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Byron's *Beppo*: Digression and Contingency

> You ask me for the plan of Donny Johnny—I *have* no plan—I *had* no plan—but I had or have materials. . . .—Why Man the Soul of such writing is it's licence?—at least the *liberty* of that *licence* if one likes—*not* that one should abuse it.
>
> *To John Murray 12 August 1819*

The Romantics valued narrative uncertainty, and Byron certainly was the rule rather than the exception. His brand of uncertainty was of a different order, however. Whereas the Ancient Mariner had "strange power of speech" or Wordsworth's *Prelude* prophesied "Something evermore about to be," Byron understood narrative uncertainty more as rhetorical liberty than the groping of one's consciousness in the effort to create one's self. Keats pointed out that Byron cut a figure and was one too; but, as his correspondence reveals, consciousness for Byron was often claustrophobic. The narrative uncertainty Byron preferred was boundless or encyclopedic like that of Sterne's *Tristram* or Burton's *Anatomy*. The use Byron made of digression—a relatively minor technique according to the classical rhetoricians—is essential to the mode of uncertainty Byron cultivated. Apart from great good fun, digression provided Byron with an alternative to the Romantic "monotony and mannerism" of which he had been guilty but later came to despise.[1] In the pages following, I will examine as briefly as possible the history of digression as set forth by classical rhetoricians and then apply these findings to Byron's *Beppo*, the narrative experiment to be elaborated in *Don Juan*. As we shall see,

Byronic digression departs from the narrative, of course, but in such a way that affirms the variability of living by means of the contingencies of language.

The genesis of *Beppo* is an interesting story, but it has been ably described elsewhere and need not be rehearsed here.[2] Suffice it to say that the poem subscribes to a comic pattern. A disguised Beppo returns to Venice after an absence of more than six years, tracks down his wife whom he finds with her *Cavalieri Servente*, and then reveals himself in, of all places, a gondola. Unlike the practice in the "moral North" of Byron's forsaken England, marriage Italian style appreciates infidelity; and Beppo's return disturbs the delicate equilibrium of Venetian mores. The subscription to the comic pattern ends here, however. The poem's "plot" is more of a dodge than a design which is inherently meaningful. *Beppo* concludes with a *ménage à trois* rather than a wedding or even a reconciliation.

The extent of digression in the poem is unusual and much energy has been spent arguing what constitutes a digressive line, a digressive stanza or stanzas, or the manifold transitions between the modes of narration.[3] The effort of fussing over the less evidently digressive segments outweighs the interpretative benefit.[4] I believe that the poem's contingency has a lot to tell us about Byron's theory of language. For one, the poem is deliberately un-plotted as if to say that no story can account for the variability of life. Digression, in fact, has more fidelity to experience because life itself is a digression between birth and death.

> Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
> 'Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge:
> How little do we know that which we are!
> How less what we may be! The eternal surge
> Of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar
> Our bubbles; as the old burst, new emerge,
> Lash'd from the foam of ages; while the graves
> Of Empires heave but like some passing waves. (*Don Juan*, XV, 99)

Digression, as the important second point, shows up the contingency inherent in language. A word's representational value might trigger a deviation into symbol, allegory, myth, or the *Morning Chronicle* for that matter, at any time. Byron does not subscribe to a notion of truth in the

phenomenal world. That a sentence describes a fact may be true, but it is still a sentence first and exists apart from an inherent truth.[5] Digression holds up (and delights in) this discontinuity between world, where we perform, and words, where that performance is verbalized. Before we apply this perspective to *Beppo*, let us fill in the background and turn to digression as it was understood by the classical rhetoricians.

I

> Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine;—they are the life, the soul of reading;—take them out of this book for instance,—you might as well take the book along with them. (Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*)

Digression is usually a minor segment, a "dropped stitch" as Sir Walter Scott writes, of a far greater design be it an oration or a text (164). While reading *Beppo*, the reader often forgets the premise that digressions must step away *from* some basis of plot (England 161). Etymologically, digression is a "stepping aside" from the narrative at hand. The Greek and Latin rhetoricians regard digression as part of a rigid oratorical method: however improvised a digression may seem to the auditor, it is a carefully conceived and artfully wrought element of a discourse. Our first landmark in the critical theory of digression, then, is oxymoronic: we may characterize digression as anticipated disorder, a momentary fracturing of narrative linearity that ultimately aids the intellectual direction of the whole.

Digression first appears in the performance art of classical theatre. *Parekbasis* is the technique in Greek Tragedy, whereas in the Greek Old Comedy of Aristophanes it goes by the name of *parabasis*. The older form of digression is ethical in import because *parekbasis*, within the context of tragedy, implies the moral transgression of some divine code. Such an infringement is in turn absorbed into literary theory, as Joel Black points out, "where it comes to refer to a fault of style, or style which is carried to excess" (12). Comic *parabasis*, however, is an interruption used by the author to insert his opinion by means of the chorus. The author speaks his mind on matters of a personal, a public, and often satirical nature. Two general types of indirection, therefore,

make up the theory of digression: the idea of a fault or excess of style, which in the context of Greek Tragedy connotes an ethical fall from society; and the stylistic excursion or the stepping aside from a linear narrative progress. Byron employs both types: the one when he describes digression as a "sin," or the second when the narrator speaks of himself as a "broken Dandy." In the history of western literature, digression is coeval with drama. As a mode of narrative indirection, its origin is found in performance art.

Of the classical rhetoricians it is Quintilian who singles out digression for separate analysis. He discusses digression within the context of forensic rhetoric and the five part division of a speech into the exordium, the statement of facts, the proof, the refutation, and the peroration. Foremost in Quintilian's discussion is its effect of pleasing the auditor, especially when pleading a case which concerns some horrible crime. Digression offers the "pleasures of a more expansive eloquence"; and within the natural order of the speech it usually occurs between the statement of facts and the proof. "Pleasures" and "expansive" are the words to note here. The first suggests that the impact of digression is psychological; the second that the affective pleasure of digression is a function of comprehensiveness.

Using the Greek word, Quintilian defines the device as follows: "[*Parekbasis*] may, I think, be defined as the handling of some theme, which must however have some bearing on the case, in a passage that involves digression from the logical order of our speech" (IV. III. 14). The "bearing on the case" of apparently unrelated matter is perhaps the most important function of digression: to bring a point to bear upon the auditor's mind by virtue of the pleasure of indirection. And so digression is not simply performative in essence, it is an eminently psychological technique that imparts additional information but under the guise of a pause, a rest, or a delay in the text.

Examples of digression in eighteenth and nineteenth-Century English literature conform less and less to classical theory as we might expect, in part because of the figure's proliferation from genre to genre. Hugh Blair regarded it as an essential feature of primitive lyric poetry, as in the odes of Pindar which are "perpetually digressive" (358). The psychological impact of the figure suited well the Romantic obsession with self and served to image the workings of the anti-rational imagination. Digression

dashed. Instead of equivalence, the title hinges upon the grammatical discontinuity between a proper noun and a noun phrase. The title puts us on a first-name basis with the "hero" and appears ingenuous thanks to this informality. Imagine a title like "Joe: a Soho Story" for a similar effect. The informality, however, goes one step further. "Beppo," as Byron notes, is a nickname, a familiar form of the Christian Guiseppe. That Beppo's name has been nicked suggests a higher degree of linguistic play; indeed, the titular hero is largely absent from the poem that goes by his name. If the individual is synonymous with his story, both have been nicked by a rhetorical technique, digression.

Tales are told, narratives are narrated, and digressions are . . . performed. The resistance of the noun "digression" to a passive formulation is a morphological indication of its essentially active significance. Byron's biggest debt to the classical tradition of digression is its history as performative discourse. A Sophoclean chorus was not simply a lyrical or ethical device but a character in itself whose discourse expanded the fictive limits of the theatrical experience.[7] Digressions in *Beppo* read as "impromptu" monologues sound. The affective success of either depends upon making the reader aware of the extent of the departure. We can treat the departure's magnitude in at least two ways. In the first case, we can treat the poem in a formalist fashion. Assuming the poem is centred upon its plot, the narrative jeopardy incurred by each departure is in proportion to the degree of that departure. And what departs the most radically from the narration should be the most valuable since its potential effect on the reader outweighs the "risk" of its communication. More pertinent to Byron's poetry is a second case, that of contingency: the magnitude of departure has no relation to the worth of what is imparted in the digression, the reason being that systemic thinking should not be the yardstick with which we measure the particular and discontinuous. Life has no unity, Byron implies, and the affect of digression is its claim to the particular—the bubbles of living—within a narrative context that might be general but remains unpatterned.

Beppo relies upon drama intertextually as in the case of Shakespeare whose *As You Like it* provides the poem's epigraph. Shakespeare's play, like *Beppo*, is replete with disguise: Rosalind disguises herself and goes by the mythological name Ganymede as she pursues and courts her lover Orlando. Rosalind is in disguise when she utters the lines Byron takes for

Beppo's epigraph and so the poem subscribes to an allusive degree of dissembling before the poem actually begins. Rosalind addresses Jaques whose melancholia she denounces: "And your experience makes you sad. I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad; and to travel for it too!" (IV.1.25). The nobleman Jaques—the "Monsieur Traveller" of the epigraph—is sentimental, cynical, a melancholy sensualist who echoes Byron and his self-imposed exile from a hostile society.

Byron's intertextuality goes beyond references to the dramatic tradition and yet remains performative. A case in point is allusion. In the poetry of Pope (much admired by Byron), allusion is the rhetorical mode of memory, Mnemosyne, and serves to approve tacitly artistic values of the past. Allusion, opposite to Pope's practice, is often the trigger for digression in *Beppo*. Byron's allusions fracture the progress of the verse in two ways. Firstly, the moral or allegorical expectation conjured by the allusion is negated by its treatment. The allusion is, in effect, a miniature digression. Take for example Ariadne who, for Pope, might imply labyrinthine terrors and a progress to the light of day directed by the power of love. Myth in *Beppo* is not a structure of knowing for Byron and so he reduces the allusion by means of sonic excess:

> 'Tis said that their last parting was pathetic,
> As partings often are, or ought to be,
> And their presentiment was quite prophetic
> That they should never more each other see,
> (A sort of morbid feeling, half poetic,
> Which I have known occur in two or three)
> When *knee*ling on the shore upon her sad *knee*,
> He left his Adriatic Ariad*ne*. (*Beppo* Sstanza 28, my emphasis)

The digression upsets the reader's expectations because Laura's apparent reverence for her husband Beppo finds no correlative in the concluding couplet. The redundancy of the pun is a grotesque of the human anatomy. Laura kneels on one knee only, and it is personified as being "sad." The effect is bathetic, of course, because Laura's body parts are mixed-up—her knee appears to have more feeling than her heart. Sonic excess such as this almost always implies the opposite of its literal statement: Laura's concept of marital fidelity exists only so far as it can satisfy her extra-

marital appetite. The alliteration and ironic semiotics of Laura's body language are clues to Byron's rhetoric throughout the poem. The "allusive digression" calls attention to itself in contradistinction to what it describes. As is the case with the "lost Pleiad" in Stanza 14, "Ariadne" is more a rhetorical jab at Romantic poetics than it is a description of Laura.

The second function of allusion in *Beppo* is to divide memory against itself. As we noted above, allusion is the mode of memory that presumes the knowledge of an entire culture's literary tradition as well as the wit to manipulate this tradition. The narrator's memory is unusually rich in material of a digressive nature such as Ariadne or the minute particulars of Venetian and English society. That part of his memory responsible for the narrative in progress, however, resorts to aleatoric accounting in Stanza 56. Or, the narrator forgets Beppo's response to Laura's questions which are recorded in detail (ll. 745-6), but remembers the *Morning Chronicle*'s particulars of Mrs. Boehm's London masquerade. In this dilatory fashion, *Beppo* contains more than a linear plot could accommodate.

To this point we have examined the digressions of *Beppo* as a performative device within an allusive context. A second performative aspect of *Beppo* is linguistically based but still augments the affect of digression. The frequency in *Beppo* of what J. L. Austin calls "performative" words is high. Austin describes non-philosophical language as being either constative or performative. Constative language states a fact and refers outward to some thing or idea. Performative language is significantly different. When one uses such language, ". . . the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something" (6-7). Austin gives the example of a wager; the clause "I bet you" signifies and performs the engagement between contestants. The narrator's utterances in *Beppo* are often performative—the words actually do what they state. The narrator and (willing?) reader, *call* Laura into poetic existence by making rhyme take priority over sense: "And so *we*'ll call her Laura, if you please, / Because it slips into my verse with ease" (ll. 167-8 my emphasis). Performatives such as "I charge ye" (l. 24), "Dine, and be d—d!" (l. 71), the verbalization of prayers or bribes (l. 173) are ironic, and therefore truthful, examples of the "name and thing agreeing." Byron's reliance upon per-formative language within

digression, a performative rhetoric, augments the poem's affective impact.[8]

III

What are the effects of digression as it is described above? For one, it affects time to a considerable degree in *Beppo*. Digression fractures the chronology of a linear sequence to the extent that it strains at a dimension of time that is beyond verbal representation.

> Of all the places where the Carnival
> Was most facetious in the days of yore,
> For dance, and song, and serenade, and ball,
> And masque, and mime, and mystery, and *more*
> *Than I have time to tell now, or at all,*
> Venice the bell from every city bore,
> And *at the moment when I fix my story,*
> That sea-born city was in all her glory. (Stanza 10, my emphasis)

Time is understood as a random collection of discrete bits of memory rather than as an absolute of experience. By putting forward an image of time that is at odds with duration, Byron exaggerates the moment of each event described. The exaggeration of the *moment* of action gives the poem tremendous rhetorical *momentum* forward (Balfour 200-1). The present tense of the narrator is overwhelming to the point that each digression suggests an experience of time far beyond the actual elapsed time of reading the digression or beyond the experience of time the digression entails. As readers we are taken hostage since we have little or no way of knowing what will come next. This experience of reading is exciting in that it strains our desire to know and challenges us to make connections between the digressions themselves, or between the poem's digressive and narrative modes.

Such associative attempts are hazardous in "nested" digressions. Take for example the fiftieth stanza. Numerically, it is very near the poem's centre—the forty-third stanza of eighty-four in the first edition, and fiftieth of ninety-nine in the final. (It is the "centre" if one counts Byron's appended stanza at l. 368). Punningly heavy-handed, it addresses the issue central to *Beppo*, digression.

> But to my tale of Laura,—for I find
> Digression is a sin, that by degrees
> Becomes exceeding tedious to my mind . . .

The stanza begins with a return to the primary narrative (abandoned fourteen stanzas previously) only to digress yet again. The second concurrent digression lists the detrimental effects of digression for the narrator and reader; it is a digression upon the nature of digression. Whereas a series of digressions might appear pleasingly haphazard, a digression that attempts to define digression as "sin" is very much to Byron's ironic purpose. We are presented with a digression that argues in favor of narrative continuity or, with respect to ironic contingency, simply continuation.

The more nested the digressions are, the closer we seem to get to the poem's "core."

> To turn,—and to return;—the devil take it!
> This story slips forever through my fingers,
> Because, just as the stanza likes to make it,
> It needs must be—and so it rather lingers;
> This form of verse began, I can't well break it,
> But must keep time and tune like public singers;
> But if I once get through my present measure,
> I'll take another when I'm next at leisure. (Stanza 63)

The stanza is unusual for the reason that it is triply nested. It is the third digression in a series that begins at 58 and ceases at 64. The narrator's insistence upon the priority of narrative is delivered in the midst of conflicting signals, the chief of which is the stanza's pronominal ambiguity. The performative "the devil take it!" is a mild oath and refers to the previous part of this line: "To turn,—and to return. . . ." Turning such as this epitomizes the poem as language folded atop itself; and since the "turn" is twinned within infinitive phrases, the impression of language as being contingent rather than representative is heightened. An infinitive phrase is neither verb nor noun, neither action nor thing (Frye 99), and yet the beginning of the stanza both describes and exemplifies digression. This coiling overlap of syntax and sense enacts the essential (and humorous) jeopardy of *Beppo*. The verbalization of what goes on in a poem creates more problems than it attempts to solve.

Exactly what is "it" by the time we get to the stanza's end? Of the five usages of the word, the first two *take it / make it* are direct objects. The next two *It needs must be—and so it rather lingers* are both subjects. The last example *break it* repeats the objective case. The duplication of "it" as object and subject is another example of the poem's rhetorical puzzle. Despite strongly transitive verbs, a meaningful carry-over from subject to object is lacking much as if the stanza occurs at a rhetorical still point. The ambiguity does not stop here. The intention to "keep time and tune" is heavily qualified by prosodic lapses. Each line surpasses the pentameter measure by one syllable, and the syllabic disharmony of feminine end rhymes diminishes the narrator's stated understanding of his chosen medium. "It" constitutes a list of a single word, not one of many discrete particulars, but a very full list nevertheless. In a digression on digression, subjects and objects tend to intrude upon each other's grammatical and conceptual territory. Byron's language gets us coming and going, as it were. If the object of the poem is to digress—to turn and return—its subject also digression.

Beppo concludes, or rather terminates itself, with:

> My pen is at the bottom of a page,
> Which being finished, here the story ends;
> 'Tis to be wished it had been sooner done,
> But stories somehow lengthen when begun.

Byron's deferral of closure is not surprising. His poem insists gleefully upon a self-reference that recognizes that it has gotten out of hand. A "poem" that consistently shifts between rhetorical abstractions and concrete particulars is terminated by a trivial economy of paper. The inevitable ordering principle of storytelling which Byron resists compels him to specify grammatically, at least, *the* story at its conclusion. Such a specificity is qualified, however, by an ambiguity regarding the story's physical composition—*a* page. The indefinite article, "My pen is at the bottom of *a* page," instead of the definite article *the*, is the final grammatical loophole through which *Beppo* concludes the story of digressive storytelling: ". . . here *the* story ends."

One *can* write a story by digressing on what that story will not contain or how it shouldn't be written, but it still requires some container for what is contained. Byron situates his poem within a frame-tale of sorts.

Shrovetide provides the narrative frame for Beppo's story; and as the last blow-out before Lent, the excesses of *Carnival* are part of a cycle of redemption completed at Easter.

> This feast is named the Carnival, which being
> Interpreted, implies "farewell to flesh":
> So call'd, because the name and thing agreeing,
> Through Lent they live on fish both salt and fresh.
> But why they usher Lent with so much glee in,
> Is more than I can tell, although I guess
> 'Tis as we take a glass with friends at parting,
> In the stage-coach or packet, just at starting. (Stanza 6)

Linguistically, the word *Carnival* is a happy congruence of reference. One can bid "farewell to flesh" only after having partaken of its pleasures. The Carnival in effect compensates for the rigors of the liturgical season it introduces. Name and thing agree, in this case. But the ironic point Byron makes here is that word and thing agree especially when we digress from the normal arbitrary standard of social behavior, hence the fidelity of the digressive mode to the (contingent) representation of life. Byron's frame-tale serves obviously as an ironic counterpoint. The poem's rhetorical insistence upon digression is Carnivalesque because it is sinning narratively.

Whereas Shrovetide is made sense of by Easter, *Beppo* concludes inconclusively. The text adroitly avoids a centre or a narrative telos. Once "inside" *Beppo*, therefore, the reader doesn't necessarily come to the middle of a poem from its beginning and then proceed to its end. A narrative construed in such sequential terms misses the point because such thinking reduces the story to its aboutness ("Oh that I had the art of easy writing / What should be easy reading!" ll. 401-2) rather than engaging the vitality of its language ("I love the language, that soft bastard Latin, . . . [Un]like our harsh northern whistling, grunting guttural, / Which we're oblig'd to hiss, and spit, and sputter all" ll. 345, 351-2). If one accepts that the subject of the poem is not the titular hero, then his "return" home is superfluous. Subjects, be they grammatical ("*I* am but a nameless sort of person " l. 409) or thematic ("This feast is named the *Carnival*, which being / Interpreted, implies 'farewell to flesh'" ll. 41-42) lose their usual discriminations. The I of the persona and the eye of the

historical Byron merge; the Carnival exists not so much in time and space, in Venice or in London, as it does in the poem's rhetorical gamesmanship. Objectives, be they satiric ("*England*! with all thy faults I love thee still" l.369) or narrative (". . . stories somehow lengthen when begun" l. 792) are achieved by indirection. Adultery is adultery whether in London or Venice; English hypocrisy, however, is damned by the frankness of Venetian carnality. The fact that narratives don't arrive at their conclusions matters less than the drive through their ideas. Byron's usage of digression transforms the cliché that narrative art as fiction must mislead us to truth into the proposition that art must mislead to be "real."

At the risk of appearing contradictory for the moment, one pleasure of *Beppo* resides in the reader's liminal awareness that the apparent chaos of the poem is nevertheless a product of a mind—the narrator's or Byron's, it doesn't matter which—that contains a multiplicity of orders. Only by perceiving digressively, at a rhetorical distance, can the nature of plot as con(ned) text be understood. The distance between digression and plot seen in this way accounts, perhaps, for the many mentions of the unsaid, the unremembered, or the unknown. Instead of resolving the knot of plot, uncertainty mounts at the poem's conclusion.[9] The knowledge of such unarticulated particulars on the part of the reader is not necessary since they belong to a moral order of storytelling that dwells on how the story turns out and who gets the girl. One senses that particulars such as these are known at a remove more comprehensive than the already encyclopedic experience of the poem.

In his early favorable review, Francis Jeffrey defines *Beppo* as "absolutely a thing of nothing—without story, characters, sentiments, or intelligible object." If we take a moment and conclude by examining the comment more closely, it *makes* sense both as a paradox and as a pun. The original meaning of paradox still lurks behind our modern usage: that which goes against heterodox opinion. We might take the comment to mean that *Beppo* exists without antecedence, that it comes out of nothing in the Latin sense, that it is, perhaps, an anti-poem. In the second case, a pun is the product of sophisticated linguistic play and exhibits, simultaneously, a residual unease with that play as a form of persuasion.[10] *Beppo*'s *thingness* ("words are things, and a small drop of ink, / Falling like dew, upon a thought" *Don Juan* III, ll. 793-4) might exist as something distilled from the order of abstract poetics where ideas or *no*-things

rule as opposed to events. Jeffrey's indefinite definition reveals the inadequacy of his (and my) vocabulary in coming to terms with *Beppo* as a narrative turned inside-out. Nevertheless, such readings reveal Jeffrey as trying to teach the "mere English reader" about *Beppo*'s unprecedented originality.[11]

If we look elsewhere for help regarding a poem as thing, Byron praised *Don Juan* because it was a *thing* of life. In a famous letter to Kinnaird from Venice, 26 October 1818, Byron cajoled,

> confess—confess—you dog—and be candid—that it is the sublime of *that* there sort of writing—it may be bawdy—but is it not good English?—it may be profligate—but is it not *life*, is it not *the thing*?—Could any man have written it—who has not lived in the world. . . . (*BLJ*, VI, 232, Byron's emphasis)

Experience is the key to poetic success especially if the experience lived is random, disjointed, even amoral. In most of Byron's later work, digression is the trope of lived experience. The arbitrary paths of life, Byron implies archly, are surveilled by the very people or institutions who stand most in need of their own counsel. Only by straying away from the arbitrary do we finally arrive at an understanding (however marginal) of life. A verbal act can only partially describe the variability of experience in that life (and can only come to terms partially with its own variability through time). But only through verbalization do we begin to approach an understanding of experience. The efficiency of digression lies in its variability. Through several editions and additions, Byron worked hard to make *Beppo* exist more as a function of its attenuated form and specific manner than as a function of its setting, characterization or satire. The discrepancy between the plot of the story and the gamesmanship of its rhetoric is to such a degree that the discrepancy, and not Beppo's story, consumes our attention, leaving the poem a thing of no formal thing.

NOTES

1. All poetry is quoted from McGann's edition, *Collected Works of Lord Byron*, (London: Oxford UP, 1980-92), 7 Vols. All correspondence is quoted from Marchand's edition, *Byron's Letters and Journals* (Cambridge: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1973-82), 12 Vols. In this case, *BLJ* VI: 25.
2. For the poem's origins see McGann's commentary in *The Complete Poetical Works* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1986) IV: 481-90, and Leslie A. Marchand's *Byron: A Biography*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957) II: 178.
3. For recent criticism of the poem see J. Drummond Bone, "*Beppo*: The Liberation of Fiction," in *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, eds. Bernard Beatty and Vincent Newey (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1988) 97-125; Paul Cohen, "'Beppo': Masks of all Times," *The Byron Journal* 8 (1980): 34-41; W. Paul Elledge, "Divorce Italian Style: Byron's *Beppo*," *Modern Literary Quarterly* 46 (1985): 29-47; M. K. Joseph, *Byron the Poet*, (London: Golancz, 1964) 198-9; Jerome J. McGann, "'Mixed Company': Byron's Beppo and the Italian Medley," *Shelley and his Circle 1773-1822*, ed. Donald H. Reiman (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986) VII: 234-57; and T. G. Steffan, "The Devil a bit of our Beppo," *Byron: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Paul West (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963) 65-82.
4. The two largest chunks of the poem that appeared in the first MS are Stanzas 1 to 27 and 81 to 99. The early section forms the poem's "beginning" and describes the Venetian setting; the second describes the curious *ménage à trois* at the plot's "end." Of Stanzas 1 to 27, eleven may considered digressive (8-9, 12-20). Of the concluding eighteen stanzas as few as three are digressive (83-84, 86). On five occasions between 12 October 1817 and 11 March 1818 Byron added a total of fifteen stanzas to *Beppo*. They are, in the chronological order of their appearance 73-77; 33-34, 45-46, 52; 64; 28, 38-39; and 80. (One digressive stanza Byron directed to appear as a note to the printer's copy of the first edition). The function of these stanzas is mostly digressive. Only three, Stanzas 33 and 34 (the second addition which occurred between late October and mid-January 1818) and 28 (the penultimate addition 9 March 1818), augment the narrative by describing the Count and the parting of Beppo and Laura. Of the remaining twelve, eleven stanzas are "nested" digressions in the sense that they occur within a digression in progress.
5. For this point see Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 3-22.
6. The allusion is to Tennyson's "Ulysses," l. 11.
7. Cynthia P. Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus: A Study of Character and Function* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1987) 1-10.
8. Examples of performative discourse in *Beppo* occur at lines 24, 64, 71, 101, 173, 216, 430, 486, and 497. In a corollary fashion, the many examples from art the narrator serves up have a performative quality about them. Venetian women are described not only in terms of "ancient" pictorial representations but as "leaning over the balcony" or "stepp[ing] from out a picture by Giorgione" (Stanza 11). The

nameless count is an opera critic (Stanza 33), a patron of the Improvisatori and poet extempore such as Sgricchi whom Byron admired.

9. See for example: ll. 512, 665, 680, 713, 743, 746, 772.
10. L. M. Findlay, "'Raly It's give me such a turn': Responding to the Reflexive in the Nineteenth-Century Novel," *English Studies in Canada* XII (June 1986): 194.
11. The allusion is to *Joseph Andrews*, and occurs in the first sentence of Fielding's Preface.

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