

## BB3 What happened to the ending?

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Text of **Byron Bits No.3** by Peter Gallagher available on [MadBadDangerous.com](http://MadBadDangerous.com)

Byron had finished Canto XVI of Don Juan and immediately began to draft Canto XVII while he was in Genoa in May of 1823. But he stopped after completing just 14 verses.

Unfortunately for him, and for us, he never added another line.

As that last summer in Italy began Byron had already made up his mind to accept the invitation of the woolly-headed warriors on the London Greek Committee to sail to Greece.

This was a private venture – contrary to the policy of the British Government – to support a Greek rebellion against their Turkish Ottoman rulers.

Byron hoped, probably, for some sort of leadership role in the rebellion. The Committee may have hoped he'd pay for it.

In any case, he departed Genoa on 16 July in the vessel **Hercules** that he'd chartered. At about the same time his new publisher, the radical John Hunt, began to issue Cantos VI to XIV of Don Juan in London.

Byron's Tory publisher, John Murray, had declined Byron's drafts of Don Juan after publishing Canto V. He considered the work immoral or at least in very poor taste and unworthy of Byron's talent.

Still, his new publisher, Hunt, had great success with the three volume set he issued over the next six months. Each volume sold between 17 and 19 thousand copies despite a flood of cheap pirated versions printed by the notorious William Dugdale.

Eleven months later, at the end of March, 1824, Hunt published the last two completed Cantos XV and XVI of Don Juan. So the continuation of the poem depended on Byron's pen. But within three weeks, Byron died of an illness and horrible medical treatment in Missolonghi.

It really seems Byron had given up on Don Juan in the year before he died. Although the Greek expedition was a frustration first and then a disaster for him, he had often continued

even accelerated his writing during periods of great personal stress and adversity.

We have only to look back two years to 1822: without doubt the worst year of Byron's Italian exile.

He had wrested possession of his young daughter Allegra from her Mother, Claire Clairmont. But, to his great grief, she died suddenly in a convent where he had placed her, a hundred miles away on the other side of Italy.

Soon after, the needy Leigh Hunt and his bothersome tribe of dependants arrived on Byron's doorstep and Byron's servants were imprisoned after a scuffle with a soldier at the gates of Pisa.

Then Shelley, a tested friend, his nearest peer and neighbour in Pisa, accidentally drowned. Byron ordered the cremation of his rotting body on the beach.

In September, his friend Cam Hobhouse arrived for a visit that didn't go smoothly. Days later, under the pressure of the Austrian Governor, his mistress Teresa Guiccioli's family was forced to leave Pisa. Byron uprooted his household, once more, and moved to Genoa.

Yet, in the same year, although unwell a lot of the time, Byron worked at a prodigious rate. He completed Cantos VI to XII of Don Juan as well as the gothic drama "Werner" and his brilliant political satire, the "Vision of Judgement".

Yes, it's **possible** that by the middle of the following year, 1823, Byron had finally tired of work on his greatest poem.

I have a theory about why that may be so. It is something I think is rather obvious although none of Byron's biographers seems to have considered it. But that's a story for some other time.

Despite the break in writing, it's difficult to believe that Byron really intended to leave Juan, Aurora Raby and the pneumatic Duchess Fitz Fulke staring at the breakfast eggs and coffee.

It's more likely, I think, that Byron **still** had no more-settled plan for Don Juan than he had when he began six years earlier. Neither a plan to quit nor a precise idea how he would go on.

The poem had always been a public performance. By 1823 it had become something like his vision of himself on the world's stage.

But, as he sailed for Greece, it seems he had, for the moment, recast that vision in a more heroic mould than satirist.

Sadly, the huge public reaction to his death a year later **seemed** to vindicate his decision to become a warrior for liberty, just when he had become disillusioned with the scrappy reality of his latest adventure.

#Byron/Bits