

"Don Juan Canto-I" Summary

Writer: Lord Byron | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Background: Most critics think that Don Juan reflects Lord Byron. Lord Byron wrote this poem to criticize the prevailing customs of society. In fact, in England at that time, there was a wide age difference between husband and wife regarding marriage. Again showing contempt for the first generation of Romantic poets, particularly Robert Southey, Byron dedicated the poem to him.

Summary

The Narrator and His Hero:

The narrator starts the poem in a playful way. He says he wants to write about a hero, but he cannot find a proper one in his time. So, he decides to tell the story of Don Juan, an old friend. The narrator speaks in the first person ("I") and shares his thoughts with the readers. This makes the poem more personal and friendly.

Don Juan's Family Background: Don Juan is from Seville, Spain. His father is Don José, and his mother is Donna Inez. Donna Inez is very smart and educated. She knows many subjects like mathematics and languages. She also has a sharp memory. Don José is different from his wife. He is not interested in books or education. He spends more time looking at women.

The couple often argues and fights. Donna Inez thinks her husband is mad. She calls the doctors and shows them his bad behavior. She also writes down everything he does wrong in her diary. Friends and family try to bring peace, but they fail. Before things get worse, Don José dies from malaria. Don Juan becomes the only heir to his father's property.

Don Juan's Education: After Don José's death, Donna Inez takes full control of Don Juan's education. She teaches him many things like riding, fencing, shooting, and languages. She wants to make him a perfect boy with high morals. She tries to stop him from having any romantic feelings. But her strict plan does not work well. Instead of becoming a pure boy, Don Juan develops a soft and romantic heart.

Donna Julia and Her Secret Feelings: Donna Julia is a beautiful young woman. She is a friend of Donna Inez. Julia is married to Don Alfonso, a man much older than her. Their marriage is not happy. People say that Don Alfonso and Donna Inez were once lovers. Julia

always liked Don Juan, but when he turns sixteen, her feelings grow stronger. She tries to avoid him, but she cannot stay away. Julia feels embarrassed but cannot stop loving him. Juan is also confused about his new feelings as he grows older.

The Affair Between Don Juan and Donna Julia: One evening in June, Julia and Juan are alone in a garden. Their hands touch by accident. Juan slowly puts his arm around Julia's waist. Julia tries to stop herself, but in the end, she gives in. They begin a secret love affair.

The Bedroom Incident: One night in November, Don Alfonso hears rumors and comes to check on his wife. He brings many men with him. Julia's maid, Antonia, warns her quickly. They hide Don Juan under the bedclothes. Alfonso and his men search the room but find nothing. Julia pretends to be angry and speaks bravely to defend herself. Alfonso feels embarrassed and leaves.

As soon as he goes out, Juan comes out of hiding. Julia tells him to hide again in the closet because Alfonso might return. Just then, Alfonso comes back alone and apologizes. Julia listens, but she is still upset. While leaving, Alfonso trips over a pair of men's shoes. He understands the truth and runs to get his sword. Julia helps Juan escape through the garden with a key.

Don Juan Escapes and Gets Exiled: As Don Juan escapes, he meets Alfonso in the garden. They fight. During the fight, Juan loses all his clothes and runs naked into the night. After the incident, Alfonso wants to divorce Julia. Donna Inez is ashamed of her son's actions. So, she sends him away to travel across Europe for four years. Julia is sent to a convent. Before leaving, she sends a love letter to Juan, saying she does not regret their love.

The Narrator's Final Words: Before ending Canto I, the narrator talks about his thoughts. He jokes about other poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge. He says he is growing old, and his heart is tired. He defends his story by saying it is not immoral. He also says goodbye to the readers for now.