what it means or how we name it in its many forms—is a rather fluid concept. James C. Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, co-editors of *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture* suggest the following:

> That is, disability is not a universal category but a strategic name marking diverse differences. Moreover, the term *disability* names multiple and diverse embodiments of conditions and impairments; even in cases where individuals have the 'same' condition… Recognizing that disability is a strategic naming, therefore, we argue both for the broadest possible definition of disability and for the right of the disability community to debate, contest, and change their preferred definitions of disability. For how disability is defined and who does the defining have important political and social consequences" (10).

Considering the difficulties inherent in any attempt to "name" disability or to categorize people and ailments in traditionally limiting manners, many disability studies scholars argue for a less restrictive definition of "disability," one that opens the discussion of what marks a disabled body to include such unusual ideas as "beauty" and "perfection." Most would agree that the "average" person is not beautiful; this in turn, must therefore imply that the beautiful person is not, at least aesthetically, "average." As such, disability loosely refers to the condition of either being or feeling "different," not subscribing (either purposefully or unintentionally) to commonly-accepted notions of "normal."

<3>This sort of excessive, "beauty" either within or as a facet of the "abnormal," may fall under classification of that which is "sublime." A "sublime" beauty is, in the words of theorist Arkady Plotnitsky, one that allows us to glimpse that which lies "'beyond the beyond' [which] is beyond everything conceivably human" (164). The nature of the sublime, for Plotnitsky, is that it exists

somewhere outside of human comprehension, which leads him to then argue that we are only able to "quasi-consume" the sublime in the world; that is, we experience what is it like to *try* to conceive of the sublime, but we are not able to get "beyond the beyond," and are only able to "quasi-consume" sublime beauty. This is particularly relevant with regard to Juan's position as a figure that is objectified and commodified. As an object of "public consumption" and a body exhibited for public amusement, the inability of spectators to "consume" Juan's beauty becomes a cultural problem, one that highlights both an intense fixation on consumer goods and Juan's radical divergence from "normal" participation within this commodity-centered society. It is the fact of Juan's only "quasi-consumable," sublime beauty that crafts him as an "abnormal" and therefore "monstrous" figure. The act of conceiving something beautiful for most people is not a sublime experience, but Juan's appeals falls within another echelon, and as such, he is not palatable; he is a body of sublime beauty that his audience cannot fully consume. Plotnitsky argues that any attempt to fully consume the sublime includes a "dismemberment" of the inconsumable:

> One thus encounters radical disarticulating materiality both in the world, specifically the body, and in the text…insofar as one can approach the world by way of a text, the dismemberment or "decoherence" of language—the ultimately irreducible, uncontrollable divergence of figures, signifiers, or whatever can carry meaning—manifests the irreducible inaccessibility of the world or life through peculiar configurations of material and phenomenological effects. (175)

It is for this reason that we must "dismember" both Juan's body and Byron's text, if we are going to attempt any true understanding of sublime beauty, functioning as an inconsumable (or even quasi-consumable) "handicap" in the text.

<4>By viewing Juan's body as a sublime exhibition and a beautiful yet exceedingly unusual object, one may perhaps best grasp the purpose of signifying aberrance within perfection, or appeal within revulsion:

> Following the romantic aesthetics, particularly the discourse of the sublime, the extraordinary has come to refer to a heightened emotional state, a sense of astonishment, strong admiration (or the contrary)…It is to earlier definitions of the term that we might most productively turn, however, including the OED entries of "acting in an unusual manner," "partial," and "outside of or additional to the regular staff; not belonging to the 'ordinary' or fully recognized class of persons; supernumerary." (Jones 15-16)

Juan's beauty is an oddity that places him in the realm of the disabled—it is because of this physical abnormality that he is so easily objectified by some and scorned by others. Ultimately, his beauty is "monstrous" because it is sublime—it renders him outside of the "regular staff" and instead places him in the position of spectacle, a beautiful object to be consumed as a curiosity for a hungry and critical crowd.

<5>The purpose of depicting Juan as a disabled figure is that in so doing, we may better view him as a relatable figure: in his awkward sense of displacement in "difference," we see ourselves. Stephen Pender notes, "Scholars have focused on deformity as a mobile, ahistorical concept that embodies our prurience or disrupts our perceptions of 'the human'; monsters are conceived as mirrors in which we see our boundaries, our narcissism, or our questions about received images of self" (96). As the hero of *Don Juan*, it is vital that Juan be a figure with which the reading audience may identify and understand. Perfect beauty is not an attribute that makes Juan relatable, however, his discomfort in his own skin and his inability to traverse the objectifying social landscapes in which he is thrust, certainly make him a more understandable character. Additionally, as Joel Reed notes, "Any attempt to 'know' those who seem to be natural exceptions, the 'defects' who fall short of some standard, or the monstrous who are 'out of the common order of nature,' inevitably links with a multiplicity of representational strategies and discourses" (156). It is the "multiplicity of representational strategies and discourses" that may prove most fascinating when engaging in a disability-focused exploration of this character. The first and perhaps most significant representational strategy utilized in *Don Juan* is the positioning of Juan as a spectaclized body for public consumption.

<6>The tradition of the "Freak Show" was a considerable element of both British and American cultures well into the nineteenth century, and it is the popularity of these spectacles that make

them so pervasive in the text of *Don Juan*: "If we listen to the past, we hear two distinct, contrapuntal sounds: into the eighteenth century, voices raised against the dangers of human exhibition reached a pitch surpassed only, it seems, by an insatiable multiform curiosity. Subject to general opprobrium and ridicule, monsters were displayed before the curious for 'pleasure' and profit" (Pender 114). However, the existence of "Freak Shows" not only speaks to the inhumane desires of people to witness the public mortification of the handicapped; it also allows us to see the voracious need that people had for a useful fiction, a paradigm in which to frame their own understanding of disability and normalcy in societies that generally determined the "value" of people based on either their sexual marketability or their supposed familial legacies. Author Linda Frost contends that, "Like the nation itself, the freak exhibit was a construction, a figure wrapped in cultural myth and story. And freaks were almost always shown within a narrative, a showman relating the story of how they came to be in a museum and selling souvenir chapbooks that contained the freak's 'history.' There was, then, no such thing as a 'real freak'; by virtue of their carefully plotted representation, freaks were/are always constructed" (6). Similar to the "freaks" mentioned in the above statement, Byron frames Juan within a narrative, offering the reader a "history" of this figure prior to two literal exhibitions that will be discussed in greater depth later in this essay: as a slave in a marketplace being sold for profit, and as a player in Queen Catherine's court being used for entertainment. Here Byron appears as a "showman," carefully constructing the figure of Juan, his great exhibit for public consumption. Juan, then, is rendered a constructed body, a figure placed within a narrative history and then driven into positions of marginalization and alienation by a paternalistic figure who serves to gain monetarily from his public display.

<7>It is worth noting that Byron himself suffered disabilities – he was both clubfooted and rather obese. However, while the relationships between the disabilities of Byron and Juan may be notable, they are not the primary subject of inquiry in this work. I do not intend to connect Juan's "monstrous beauty" as disability to Byron's own literal deformity, as this trope has been critiqued in past works, and would not offer much in the way of new material to the discussion. Some of the relevant texts that discuss Byron's deformity including Martin Garrett's *George Gordon, Lord Byron*, in which the author writes:

> There has been some debate about the exact nature of the condition, but we know that his right foot turned inward. Corrective footgear did little to help and perhaps even made matters worse. For much of his life he remained sensitive about the way he walked. As a child, he allegedly shouted "Dinna speak of it" at a woman who had the temerity to allude to it; he had learnt more stoicism and more wit by the time he wrote, in 1811, that 'in another existence, I expect to have *two* if not *four* legs by way of compensation.' Some have attributed Byron's melancholy, his sexual over-activity, or his poetic ability to his foot; more certainly there was a compensatory element in his passion for riding, boxing, and long-distance swimming. (10)

Byron has been well-documented as a contentious and outspoken man, one who exercised little self-censorship when offered the opportunity to spout invectives on those who had the audacity to comment on his handicap. Additionally, Benita Eisler, author of *Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame* notes the more recent developments in scholarly contention on the nature of Byron's disability:

> Later descriptions of Byron's foot and limp point to the congenital malformation known as club foot, wherein the heel is drawn up and the sole of the foot turns inward. Recent evidence, however, suggests that Byron's deformity resulted from a mild version of spina bifida, a developmental abnormality of the spine that, in this case, causes the right leg to be shorter than the left and the foot to remain in spasm. These symptoms, together with the resulting withered calf muscles, would have caused the limp and explains the sliding or running gait (impossible with a club foot) with which Byron as a young man strove to disguise his lameness. (766)

Regardless of the nature of his condition, for the purpose of this exploration, I intend only to locate Byron in the analysis of this tale as the creator of Juan as a spectaclized figure, to argue that the narrative framing of this character may in fact, have sprung from Bryon's own interaction with disability and "freakishness" in the culture from which he came. In terms of Juan's "monstrous beauty," I intend to follow the in vein of Paul Youngquist, who suggests that at some point exceptional bodies like that of both Juan and Byron could no longer be wonderful or sheerly exceptional. They become uniformly monstrous (Jones 21), and this is a trope that is imbricated

in the prose.

<8> Juan meets most of the standard roles expected in a freak exhibit as an oddity displayed for the public, especially in the two most apparent examples of freakish exhibition in the text: the slave auction and the scenes at court. Juan's appearance certainly draws stares and his overwhelming sexual appeal illustrates him as dangerous and somewhat primal. Frost writes, "Represented as potentially dangerous and often sexualized, the freak exhibit simultaneously served to titillate and reassure the white viewer" (9). Juan's ability to both titillate and reassure, in this case, his female viewers, is what makes him a most valuable commodity. The viewing audience objectifies Juan's oppressive beauty, and is at the same time reassured by his status as "thing" on display. This was a common public desire, for both men and women, in the freak show. One of P. T. Barnum's most successful exhibits hinged on the sexual appetites of his viewing audience and their abilities to be reassured of their own normalcy in viewing such a dangerous sexual commodity through the distanced lens of the spectator.

<9>The Circassian Beauty, one of Barnum's most profitable exhibits, reveals Juan's position in a number of compelling and significant ways. Although Circassian Beauties were generally women, the comparison to Juan is noteworthy, especially in consideration of his often effeminate behaviors. Additionally, Juan spends most of Canto V dressed as a women so that he may be accessible to the Sultana, and we are told that this feminine persona suits him based on the fact that "His youth and features favoured the disguise" (Byron Canto V 115). I will look at Juan as a feminized figure with particular regard to Canto V in his comparison to a Circassian beauty. Circassian beauties were exhibited as part of Barnum's circus, used to sexually entice and aesthetically enthrall viewers with their physical splendor. What made them unique was both their exquisite beauty and their statuses as white slaves, bought in slave-markets (but usually from Caucasus, located north-west of Asia Minor, between Black and Caspian Seas) and sold to showmen: "Perhaps this accounted for the marketability of the Circassian beauty: the whitest of the white, yet a slave, the Beauty combined the purity of the white women with the sexual availability of the slave. She could at once be both worshipped and raped" (Frost 67). However, these beautiful women were still part of "freak" culture; their physically ideal bodies considered an important element in the parade of aberrance set before the public. Frost writes, "[Barnum colleague, John Greenwood, Jr.] saw a large number of Circassian girls and women, some of them the most beautiful beings he had ever seen… [Circassian Beauties were] spiritual perhaps, but certainly delectable—to be consumed" (68-9). The Circassian Beauty is significant because Byron was himself aware of this figure situated somewhere between both slave and freak show commodity cultures. He refers to these women in his introduction to the slave market in which Juan is objectified and spectaclized before the gawking consumer culture.

<10>Byron was clearly conscious of the Circassian's role: her idealized physical beauty, her whiteness of skin, and her role as a commodified body on display. What makes the textual reference to Circassian Beauties in *Don Juan* particularly powerful is that Byron describes the Circassian as a purchase for the Sultan. As Juan will soon become a purchase of the Sultana as well, the features and attributes that he shares with the Circassian Beauty are underscored and exemplified, and Juan and the Beauty are linked. Byron writes:

> …And there with Georgians, Russians, and Circassians,
> Bought up for different purposes and passions.
> Some went off dearly; fifteen hundred dollars
> For one Circassian, a sweet girl, were given,
> Warranted virgin. Beauty's brightest colours
> Had decked her out in all the hues of heaven.
> Her sale sent home some disappointed bawlers,
> Who bade on till the hundreds reached the eleven,
> But when the offer went beyond, they knew
> 'Twas for the Sultan and at once withdrew. (Byron Canto IV 113-4)

The description of Juan during the sale is similar to that of the Circassian, the focus of depiction falling on the figures' beauties and apparels, and marking the connections between the two:

> His figure and the splendour of his dress,
> Of which some gilded remnants still were seen,
> Drew all eyes on him, giving them to guess
> He was above the vulgar by his mein

He was above the vulgar by his birth,
And then, though pale, he was so very handsome.
And then – they calculated on his ransom. (Byron CantoV 9)

Circassians were valued based on their beauty, their white skin in slavery, and their sexually-exoticized yet virginal bodies. Similarly, throughout Canto V, in which Juan is enslaved by the Sultana, he is described as "pretty" (156), "pale" (9), and as a "new-bought virgin" (156). Moreover, when Juan is conversing with another young man up for auction, the young man says to Juan, "Fortune has played you here a pretty freak" (Byron Canto V 14). Juan is the embodiment of Barnum's "freakish" Circassian Beauty, exhibited publicly as a slave in a consumer-culture marketplace and then utilized as an object of sexual fantasy for the Sultana.

<11> The Sultana's sexual agenda with regard to Juan is another facet of his incarnation of the freak show's Circassian Beauty. Frost writes about "the Circassians, who are described as 'fair and rosy cheeked' and exposed 'only so far as delicacy would sanction, yet leaving enough visible to develope [sic] charms that fired the spirits of the Turkish crowd" (74). We are told that Juan's cheek is "as pale as snowdrops blowing" (V 117) but that receiving a compliment from the Sultan makes him, "blush and shake" (V 156). Additionally, it is quite clear that Juan "fires the spirits" of the Sultana in the marketplace as Byron writes, "Juan, the latest of her whims, had caught/ Her eye in passing on his way to sale" (V 114). It is the sexual nature of the Circassian Beauty, her ability to seduce without intention, that makes her such an abundant source of value: "The Circassian slave then becomes the idealized colonial subject, she who is primed for 'civilization' and who exhibits the naturalized individualism and intellect of Western and particularly American culture, traits that allow her to attract without effort" (Frost 78). The results of this for Juan are the unsolicited sexual advances of the Sultana, which he must then use his "naturalized individualism and intellect" to dissuade:

'The prisoned eagle will not pair, nor I
Serve a sultana's sensual phantasy.
'Thou ask'st if I can love; be this the proof
How much I *have* loved – that I love not thee! (Byron Canto V 126-7)

Like the Circassian Beauties, Juan is the unwitting recipient of amorous advances, his physical beauty the unfortunate abnormality that engenders lustful gazes.

<12>One of the most famous stories of a Circassian Beauty, written by Maturin Murray Ballou and first published serially in Gleason's *Pictorial Drawing Room Companion* in 1851 (Frost 73) is oddly similar to that of Byron's Juan, and perhaps a derivative of Cantos III and IV of Byron's poem. In Ballou's *The Circassian Slave; or, The Sultan's Favorite*, A young woman named Komel is taken from her homeland by a jealous lover and sold into slavery, at which point she is purchased by the Sultan. However, what makes this story so fascinatingly similar to Byron's version is that we are told of Komel's life before she is sold into slavery, where, like Juan, she enjoyed perfect, innocent love in a sort of pre-lapsarian paradise:

> [Komel] is bound by her affections to a childhood companion, Aphiz Adegah, and they are depicted as blissfully united prior to Komel's abduction: 'they had grown up together from very childhood, played together, worked together, sharing each other's burthens, and mutually aiding each other; now quietly watching the sheep and goats upon the hillsides, and now working side by side in the fields, content and happy, so they were always together.'" (Frost 75)

Likewise, Juan and Haidee are described as deeply in love, frolicking unchecked by any real restraints:

And now 'twas done; on the lone shore were plighted

Their hearts. The stars, their nuptial torches, shed
Beauty upon the beautiful they lighted.
Ocean their witness, and the cave their bed,
By their own feelings hallowed and untied;
Their priest was Solitude, and they were wed.
And they were happy, for to their young eyes
Each was an angel, and earth a Paradise. (Byron Canto III 153)

The story changes slightly in Ballou's version: instead of an angry patriarch selling Komel into slavery, a jealous lover is responsible. Additionally, in Ballou's version, Komel eventually escapes from the Harem when her lover comes to rescue her and the two return home to live out their lives in peace. This, of course, cannot happen for Juan, as his story would have ended and Byron's tale would have drawn to a rather anti-climatic conclusion. However, the the similarity between these two parables helps to authenticate the strong connection between Juan and the freakish spectacle of the Circassian Beauty.

<13>Juan's function as a valued commodity can also be seen after he escapes the Harem and enjoys unusual social mobility in the Russian court, which we may directly equate with his status as a "freakish" spectacle in Russian society. It is, in fact, his role as "oddity" that allows him to permeate the rather stringent social codes of Royal Russian society. Many of those deemed "abnormal" in high society were included in and often invited to social functions, especially in England: "Throughout the early modern period, advertisements of human curiosities had guaranteed their value by testimonials of the privileged: royalty and scientific authorities like the members of the Royal Society. Some of these 'monsters' or 'demonstrations' made social mobility itself the marvel" (Benedict 141). The notion that these unusual bodies were granted the sort of social mobility that was "itself a marvel" demonstrates the functional presence of disability and "freakishness" in the bourgeois culture of this period. The presence of an "oddity" virtually guaranteed the entertainment of guests; many deformed or disabled people were kept on staff at the homes of the wealthiest and most respected members of society:

> At the same time, legless dancers, handless artists, giants, dwarfs, and physically unusual people rose in society by purveying their bodies to become invited guests at fine houses. Traditionally, dwarfs had been the playthings of kings, permitted rare freedom, like King Lear's fool, and still people with special talents…could find fame and fortune from royalty. (Benedict 142)

Like these spectaclized disabled bodies, Juan is able to penetrate the Russian Royal Court and achieve unusual social mobility by purveying his uncommon figure.

<14> Juan's presence as a "freakish" body in the Royal Court shifts and evolves as Canto X progresses: he is first introduced as a figure so very unusual that he is able, like other "oddities" of the period, to cross class lines and disorient social politics. However, by the end of the chapter, Juan has been converted into physicalized diseased and a new kind of handicapped body, when he has hitherto represented a deformity that is situated in extreme physicalized flawlessness. When Juan initially arrives in Russia, he is described as having a rather singular ability to infiltrate society and to have the sort of marvelous "social mobility" that other "monsters" often attained:

> Juan instead of courting courts, was courted,
> A thing which happens rarely. This he owed
> Much to his youth and much to his reported
> Valour, much also to the blood he showed
>
> Like a race-horse, much to each dress he sported,
> Which set the beauty off in which he glowed,
> As purple clouds befringe the sun... (Byron Canto X 29)

Juan's ability to be embraced by upper class society, Byron tells us, is a "thing which happens rarely," and certainly indicates Juan's remarkable positioning in this new community; it infers that his mobility is the result of some truly distinctive characteristic. In the above lines, it is evident that Juan is "courted" for many reasons, but one the most significant is his staggering beauty, which, offset by the way he is adorned (in clothes that "befringe" him like "purple clouds"), reveals a physical construction so enticing that Juan seems to "glow" with the luminescence of the "sun." Furthermore, Juan's presence as a confounding beauty treads ever-nearer to disfigurement as he finds that his attractiveness engenders self-erasure, that his beauty allows others to lose sight of his very humanity, and to instead view him only as a commodified ideal: "Don Juan, who was real or ideal – / For both are much the same, since what men think / Exists when the once thinkers are less real/ Than what they thought, for mind can never sink…" (Byron Canto X 20). In the Russian Court of Catherine the Great, Juan's functional purpose is to be a striking oddity, a spectaclized novelty for public consumption, used to bring pleasure and entertainment to the viewing audience as an image of ideal but soulless beauty.

<15> Juan's role as a disfigured individual becomes physicalized in a different way when the

psychological stress of his singularity results in illness. While being paraded around the Russian court as a spectacle of beauty, Juan is gripped with an indeterminable sickness that further marks him an object of curiosity:

> …Of his fierce pulse betoken a condition
> Which augured of the dead, however *quick*
> Itself, and showed a feverish disposition,
> At which the whole court was extremely troubled,
> The Sovereign shocked, and all his medicines doubled.
> Low were the whispers, manifold the rumors:
> Some said he has been poisoned by Potemkin;
> Others talked learnedly of certain tumours… (X 39-40)

No longer merely the subject of excessive appeal, Juan's waning beauty, now deteriorating due to illness, becomes the site of hushed speculation and vicious gossip. His condition worsens, possibly due to an inability to find acceptance or camaraderie in the community in which he now exists as an alienated presence: "Perhaps despite his duty, / In royalty's vast arms he sighed for beauty" (X 37). Juan longs for beauty even as his own diminishes, as though his appeal is somehow intrinsically tied to his status as visual commodity. Like a plant left exposed too long to the sun, Juan becomes acutely vulnerable to the glaring gaze of courtiers. Indeed, immediately preceding the introduction of Juan's illness, Byron likens him to a sensitive plant, stating: "The gentle Juan flourished, though at times / he felt like other plants called sensitive, / Which shrink from touch…" (X 37). Juan "shrinks from touch" because he is overwhelmed with adoration, and this condition eventually escalates into a physically present rejection of the aestheticized experience.

<16>When Juan's illness reaches its peak he becomes a rather useless commodity in the Queen's cabinet of spectacles. Sick people were, of course, not terribly "curious," at least not in the same way that strikingly charming "oddities" were. No longer exquisitely beautiful and therefore no longer required for service in the Queen's Parade of "freaks," Juan is dismissed. Byron writes:

> His youth and constitution bore him through
> And sent the doctors in a new direction.
> But still his state was delicate; the hue
> Of health but flickered with a faint reflection
> Along his wasted cheek and seemed to gravel
> The faculty, who said that he must travel. (X 43)

Juan begins to recover, but as he has still not regained his former splendor, it is determined that his services will be best suited for another court, another "mission." Catherine recognizes Juan's value as commodity, and manipulates the situation so that her "oddity," now slightly decreased in value because of the ravages of illness, may be purveyed as a generous gift to another dignitary. As such, Juan is "traded" to another country as he is sent on a "mission" on behalf of the Queen:

> [Catherine] did not like at first to lose her minion;
> But when she saw his dazzling eye wax dim
> And drooping like an eagle's with clipt pinion,
> She then resolved to send him on a mission,
> But in a style becoming his condition. (X 44)

In the above-referenced segment, it is clear that Catherine decides to rid herself of Juan only *after* she notes the alteration in his appearance. When she observes Juan's "dazzling eye wax dim" and "droop" Catherine "*then* resolved" (my emphasis) to proffer him a task that would befit his "condition" – the condition of being both a "sick" man and a "freakish" commodity. To this end, Catherine sends Juan as a token of goodwill during the creation of a "treaty." However, he does not simply go as an ambassador, he is a "display" himself, sent for the enjoyment of the court:

> [Catherine] conferred
> This secret charge on Juan to display
> At once her royal splendour and reward
> His services. He kissed hands the next day,
> Received instructions how to play his card… (X 46)

Royalty historically sent unusual and exotic offerings to other countries as symbols of amity; Juan is sent as a human gift, a gesture to the court of the amiability of Russians, and an example of the sort of wondrous oddities they posses in Russia. He is instructed about how to "play his card," indicating that his function is that of a cultural amusement and an embodied recreation.

<17> Another type of cultural oddity consumed for the purpose of entertainment was the figure of the Italian castrato opera singer, a social curiosity similar to Juan in many ways. Author J. Jennifer Jones' comprehensive work on the castrati allows us to more clearly link Juan with these performers. Jones' article, entitled "Sounds Romantic: The Castrato and English Poetics Around 1800," informs us of the popularity of the castrati singers in Southern Europe where they achieved recognition during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (10). These opera singers – all men – were subjected (or subjected themselves) to castration in an attempt to retain the high pitched sounds of their voices (Jones 13). This severe medical procedure caused many physical abnormalities in the singers as a result of hormonal imbalances. Some of these deformities included abnormally large torsos, arms, and legs. Many associated, "the body of the castrato singer with monstrosity, claiming he had a distinctly 'freakish appearance,' to which, once again, myriad reports of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries testify" (Jones 17). What make the castrati such a useful point of comparison when attempting to "read" the body of Don Juan is their relationships to viewing audiences as spectaclized disabled bodies, and their "freakish"

status as transgendered figures.

<18> Like Juan, castrati singers elicited both wonder and revulsion when placed before an assemblage of spectators. Jones writes, "castrati singers have not only aroused fear and distaste, but also 'prurient interest'" (10). Moreover, it was the very essence of the castrato's "freakishness" – their high voices – that made them so monetarily valuable and their music so sublime. Like the oddities exhibited by P.T. Barnum, the castrati were valued on the exceedingly unusual nature of their talents:

> The practical expression of the supreme value of the high voice was demonstrated by the fees paid to the opera singers dating from the beginnings of the public opera houses in the 1630s, in which high voices in leading parts (castrati and women) were almost always paid more than tenors or basses. (Jones 11)

Like Juan, the castrati were culturally consumed goods whose figurative and literal worth were singularly determined by their handicaps. Jones informs us that "Castrati were, from the first, both greatly admired and greatly loathed" (14). This certainly may be applicable to Juan, as he is both the site of desire and infamy in the tale; when he is not being pursued for lust he is being reviled for abhorrence, as is the case with Alphonso, Lambro, even the Sultana when he initially rejects her suit.

<19> The castrati were also fantastically socially mobile, much like Juan. In addition to being musical and visual spectacles of renown and acclaim, the castrati were able to rather astonishingly thwart the attempts of Napoleon Bonaparte in erasing them entirely from culture. Napoleon "forbade castrated boys from matriculating at schools or music conservatories as a means of abolishing the practice of creating eunuchs in order to produce women's voices in men" (Jones 14). However, despite these ominous social constraints, the castrati proved to retain their popularity, being invited to perform in many major European cities as a testament to their regard (Jones 14). Perhaps one explanation for the degree of repugnance exhibited by Napoleon towards the castrati stems from the publicly acknowledged homosexual relationships that existed between castrati and political leaders: "Grand Prince Ferdinando de 'Medici (1663-1713), grandson of Ferdinando II, carried on a rather open affair with the castrato Francesco (Cecchino) de Castris, who himself replaced Ferdinando's previous castrato favorite, Petrillo. De Castris too rose to a position of great influence before envy and intrigue led to his banishment" (Freitas 21). These types of relationships were condemned for many reasons, notably because the Catholic church vehemently opposed homosexuality. However, the church was equally concerned with the relationships between castrati and women, arguing that such relationships were forbidden based on the fact that the castrato's genital mutilation rendered them incapable of reproduction. If they could not reproduce, their sexual encounters – even with their wives – could be described as sexual acts performed strictly for pleasure:

> In 1587, for example, Pope Sixtus V wrote a letter to the bishop of Novara, papal nuncio to Spain, specifically prohibiting castrati from marriage. In his view, castrati unleashed the (natural) lasciviousness of women: 'Women who marry [eunuchs] live

> not chastely, but are instead joined carnally, with depraved and libidinous intention, under the pretext and in the form of matrimony, aspiring to these shameful unions, which offer an occasion for sins and scandals and make for the damnation of souls.' (29)

As such, Juan, like the castrato, is abhorred by figures of social power for his gender-ambiguous role. He is a feminized figure like both the Circassian beauty and the castrato, one who is prone to socially-constructed gendered projections. As author Roger Freitas notes, "A man who succumbed too much to the pleasures of the flesh, whose existence revolved too much around women, was considered in danger of losing his masculine nature and even physical strength. By the same principle, a man who presented a rather feminine demeanor – like the boy or castrato – was considered predisposed to becoming ensnared in the womanish pursuit of love" (10). Juan may certainly be described as being "ensnared in the womanish pursuit of love." The tale itself exists as a revelation of his romantic endeavors. Like the castrato, Juan is both embraced and rejected, he is socially-mobile and socially-ostracized based on his unique sexual ambiguity, which breeds both fascination and anxiety among his spectators.

<20> The ambiguous sexuality of both Juan and the castrato further associate these figures – while Juan is forced to cross-dress for the Sultana and is often characterized as effeminate, the castrati too were often denominated as "pseudo-female" and were frequently even mistaken for young women. Jones writes that there were "rumors that the castrato singer possessed the body of a woman, including lack of beard growth" (16-17). She also references Angus Heriot's work on Casanova as he relates the experience of having encountered the feminine sensuality of a castrato:

> …it was above all by this means that the monster made such ravages. Though one knew the negative nature of this unfortunate, curiosity made one glace at his chest, and inexpressible charm acted upon one, so that you were madly in love before you realized it. (Heriot 54).

It was the castrato singer's sexual ambiguity coupled with his indeterminate sexual appetite that often made him the subject of fear, ridicule, and virulent gossip. The castrati were often misrepresented as sexually aberrant, misidentified and wrongfully characterized as the embodiment of deviant male sexuality. Freitas notes, "As Kowalesky-Wallace puts it, by having sex without the threat of pregnancy, women and castrati 'constitute an implicit threat to the construction of masculinity.' The castrato embodies a renegade sensuality unbound by the rules of religion and society" (30).
This last form of enfreakment, the monstrosity of male sexuality, is also a social construction of the beautiful-as-monstrous from which Juan suffers.

<21> Juan's mesmeric beauty compels many of the women he encounters to frantically lust after him, yet Juan is not diffident about reciprocating the advances of most of these admirers, and it is because of this that his sexual appetite is often construed as excessive. Juan beds a litany of women, many of whom are already married (Donna Julia, the Sultana, etc.). This type of behavior was certainly condemned by society for both men and women in this period. Juan's sexual appetite, however well-intentioned or expressly warranted, is understood to be an inappropriate, dangerous, and even a somewhat "monstrous" quality: "Here, the image of tempted Eve symbolizes a modern female corruption that matches the Monster's sexuality. Whether male or female, sexuality itself emerges as the monstrous trait, a trait concealed but not controlled by modern manners" (Benedict 132). In fact, according to Barbara M. Benedict, author of "Making a Monster: Socializing Sexuality and the Monster of 1790," it was the refined and beautiful gentleman who was distinguished as the most frightful, most deviant monster: "Sexuality, class status, nationality, political and domestic behavior, and legal regulation all intertwine to show that monstrosity at the turn of the century designated a man who, concealed under a decorous exterior, rejected public values: the hidden man, the emblem of a sexual identity impervious to social instruction" (Benedict 129). While Juan is not necessarily characterized as having a "sexual identity impervious to social instruction," he does find himself in unusual locales where he is unfamiliar with social codes. Instead of attempting to understand the codes of conduct embraced by these communities, or attempting to project the accepted social norms of his own community onto the new environment in which he exists, Juan indulges his sexual appetite without regard for consequences. His sublime beauty is what draws women in, what arouses their sexual desires, and this is "monstrous" in its own right, however unintentional, considering the implications and penalties associated with a beauty that causes women to commit crimes against marriage and

virtue. Initially Juan is innocent of his affect on women, however once he becomes aware of his appeal, it is his active sexual agency in context of the awareness of his own allure that makes his beauty "monstrous." As such, we can conclude that Juan's forced role of spectaclized, sublime Beauty eventually engenders in him a monstrous sexuality, one in which Juan may be compelled to indulge in his sexual appetite to compensate for his sense of social alienation and "freakishness" in the world.

<22> To conclude, Juan's monstrous beauty is the amalgamation of a number of different kinds of oddities: his literal appeal as a captivating (and sometimes captive) human "freak," his social positioning as an oddity of social entertainment, and his characterization as a sexual monster all assist in the creation of a figure who is beautiful to the point of bizarre. As is typically the case with tales of monsters, we are left without any real sense of how Juan felt about his own monstrosity. Instead, we are left like the crowds at Barnum's shows, those at the slave-market, the Royal Courts and the Opera, to read the curios body of Juan, to participate the peculiar enfreakment of his character, and to join the throng of spectators by reading ourselves into thrilling spectacle that is *Don Juan*.

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