

WHEN EPIC JUAN MEETS DONNA JOAN: BYRON, ROIDIS AND THE ‘LATIN’ ENCOUNTER IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY GREEK FICTION

FOTEINI LIKA,
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Byron’s affinity with the epic tradition has been much studied. The same cannot be said, though, about the reception of Byron’s work in Greece.¹ One modern Greek writer however, Emmanouil Roidis, was thoroughly conversant with both Byron and the tradition of epic and Italian mock-epic. Roidis was not only a big fan of Casti’s poems (especially his *La Papessa*) but also was a keen follower of Byron’s work. *Don Juan*, in particular, was one of the most enjoyable readings of all time for him and one of the main reasons behind his decision to write his *Pope Joan*, a historical novel under the guise of a medieval study. Published in 1866, it describes the adventures of the legendary woman who disguises herself as a monk, has various amorous liaisons, and, in defiance of probability, ascends the Chair of St Peter, gets overconfident, and dies after bearing a child during a papal procession.

Pope Joan was translated and adapted by Lawrence Durrell in 1954.² It is extremely funny, erotically suggestive in places, and satirical at the expense of the ‘weaker sex’, the Greeks and the Eastern Orthodox Church:

[Joan] was approaching her thirtieth year when women, not having enough of their own special defects, begin to take on ours also; by adding ambition, pedantry, drunkenness and other male vices which may tend to make their heart a model of feminine perfection, in the same manner as, owing to its politicians, Greece has become today a model kingdom in the East.³

... the Eastern Church though far older than her sister insisted, either from poverty or pride, in trying to attract the faithful with nasal voices and squinting virgins.⁴

Two-faced English imperialists are not let off the hook either:

Even in our own age ... the English manufacturers make a practice of sending Hindu and Australian idols, carved by the pious Puritans and Quakers, to the peoples of their colonies. These idols are generally loaded on to a boat with bales of Bibles to serve as an antidote, and both are embarked under the protection of the Union Jack.⁵

What is more, Roidis even dares to joke about Byron, the Philhellenic Icon:

... Byron abandoned the poem and poetry, and became in despair a misanthropist and philhellene, and took himself off to be buried in a swamp at Missolonghi.⁶

The English translation of *Pope Joan* used mostly here is by Lawrence Durrell, *Pope Joan. A Romantic Biography* by Emmanuel Royidis (London: Andre Deutsch, 1954, rptd 1971). I should also like to thank Peter Cochran for his keen observations and his valuable help with the English translation of the Italian extracts. The text of *La Papessa* is from *Novelle di Giambattista Casti* (Paris 1804), Vol. II. The text of *Don Juan* is from the Penguin edition (1987), ed. Steffan, Steffan and Pratt.

1: See Athina Georganta’s article, “Η ευρωπαϊκή οικογένεια της Παπισσας Ιωάννας,” *Diavazo* 96 (1984), 21-31.

2: However, as Dimitris Tziouvas has observed, with Durrell’s name so prominently displayed on the cover of the book, *Pope Joan* ‘has ended up being considered as anything but a work of Greek literature’ (Dimitris Tziouvas, “Religion, style and translation: The Fortunes of Pope Joan,” in Vassilios Sabatakakis and Peter Vejleskov eds., *Filia: Studies in Honour of Bo-Lennart Eklund* (Lund: Wallin & Dalhom Boktryckeri AB, 2005), 171).

3: For reasons of convenience, when not quoting Durrell, from now on I will refer both to the first edition of *Pope Joan*: Emmanouil Roidis, *Η Πάπισσα Ιωάννα: Μεσαιωνική Μελέτη* (Athens: Typois Io. Kassandreos, 1866) and to the most recent, and thus most easily accessible, 2005 edition by Dimiroulis: Emmanouil Roidis, *Η Πάπισσα Ιωάννα: Το αυθεντικό κείμενο του 1866*, ed. Dimitris Dimiroulis (Athens: Metaichmio, 2005). The references to the first will be given first while the relevant pages in the later edition will be denoted by numbers in brackets. Roidis 1866, 218-9 [236-7] and cf. Durrell 115.

4: Durrell 63.

5: Durrell 79.

6: Durrell 143 and see also the third of Roidis’ ‘Agrinot letters’ written under the pen name of Dionysios Sourlis, in which Roidis’ satirical alias is prepared to sacrifice both his remaining limb and his last days only to defend his noble convictions, in the same manner that Byron gave up his life for the cause of the Greek Independence (Dimiroulis 2005, 444).

In its prologue, where Roidis provides us with his manifesto of poetics, he admits that the antisoporific remedy he has recourse to whenever he wants to keep his reader awake (i.e. his use of unexpected digressions, peculiar similes and bizarre incongruities), was first introduced in England by Byron, who followed in the footsteps of various 'decadent' Italian writers such as Berni, Pulci, and Casti:⁷

This way of writing which Byron introduced into English, Heine into German and Myrger and Musset into France was invented by the Italian writers of the decadence who, dispirited by the heights that Dante and Petrarch had set their flag on, sought for another route, more accessible to popularity, and not to fame.⁸

In the novel itself, Roidis makes his literary allegiance still clearer:

Here, my dear reader, I could if I wished borrow some timely obscenity to fatten up my story from the Abbot Casti, the most holy Pulci, or the right reverend Rabelais.⁹

He is disingenuous, as all writers in this tradition must be when quoting their 'sources'. 'The Abbot Casti' has provided Roidis not just with 'timely obscenities', but with – in outline – most of his plot, which is from *La Papessa*, one of the *Novelle Galanti* which Byron admired so much.¹⁰ The climax of its second section, in which a woman, in the religious costume of a man, reveals her true gender, was not lost on him when he wrote *DJ XVI* – a parallel to which Roidis draws deliberate attention.¹¹ Its notes also give Roidis several useful leads for research (for Roidis, like Casti and Byron, is 'anxious to assure' his lady readers that his narrative is founded on the best learned documents).¹²

Furthermore, the similarities between Roidis and Byron do not end here.¹³ Apart from the same Italian medley literary tradition they share, they seem to have the same goal as well, that is to write a pleasant book not only for their readers but mostly for themselves, as the narrator of *Don Juan* admits in Canto IV, 5 and Roidis himself, as an implied author, echoes in his prologue: 'Whenever I read a relevant, intentionally and wilfully written, book, [...] I unblushingly admit that I had but this in my mind "Unless it were to be a moment merry."' ¹⁴

However, because of the existence of these and similar examples of borrowing (two references, for instance, to St Francis' 'monastic concubine of snow': *DJ VI* 17),¹⁵ or the Ragusan slave-dealer who is described as a 'fisher of men': *DJ II* 126, 1, and 174, 8,¹⁶ or King Xerxes: *DJ I* 118, 1-2),¹⁷ this rapport between Byron and Roidis seemed highly suspicious to the latter's contemporaries, and intrigued them to such an extent that a few not so well-disposed critics accused Roidis of plagiarism.¹⁸ In particular, Charilaos Meletopoulos, who succeeded Roidis in his post as ephor in the National Library, went as far as to propose that *Don Juan* was the literary progenitor of *Pope Joan*. According to him, such was their resemblance that there must be some sort of kinship involved, and ironically suggested that *Pope Joan* should be called *Donna Joanna* instead:

Firstly, Byron and mostly his *Don Juan* should be justly considered as *Pope Joan*'s fathers. May be the origins of *Pope Joan* who was of English descent or the similarity of her name made the author think that he was allowed not only to imitate the style and images of *Don Juan* slavishly, but also to translate word for word and appropriate many of its extracts. For this reason she owes him her life

7: On the 'decadent' Italian writers, see Anna Zimbone, "Il 'Prologo' della *Πάπισσα Ιωάννα*," *Diptycha Etaireias Vyzantinon kai Metavyzantinon Meleton* 6 (1994-5), 502-3.

8: Roidis 1866, ια' [13].

9: Durrell 142.

10: See BLJ V 80.

11: Durrell 142-3.

12: Durrell 50 and cf. *DJ V*, 1.

13: Marius Byron Raizis, though, argues against its status as a Byronic work, contending, for instance (in defiance of *DJ II*, 70) that no Byronic heroine ever gets pregnant, as Joan does (Raizis, "Byron's Impact on Modern Greek Literature: Imitations and Misunderstandings," in Martin Procházka ed., *Byron: East and West*, Proceedings of the 24th International Byron Conference (Charles University Prague: Prague, 2000), 172-5).

14: See Roidis 1866, ιγ' [15] and see also the motto of the third part of *Pope Joan*, Roidis 1866, 151 [169]; Durrell 73.

15: Durrell 49, 53.

16: Durrell 92.

17: Durrell 145.

18: Ioannis Papadiamantopoulos, *Ολίγα Σελίδες επ' ευκαιρία της μεταξύ των κκ. Ε. Δ. Ροϊδου και Αγγέλου Βλάχου Αναφύσεως Φιλολογικής Εριδος* (Athens: Typois Efimeridos ton Syzitiseon, 1878), 13 and cf. Alain Boureau, *La Papesse Jeanne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), 312-3, for a modern regurgitation of this same view.

or her beginning as the reader can easily see further down. Therefore, she could reasonably be called *Donna Joanna* instead.¹⁹

Nevertheless, when we go through the disputed material, we can see that some of the Juanesque details planted by Roidis are playfully inaccurate and add on Byron's initial irony. Although it's true that Donna Inez knows the Lord's Prayer in Latin and likes the Hebrew tongue (*DJ* I 13-14), Roidis misleadingly credits Byron with the curiosity of prying even into his heroine's wardrobe. In the relevant stanzas, Byron makes fun of Donna Inez's extreme erudition and Roidis' witty comment about her wearing linen underclothing and blue stockings is hinting to that direction.²⁰ After all, Donna Inez may have never actually worn them but she was a 'bluestocking' of her time.

Next Roidis has Don Juan switching prayers from 'dried-up saints' to 'the Magdalene';²¹ in fact Juan '... turned from grisly Saints, and Martyrs hairy, / To the sweet portraits of the Virgin Mary' (*DJ* II 149 7-8). Here Roidis' thoughts seem to make a synecdochical leap from Virgin Mary to Mary Magdalene.²² The cunning effect is to suggest that *Don Juan* is more remote from Roidis' mind than we suspect it to be. Another section, however, shows a more blatant lift. Two monks (one of them a eunuch) are fighting over Joan:

... blood began to flow, though luckily only from the nose. After a determined struggle Corvinus, who had been thoroughly beaten by his infuriated rival, suddenly made off, leaving a part of his cowl in Frumentius' hands as booty: very much as Joseph left a piece of his mantle to Potiphar's wife ... though the resemblance between Corvinus and Jacob's son end there, I think.²³

Meletopoulos was quick enough to notice Byron's immediate influence in these lines and his criticism against Roidis acquires a literal edge when he claims that Byron, among others, left a piece of his text to Roidis' hands:²⁴

Alfonso grappled to detain the foe,
And Juan throttled him to get away,
And blood ('twas from the nose) began to flow,
At last, as they more faintly wrestling lay,
Juan contrived to give an awkward blow,
And then his only garment quite gave way;
He fled, like Joseph, leaving it, but there,
I doubt, all likeness ends between the pair. – (*DJ* I st.186)

Another point where Roidis echoes *Don Juan* is a sensual description²⁵ of young, sleeping nuns of various nations (Swiss, Cypriots, Saracens, Galatians), which owes much to the Harem section of Canto V, with its variegated heroines Lolah, Kattinka, and Dudù.²⁶ Nonetheless, whereas Juan does not become a harem girl and is welcomed as an obtrusive male presence within the harem,²⁷ Joan is paradoxically forced to keep her mannish disguise and conceal her female identity within a women's monastery. Instead, it is the undisguised Frumentius who enjoys in full the company of the young nuns. As for Joan, she falls prey to her own fits of jealousy; given that whenever she dismisses her lover, curtly telling him to kiss another nun, he is more than happy to obey her command. This invidious situation becomes an excuse for Roidis to castigate the political corruption in Greece of his time, since, as he explains, 'Jealousy, when it is not idiopathic or constitutional (as the hunting for offices is in Greece today) can be a terrible and disrupting

19: Charilaos Meletopoulos, *Η Αλήθεια περί της Εθνικής Βιβλιοθήκης* (Athens: Typographeio Adelfon Perri, 1881), 88-9. Athina Georganta also noted that: 'with Pope Joan Roidis wanted to create the Greek and female counterpart of Byron's Don Juan' (Georganta, *Αιών Βυρωμανής: Ο κόσμος του Byron και η νέα ελληνική ποίηση* (Athens: Exantas, 1992), 76). For more on Roidis' female Don Juan, see also Alkis Angelou, "Κάποιες Προτάσεις για να Ξαναδιαβάσουμε τον Ροΐδη," in Emmanouil Roidis, *Σκαλαθύρματα* (Athens: Ermis, 1986), μ'.

20: Roidis 1866, 62 [80].

21: Durrell 22.

22: A reference to the Ave Maria (Durrell 50) echoes Byron's third Canto, stanzas 102-3.

23: Durrell 70.

24: Meletopoulos 1881, 89, 94.

25: Durrell 85.

26: For a discussion of the influence of the medieval romance in the incident between Juan and Dudù, see Andrew M. Stauffer, "The Hero in the Harem: Byron's Debt to Medieval Romance in *Don Juan* VI", *European Romantic Review* 10:1 (1999), 84-97.

27: Bernard Beatty, *Byron's Don Juan* (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), 100.

disease.²⁸ In this way, commentary and meta-commentary overlap in Roidis' work in the same fashion that Byron's poem constantly fluctuates between transparent narration and self-conscious display of narrative technique.²⁹

At another point though Roidis virtually quotes *Don Juan*:

Byron, by far the greatest poet of this century, whose brain weighed 638 drams, had freely confessed that when he fell ill after his first phlebotomy, he felt himself capable of believing in the miracles of Moses; after the second, in the incarnation; after the third, in the immaculate conception. After the fourth phlebotomy he had reached such a pitch that he found himself grieving because there were no other beliefs of this kind to accept.³⁰

He paraphrases this (minus the phlebotomy):

The truth is, I've grown lately rather phthisical.
I don't know what the reason is – the air
Perhaps; but as I suffer from the shocks
Of illness, I grow much more orthodox:

The first attack at once proved the Divinity
(But *that* I never doubted – nor the devil);
The next, the Virgin's mystical Virginité;
The third, the usual origin of evil;
The fourth at once established the whole Trinity
On so uncontrovertible a level
That I devoutly wished the three were four,
On purpose to believe so much the more. (*DJ* XI sts.5-6)

For this reason, Meletopoulos – having given his readers a two-page account listing some of Roidis' most prominent borrowings, including some of the ones mentioned above – invoked the eloquence of Alfred de Musset ('Je hais comme la mort l'état de plagiaire') in order to corroborate his argument against plagiarism and then rested his case.

However justified or unjustified Meletopoulos' reaction was, it was written in such a tone that it was bound to provoke Roidis' response. Roidis, assuming the role of an ex-office boy of the Library, overturned each accusation point by point and proved Meletopoulos' ignorance on matters of literary imitation and influence. De Musset, whose authority Meletopoulos had invoked, was among the first to plagiarise Byron, who – in turn – copied Pulci:

It is worth noting that Musset never denied imitating Byron, but apologised instead by outing him as an even bigger thief [...]

Byron, me direz-vous, m'a servi de modèle;
Vous ne savez donc pas qu'il imitait Pulci?
Lisez les Italiens, vous verrez s'il les vole.
Il faut être ignorant comme un maître d'école, etc.³¹

After all, it was none other than Byron who, in a conversation with Countess Blessington, admitted that:

Who is the author that is not, intentionally or unintentionally, a plagiarist? [...] for if one has read much, it is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid adopting, not only the thoughts, but the expressions of others, which, after they have been some time stored in our minds, appear to us to come forth ready armed, like Minerva from the brain of Jupiter, and we fancy them our own progeny, instead of being those of adoption.³²

28: Durrell 88.

29: Catherine Addison, "Heritage and Innovation in Byron's Narrative Stanzas", *The Byron Journal* 32, no 1 (2004), 18.

30: Durrell 130-1.

31: Emmanouil Roidis, *Απαρτα*, ed. Alkis Angelou, 5 vols., (Athens: Ermis, 1978), vol. III, 107.

32: Marguerite Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron with the Countess of Blessington* (London: Henry Colburn, 1834), 363-4.

Apart from their shared penchant for assimilating other people's work,³³ the two writers were also close because of their aspiration to create an all-embracing genre. As a result, in the same way that *Don Juan* – despite Byron's explicit classification of it as an 'epic satire' (*DJ* XIV st.99) – was regarded as an epic, an anti-epic,³⁴ an unheroic poem 'though not simply mock epic'³⁵ and 'a versified picaresque novel',³⁶ *Pope Joan* has been characterised by critics as a biography and a novel, a historical anti-novel, an anti-romantic novel, and a metafiction.³⁷

For all these reasons, it is timely to see which of *Don Juan*'s traits advocate its uneasy classification as an epic poem, and how and with what effect these same characteristics are incorporated in *Pope Joan* as well.

According to *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* an epic is defined as:

... a long narrative poem that treats a single heroic figure or a group of such figures and concerns an historical event, such as a war or conquest, or a heroic quest or some other significant mythic or legendary achievement that is central to the trads. and belief of its culture. [...] Typically long and elaborate in its narrative design, episodic in sequence, and elevated in lang., the e. usually begins 'in the midst of things' (*in medias res*) and employs a range of poetic techniques, often opening with a formal invocation to a muse or some other divine figure, and frequently employing elaborate formulaic figures, extended similes (usually termed epic or Homeric similes) and other stylized descriptive devices such as catalogues of warriors, detailed descriptions of arms and armour, and descriptions of sacrifices and other rituals.³⁸

At first glance it is easy to see why *Don Juan* fits this description: even though incomplete, it is quite a long narrative poem, with seventeen cantos, each of which has an average of more than one hundred stanzas, and a single hero based on a mythical character renowned for his amatory exploits. Nevertheless, whether or not Juan himself is a legendary lover is a matter still debated among critics.³⁹ As for the poem's prospects, they certainly seem to involve love, war, sea-storms, a list of captains, even a descent to the underworld:

My poem's epic and is meant to be
Divided in twelve books, each book containing,
With love, and war, a heavy gale at sea,
A list of ships, and captains, and kings reigning,
New characters; the episodes are three.
A panoramic view of hell's in training,
After the style of Virgil and of Homer,
So that my name of Epic's no misnomer. (*DJ* I, st.200)

Given these Homeric and Latin parallels, Byron's tongue-in-cheek assurance to the reader that the 'name of Epic's no misnomer' can even pass as plausible.⁴⁰ When the reader, however, begins to combine this declaration with the numerous other initiatives that Byron takes when writing his 'epic poem' – such as his perfunctory, dismissive and belated invocation to the Muse⁴¹ – his attack on the epic conventions

33: Jane Stabler, "Byron, Postmodernism and Intertextuality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 275.

34: John Lauber, "Don Juan as Anti-Epic," *Studies in English Literature* 8, no. 4 (1968), 619 and see also Hermione de Almeida, *Byron and Joyce through Homer: Don Juan and Ulysses* (London: Macmillan Press, 1981), 20.

35: Brian Wilkie, "Byron and the Epic of Negation," *Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition* (Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 188 and cf. Frederick L. Beaty, *Byron the Satirist* (Dekalb Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1985), 144.

36: Elizabeth French Boyd, *Byron's Don Juan: A Critical Study* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1945), 59.

37: For the relevant discussion, see K. Th. Dimaras, *Ιστορία της Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας: Από τις Πρώτες Ρίζες ως την Εποχή μας* (Athens: Gnosi, 2000), 438; Mario Vitti, *Ιστορία της Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας* (Athens: Odysseas, 1991), 25 and Maria Kakavoulia, "Πάπισσα Ιωάννα: Πολύτοπο / Παλίμψηστο," *Chartis* 15 (1985), 307, 310-11.

38: See the relevant entry for Epic in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

39: See Anne Barton, *Byron: Don Juan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 24-5 and cf. Moyra Haslett, *Byron's Don Juan and the Don Juan Legend* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 114-15.

40: As Arthur Kahn rightly observed: 'Byron is not repudiating Homer and Virgil, his whipping boys in this instance [...]. He uses them as a foil for developing his own new kind of epic (Kahn, "Byron's Single Difference with Homer and Virgil: The Redefinition of the Epic in *Don Juan*", *Arcadia* 5, no 2 (1970), 144).

41: *DJ* III, 1: 'Hail, Muse! et cetera. We left Juan sleeping, / Pillow'd upon a fair and happy breast, / And watch'd by eyes that never yet knew weeping, / And loved by a young heart, too deeply blest / To feel the poison through her spirit creeping, / Or know who rested there, a foe to rest, / Had soil'd the current of her sinless years, / And turn'd her pure heart's purest blood to tears!'. For a more detailed discussion of the satiric tradition behind this particular invocation, see Gavin Hopps, "Hail, Muse! Et Cetera," *Litteraria Pragensia* 7, no. 14 (1997), 69-83.

acquires a more systematic character. It is in this spirit of apostasy that the narrator flouts famous epic laws and targets his satire against the convention of beginning ‘in the midst of things’:

Most epic poets plunge *in medias res*
 (Horace makes this the heroic turnpike road),
 And then your hero tells whene’er you please,
 What went before by way of episode,
 While seated after dinner at his ease,
 Beside his mistress in some soft abode,
 Palace, or garden, paradise, or cavern,
 Which serves the happy couple for a tavern.

That is the usual method, but not mine;
 My way is to begin with the beginning.
 The regularity of my design
 Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning,
 And therefore I shall open with a line
 (Although it cost me half an hour in spinning)
 Narrating somewhat of Don Juan’s father,
 And also of his mother, if you’d rather. (*DJ* I, sts.6-7)

Roidis, on the other hand – who had never professed to be writing an epic – managed to tailor this attack to his own satirical needs. In the context of his *Pope Joan* epic acquires a more literal, if not a metonymical edge. More specifically, Roidis invokes first the Aristotelian licence⁴² and the Horatian paradigm that Byron’s Muse was so fond of, and then explains what his use of the term epic denotes (i.e. every work that literally acquires epic dimensions and consequently all those voluminous historical novels written *à la manière de Dumas*). This way he combines Latin with French literary tradition, thus further advancing Byron’s original point, in his very opening paragraph:

Epic poets usually plunge *in medias res*, like those romancers who relate the fortunes of a Porthos or an Aramis in ten volumes, and recommend some newspaper in their pay to dignify them, *licentia poetica* [ἀριστοτελική ἀδεία], with the title of epic poems. Then the hero when he finds a favourable opportunity, in a grotto or a palace, on the fragrant grass or a luxurious couch, gives his lady-love an account of preceding events.

ἐπεὶ εὐνῆς καὶ φιλότητος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο.

This is the advice of Horace in his *Ars Poetica* – and of publishers who, when commissioning an author to write a book, limit him in length, breadth and material, as if they were giving a tailor an order for a coat. Such in fact is the usual practice; but I myself prefer to begin at the beginning. Anyone, however, who is fond of classical irregularity, can read the last pages first and then the commencement, and in this manner transform my simple and veracious narrative into an epic romance.⁴³

What is more, Roidis reverses Byron’s argument, and seems to imply that if Byron thought that the mere existence of a chronological order was a powerful enough blow to the identity of an epic, then an unorthodox reading practice should be more than enough to transform his own ‘truthful narrative’ into an ‘epic romance / novel’.

In turn, Byron’s avowed insistence on factual accuracy and his particular dislike for fictional narratives are reflected in his evaluation of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* as a ‘true tale’ and a ‘real epic’ (*DJ* XIII, 8-9).⁴⁴ Cervantes – not unlike Byron – in the course of satirising romance, wrote an epic which

⁴²: *DJ* I, 120: ‘Here my chaste Muse a liberty must take / Start not! still chaster reader, she ‘ll be nice hence- / Forward, and there is no great cause to quake; / This liberty is a poetic licence, / Which some irregularity may make / In the design, and as I have a high sense / Of Aristotle and the Rules, ’tis fit / To beg his pardon when I err a bit’.

⁴³: Roidis 1866, 61 [79] (not Durrell’s translation). It is also worth noting that the line Roidis quotes here is actually a cluster of two Homeric lines, *Iliad* Ξ 207 (εὐνῆς καὶ φιλότητος, ἐπεὶ χόλος ἔμπεσε θυμῶ) and A 469 (αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο). Once again we can see that Roidis changes the initial frame of reference in order to satisfy his needs, the lovers in the *Iliad* abstained from love (ἦδη γὰρ δηρὸν χρόνον ἀλλήλων ἀπέχονται, Ξ 206), whereas his did not.

⁴⁴: Cf. also Leslie Marchard, ‘Narrator and narration in *Don Juan*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal* 25 (1976), 30: ‘Though he insists that his story is actually true, he is thinking of its truth to human nature and human motives, for he is obviously bored with the “claptrap” of fictional devices to create verisimilitude in the contrived story, in fact in the whole narrative structure itself’.

exposed the disparity between culturally accepted norms and actual behaviours, between the ‘mere Fancy’ of romance and the way things really are.⁴⁵

Furthermore, Byron’s extreme aversion for all things inspired and elevated is the reason why he is so deprecating of Robert Southey and his followers. He belittles them because they are so self-absorbed that, in their attempt to present their high ideals, they forget one simple truth: ‘a realistic and unforced genius is superior to an artificial and overambitious creativity’, or as he phrased it:⁴⁶

For me, who, wandering with pedestrian Muses,
Contend not with you on the winged steed,
I wish your fate may yield ye, when she chooses,
The fame you envy and the skill you need. (*DJ* Dedication, 8)⁴⁷

Byron’s polemic against Southey and the romantic school of the ‘Lakers’ finds its analogue in Roidis’ polemic against Panagiotis Soutsos and the romantic school of Athens.⁴⁸ Roidis scoffed at Soutsos’ mellifluous writing and his sentimental subjects in the exact same way that Byron denounced amatory poetry in his *Don Juan*:

When amatory poets sing their loves
In liquid lines mellifluously bland,
And pair their rhymes as Venus yokes her doves,
They little think what mischief is in hand.
The greater their success the worse it proves,
As Ovid’s verse may give to understand.
Even Petrarch’s self, if judged with due severity,
Is the Platonic pimp of all posterity. (*DJ* V, 1)

Roidis’ complete assimilation of Byron’s lesson is mirrored in the following extract, in which he tries to duplicate in prose the sound patterning (use of assonance and alliteration, feminine rhyme) of Byron’s casual ‘singing’. Roidis literalizes Byron’s yoke simile and reproduces the debunking effect of the Byronic stanza by figuratively associating the lines of the poems with Venus’ ‘line’ and by using repeated syllables (*μαστ-ούς, μαστ-ρωπ-ούς*) to form internal rhyme:

What is more in writing a true story, I cannot imitate those poets and authors who heap up tremblings, tears, blushes, and other platonic provender yoking their mellifluous lines by twos as husbandmen do oxen to the plough, and smoothing their periods as round as the paps [*μαστούς*] of Aphrodite. The great Dante called these *pimps* [*μαστρωπούς*], but I don’t like their name or their occupation. So abandoning these devices of Plato, Ovid, Petrarch and their mawkish followers I shall continue to describe the truth, naked and uncombed, just as it came out of the well.⁴⁹

This is not the only time Roidis’ work resonates with the Byronic spirit. One of the most memorable instances in *Pope Joan* is when – in a conversational-like confession – the narrator’s bodily presence is flashed before our eyes:

And now I must let Joanna have a little rest before I follow her to Rome. / The great poets like Homer and P. Soutsos, Esq., write wonderful verses while they sleep; but I always wipe my nib and lay down my pen before I put my night-cap on. Only the greater spirits may be permitted expression while they sleep, but we humbler scribes must always be alert [*ἔξυπνοί*], like the Capitoline geese which woke the Romans.⁵⁰

The same air of nonchalance and ennui can be found in Byron’s poem as well:

45: George Ridenour, *The Style of Don Juan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 99. For more on the underlying tension between these two concepts of reality in *Don Juan*, see also Nicolas Halmi, “The Very Model of a Modern Epic Poem”, *European Romantic Review* 21, no 5 (2010), 598.

46: Abdul Yesufu, “The Narrative Voices and the Ironic Mode in Byron’s *Don Juan* I and II”, *English Studies in Africa* 37, no 1 (1994), 24.

47: The fact that Roidis’ muse is also a pedestrian/pragmatic one and his inspiration is not drawn by a winged steed (*Πήγασος*) can be seen in the next extract as well: ‘If I were a poet I would have said that my Pegasus could smell the stable and was driving me willy-nilly towards it; but as a pedestrian in prose [*πεζός*] surely I have more right to hint that after so many wanderings I have grown tired, and look forward to the anticlimax of my story’ (Durrell 152).

48: Georganta 1993, 226.

49: Durrell 50.

50: Roidis 1866, 225 [243]; Durrell 119 (adapted).

We learn from Horace, Homer sometimes sleeps;
 We feel without him, Wordsworth sometimes wakes ... (*DJ* III 98 1-2)

or ...

Let this fifth canto meet with due applause,
 The sixth shall have a touch of the sublime.
 Meanwhile, as Homer sometimes sleeps, perhaps
 You'll pardon to my Muse a few short naps. (*DJ* V 159 7-8)

It is only when we read the Byronic narratorial excuses that we actually realise that the narrator's exit in *Pope Joan* is a fusion of two Byronic initiatives, the one referring to the weary penman (In the meantime, without proceeding more / And laying down my pen, I make my bow, / Leaving Don Juan and Haidée to plead / For them and theirs with all who deign to read: *DJ* II, 216) and the other to his sleepy Muse, as shown above. Roidis makes use of the Homeric example followed by Byron and at the same time introduces the Romans through the back door. Through his clever use of the Latin element in his simile, he makes an ambiguous pun in order to differentiate between his own wakeful (ξύπνια) and therefore smart (έξυπνη) approach and his rival's drowsy (υπνάλεα) and thus tedious phrasing.

Casti also employed the same narrative technique in *La Papessa*:

Giovanna quì lasciam per un momento,
 E Fulda seguitiam che dal Pireo
 Allo spirar dal favorevol vento
 Sciolse sovra un naviglio Raguseo ... (*La Papessa* I st.41, 1-4)

[Let us leave Joan here for a moment, and follow Fulda from Piraeus before the breath of a favourable wind, which dissolved over a Ragusan vessel ...]

Ma è tempo che a Giovann omai ritorno
 Facciam che intanto segnalossi altrove.
 Noi lasciata l' abbiam se ven sovviene,
 In sul procinto di partir d' Atene ... (*La Papessa* I st.53, 5-8)

[But it's time now to return to Joan from having been occupied elsewhere. When we left her, if you remember, she was about to leave Athens ...]

... and

E si riposan ambo i nostri eroi,
 Benchè in levante l' un l' altro in ponente;
 Di grazia riposiamoci anche noi,
 Poichè nel mio racconto susseguente
 Fatti vi narrerò maravigliosi,
 Chè un preambolo è sol quant' io v' esposi. (*La Papessa* I st.69, 3-8)

[And let us rest both our heroes, even though one's in the Levant and the other in the West; and pray, let us rest as well, because in my subsequent story I will tell you such marvellous facts, that it will become clear that this has been just a preamble]

His chatty narratorial persona, though, is more full-fledged in *Gli Animali Parlanti*, where he gets not only tired but also 'hoarse' from constantly talking to his audience:

Ma spossatello omai mi sento e roco,
 Ne in grado più proseguire il canto,
 Permettetemi dunque, almen per poco,
 Ch'io prenda fiato, e mi riposi alquanto.
 Che poi, qualor vi piaccia, io sarò pronto
 A riprendere il fil de mio racconto. (Casti, *Gli Animali Parlanti* Canto IV, 107)⁵¹

51: For a detailed consideration of the Italian influence on Byron, and Casti in particular, see Peter Vassallo, *Byron: The Italian Literary Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1984) and Claude M. Fuess, *Lord Byron as a Satirist in Verse* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1973), 137: 'In many respects, Casti's third poem, *Il poema Tartaro*, which has never been mentioned in connection with Byron and which was never referred to by the English poet, is even more closely akin than *Gli Animali Parlanti* to *Don Juan*. It is possible that it may have offered a suggestion for a portion of the plot of *Don Juan* – the episode of Catharine II'. Peter Cochran is of the same opinion when he writes on the same

[But now I feel exhausted and hoarse, unable to finish the canto, so let me, at least briefly take a breath, and rest a little. And then, if you want, I'll be ready to regain the thread of my story.]

Roidis borrows more from the Casti / Byron tradition, but often dilutes it with his subtle use of irony. In the finishing lines of his first chapter he tries a seemingly polite address to his female readers while also implicitly hinting at their nocturnal habits:

... at last she fell asleep, lying between St. Peter and Marcellinus. Fearful that the same thing may happen to you, my female reader, we would direct your attention to the next chapter for the continuation of our [veracious] story.⁵²

At this point in the story Joan falls asleep between the relics of two saints, whereas the narrator's exit leaves the readers with a totally different picture. Thus all the while Roidis seems really concerned about the well-being and comfort of his lady-reader, he insinuates that is customary for women to sleep 'sandwiched' between men.

In a similar vein, Byron also likes to keep his readers on their toes, 'hovering' between possible interpretations, and genuinely relishes the tension he causes mostly to his female audience, since it is usually the ladies that are incurably curious ('O, gentle ladies! should you seek to know / The import of this diplomatic phrase', *DJ IX 49*) and callous in their ways:

Whether Don Juan and chaste Adeline
Grew friends in this or any other sense
Will be discussed hereafter, I opine.
At present I am glad of a pretence
To leave them hovering, as the effect is fine
And keeps the atrocious reader in suspense,
The surest way for ladies and for books
To bait their tender or their tender hooks. (*DJ XIV 97*)

Therefore, when he apologises to them, he is openly sarcastic:⁵³

Oh ye, who make the fortunes of all books!
Benign ceruleans of the second sex!
Who advertise new poems by your looks,
Your imprimatur will ye not annex?
What, must I go to the oblivious cooks,
Those Cornish plunderers of Parnassian wrecks?
Ah, must I then the only minstrel be,
Prescribed from tasting your Castalian tea! – (*DJ IV 108*)

However, when Casti addresses his female audience, he has a more tolerant and ingratiating attitude towards his 'Donne amorose'. In addition, he prefers his ladies 'unillusioned'⁵⁴ and cured of any misconceptions and half-truths. For this reason, he is being honest with them to the point of vulgarity. As his trusted confidants, they are to know all the sordid details of the Popess' story:

Ben avvisto io mi son, Donne amorose,
Che a certe infamità non mica avvezzo
L'orrecchio vostro, l'opre scandalose
Di Giovanna in udir, provò ribrezzo.
Una Papessa far sì fate cose?
Ma ciò che dir si vuol, mai dirsi a mezzo
Non dee, per quanto ei sia straordinario,
Tal qual'è raccontarlo è necessario. (*La Papessa*, III st.1)

subject (Cochran, "Casti's *Il Poema Tartaro* and Byron's *Don Juan*, Cantos V-X," *Keats-Shelley Review* 17 (2003), 65) and cf. also Cochran, "Francis Cohen, *Don Juan*, and Casti," *Romanticism* 4, no 1 (1998): 120-4.

52: Durrell 35.

53: For more on Byron and the female reader, see Haslett 1997, 187-230.

54: Ritchie Robertson, *Mock-Epic Poetry from Pope to Heine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 326 and cf. also Maria Schoina's paper: "Byron and Casti: Dangerous Liaisons," published in the online Proceedings of the 37th International Byron Society Conference, *Byron and Latin Culture* (Valladolid, 27 June – 1 July 2011), http://www.internationalbyronsociety.org/images/stories/pdf_files/conference_proceedings/valladolid/schoina.pdf.

[For I well perceive, loving Ladies, that, not at all accustomed to certain infamy, your ear was disgusted to hear of Giovanna's scandalous deeds. A Popess to do such things? But what is it that we wish to say, we must never say it half-way, no matter how extraordinary it is, it's necessary to recount as it is.]

Roidis in turn, ironically inclined, adopts a more reserved attitude towards truth. His muse, not unlike Byron's ('Besides, my Muse by no means deals in fiction. / She gathers a repertory of facts, / Of course with some reserve and slight restriction, / ... For too much truth at first sight ne'er attracts': *DJ* XIV, 13) is particularly fond of apposite phrasing when it comes to 'bare facts'. After all, some things are more easily done than said. Therefore, Roidis does not soil his pen 'of English make' (a telling instance of his admiration for Byron) with distasteful details as Casti did,⁵⁵ but instead lets his lady-reader fill in the gaps for herself, a 'noble act' which bitterly criticises his contemporaries' hypocrisy, false prudery and cant: 'Do not hasten to blush, my worthy female reader. [...] No, there is no danger of hearing from me anything "unbecoming to reveal before the virgin mind"'.⁵⁶ Consequently, where Roidis breaks with Casti lies in his refusal to give any space to the voice of outraged paternalism and conventional Judaeo-Christian disgust. In *La Papessa* (III, st. XLIV), the monk Fulda, Joanna's lover in Greece and the Levant, becomes Casti's mouthpiece and is not sparing in his judgement of her actions: 'Certo di te parlò l' Apocalisse, / Quando la grande adultera descrisse' [Of course, the Apocalypse spoke of you, when it described the great Whore]. Roidis, while not underplaying the hubris that leads Joanna to her doom, is never as horrified by her sexuality as Casti allows her ex-lover to be, and offers his heroine the choice between an earthly life of disgrace and an afterlife in hellfire.⁵⁷

To return to Byron: though, as Claude Fuess, Peter Vassallo, Catherine Addison and others have observed, he learned – in part from Casti and later from Berni and Pulci – the use of the burlesque method (the discursive style, with its opportunities for digression and self-assertion) and made it a channel for voicing his own beliefs as well as for speaking out against his enemies.⁵⁸

In a similar manner, in the next extract Roidis not only pays due respect to his English tutor⁵⁹ – the appreciative allusion to Byron's shipwreck incident with its subsequent cannibalism (*DJ* II, 78)⁶⁰ is hard to miss – but also outgrows the latter's teachings. Roidis considers this whole shipwreck motif as *dépassé* and, in an equally Byronic gesture, leaves his heroine to continue her journey alone:

On the day following, the wind started up in some force, and took them past Sardinia which is famous, say the poets, for its cheeses and the treachery of its inhabitants, and the third day, it fell again ... But really I, a poor swimmer, cannot hope to follow in the wake of my heroine's swift ship as comfortably as I once followed in the steps of her ass. And besides this: nautical descriptions of the waves, the rigging, the pitch, the shipwreck and so on, are liable to induce nausea in the reader, so often has it been done before; except when a pleasant episode about starvation or anthropophagy is stealthily introduced into the text. Hence referring all land-lubbers with unstable stomachs to the milk-and-water descriptions of the poet P. Soutsos (where hardly a poetic ruffle stirs the 'silent beach, all smiling milk') we may make so bold as to inform the rest of our readers that hero and heroine yawned, retched, were seasick ... *and so on*.⁶¹

55: As Anna Zimbone observed: 'Nel Casti, il volgare rimane volgare; Roidis lo copre di velo di discrezione, perché egli, per sua connaturata disposizione, in sintonia con la gelosa dignità di narratore, si muove sempre su un piano di reminiscenze culturali classico-mitologiche, di aristocratica finezza e di umoristica cordialità (Zimbone, "Il Romanzo di Emmanuël Roidis e il suo 'Modello' Italiano," in *Medioevo Romanzo e Orientale: Testi e Prospettive Storiografiche*, eds. A. M. Babbi et al. (Verona: Rubbettino, 1992), 332).

56: Durrell 43.

57: Durrell 147 and see also Zimbone 1992, 332-3.

58: Fuess 1973, 161; Vassallo 1984 and see also Catherine Anne Addison, 'Adventurous and Contemplative': *A Reading of Byron's Don Juan*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1987).

59: Even though in this case Roidis admittedly draws his inspiration from Alessandro Tassoni's *La Secchia rapita: Poema Eroicomico* (Florence: Tipografia Fraticelli, 1844), 45): 'Portar, e quindi all' Isola de' Sardi / ricca di cacio e d' uomini bugiardi' (II. 66), one cannot but think that he was acquainted with Byron's analogous phrasing: 'In Seville was he born, a pleasant city, / Famous for oranges and women' (*DJ* I, 8).

60: 'The sailors ate him, all save three or four, / Who were not quite so fond of animal food; / To these was added Juan, who, before / Refusing his own spaniel, hardly could / Feel his appetite increased much more; / 'Twas not to be expected that he should, / Even in extremity of their disaster, / Dine with them on his pastor and his master' (*DJ* II st.78).

61: Durrell 93-4.

More specifically, in Canto II Byron structures a shipwreck episode around the notion that ‘man is a carnivorous production’ (*DJ* II, 67)⁶² whose energy and every thought revolve around the movements of his stomach. Thus, when Juan is forced to leave Donna Julia and experiences a fit of lovesickness, he mostly feels the loss in his stomach and becomes more prone to seasickness in this way: ‘No doubt he would have been much more pathetic / But the sea acted as a strong emetic’ (*DJ* II, 21). Nevertheless, according to Byron, the best remedy against seasickness and therefore against anything that upsets the stomach is a good meal, or a ‘beefsteak’ to be precise: ‘The best of remedies is a beefsteak / Against seasickness: try it, sir, before / You sneer, and I assure you this is true, / For I have found it answer – so may you’ (*DJ* II, 13).

In Roidis’ case, on the other hand, it is not the sea itself that acts as an emetic, but another liquid (milk) that has the same effect on the reader. Milk can be a powerful antidote for various kinds of poisoning, only this time the remedy is the same as the cause. The milky descriptions of Panagiotis Soutsos, despite their stillness, nauseate the readers and cure them of their romantic obsessions. For this reason, Roidis does not need to describe a bad spell at sea as Byron did. All he has to do is to make his readers think of milk and then synecdochically of Soutsos’ poetry, and they will experience the violent movement in their stomach. Consequently, the sea storm incident proved to be quite a valuable lesson for Roidis since it impregnated his mind with ‘charming’ ideas on how to relate culinary allusions to poetic taste.⁶³

Having thus examined how at least three major epic conventions (invocation of the muse, beginning ‘in medias res’, shipwreck motif) operate in both English and Greek texts, we will next try to establish the role of epic similes as well.

In general – as Terence Hawkes has observed – simile, because of its ‘like’ or ‘as if’ structure, entails a more visually inclined relationship between its elements than metaphor. Therefore in simile, by contrast to metaphor, words are used literally, or ‘normally’. The thing A is said to be ‘like’ that thing, B, while the description given to A and to B is as accurate as literal words can make it.⁶⁴

Epic simile on the other hand, instead of forcing points of likeness upon the reader allows some space for digression, since, as C. M. Bowra noted:

Homer does not mind putting into similes features which he excludes from his narrative. [...] In each of these cases the world of the similes is not the world of the narrative, and in each the detail described belongs not to the Mycenaean Age but to a much later time.⁶⁵

In a similar manner, history, fiction, theology, philosophy and biology jostle with each other as jumping-off points for comparison within Byron’s and Roidis’ similes, while their spatiotemporal range varies from the Greek and Latin ancient world to the Middle Ages, contemporary Europe, and the United States of America in Roidis’ case.

In particular, *Don Juan*’s narrator, as a prospective epic poet, is not only self-conscious about the profusion of similes in his work, ‘My similes are gathered in a heap, / So pick and choose; perhaps you’ll be content / With a carved lady on a monument’ (*DJ* VI, 68), but is also aware of the stock similes abundant in traditional epics. Moreover, his attitude to them is quite ambivalent, since there are times when he himself criticises their lack of originality and ingenuity (*DJ* I, 55): ‘Of many charms in her as natural / As sweetness to the flower or salt to ocean, / Her zone to Venus or his bow to Cupid / But this last simile is trite and stupid’; and there are other cases when he scorns his readers for showing the exact same critical acumen as he previously did:

Juan, who had no shield to snatch and was
No Caesar, but a fine young lad, who fought
He knew not why, arriving at this pass,
Stopped for a minute, as perhaps he ought
For a much longer time; then like an ass
(Start not, kind reader, since great Homer thought
This simile enough for Ajax, Juan
Perhaps may find it better than a new one) – (*DJ* VIII, 29).

⁶²: For more on this subject, see Christine Kenyon Jones, “‘Man Is a Carnivorous Production’: Byron and the Anthropology of Food,” *Prism(s): Essays in Romanticism* 6 (1998), 41–58.

⁶³: On Byron’s poetics of ‘ambiguous taste’, see Jocelyne Kolb, “Byron’s *Don Juan*, or Four and Twenty Blackbirds in a Pie,” *The Ambiguity of Taste. Freedom and Food in European Romanticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 55-114.

⁶⁴: Terence Hawkes, *Metaphor*, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen, 1972), 72.

⁶⁵: C. M. Bowra, *Tradition and Design in the Iliad* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 121.

Similarly, Roidis was just as aware as Byron was of the role of epic similes in a text. This can be clearly seen in the next example, where, following an unexpected argumentation, he parodies the classical tendency of comparing humans to animals while satirising his heroine as well:

And who would dare to compare Semiramis, Morgana, or the Aurelian Parthenos [*Joan of Arc*] with one such as Joanna? We have no other comparative reference to hand. Yet whenever a human being surpasses his fellows we are apt to compare him to some beast or other; to a bull if he was a great king, to an ass if he was a brave general, to a fox if he was noted as a diplomat. But what animal analogy may one seek for him who becomes a Pope?⁶⁶

What is more, when Roidis finally presents us with Joan, he opts for a series of similes instead of a realistic description of his heroine:

Face of a sixteen-year-old, rounder than an apple, blond hair of Magdalene but uncombed as Medea's, lips as red as a cardinal's biretta which promised inexhaustible pleasures, breasts plump and soft as partridge's, still heaving with emotion. Such was Joan when she caught a glimpse of herself in the water, and indeed it was thus that I myself saw her in an illuminated manuscript at Cologne.⁶⁷

We can see that his similes draw on the flora and fauna, Ancient Greek mythology and ecclesiastical tradition for suitable points of comparison. In other words, apart from relativist associations, we have nothing concrete on Joan as a palpable existence. Her mirror image is a mirage which disappears after the narrator's interruption and along with it vanishes also our notion of a faithful representation of reality.⁶⁸ What we see is not even her reflection, but the way Roidis reflected on her. She is not a whole being but a set of attributes given through similes that are in turn other simulacra, other mirrors.⁶⁹

The same reflective and intertextual technique is also at work in Byron's presentation of Donna Inez in *Don Juan* I, 15, where, instead of the expected picturesque description, he outlines her features through other texts: 'she looked a lecture, / Each eye a sermon, and her brow a homily'. Furthermore, this palpable relation between faces and texts is all the more evident when Haidée looks at Juan and 'reads the only book she could', the lines of her lover's face (*DJ* II, 162).

The following Byronic stanza is equally subversive, albeit in a different way. Here not only does Byron epitomise the types of simile recurrent in an epic poem but also manages to bring down with his rhyme the very edifice they stand on:

And she bent o'er him, and he lay beneath,
Hushed as the babe upon its mother's breast,
Drooped as the willow when no winds can breathe,
Lulled like the depth of ocean when at rest,
Fair as the crowning rose of the whole wreath,
Soft as the callow cygnet in its nest.
In short he was a very pretty fellow,
Although his woes had turned him rather yellow. (*DJ* II, st.148)

In other words, Byron's pithy couplets do the demystifying trick, since – according to Anne Barton – he purposefully employs them in order ...

... to set up 'improper' juxtapositions (e.g. 'gunnery / nunnery', 'intellectual / henpeck'd you all'), jolting the reader out of complacency by insisting that objects or activities conventionally regarded as distinct may, in fact, be related in ways that do not necessarily end with their phonetic similarity.⁷⁰

66: Durrell 135.

67: Roidis 1866, 78-9 [96-7]. Durrell, 26.

68: Kakavoulia 1985, 299.

69: Roidis underscores the intertextuality even of his secondary characters when he admits that the faces of the Benedictine monks in the monastery where Frumentius and Joan stayed resembled a palimpsest of contradictory sources (Roidis 1866, 138 [156]).

70: Barton 1992, 18 and cf. also Paul West, *Byron and the Spoiler's Art* (New York: Lumen Books, 1992), 48 and Jim Cocola, "Renunciations of Rhyme in Byron's *Don Juan*", *Studies in English Literature* 49, no 4 (2009), 846.

Roidis, as we have already seen, was also cognisant of the importance of rhyming in a satirist's work and that is the reason why, even though he wrote in prose, he introduced poetical elements and repetitive patterns into his work on many occasions:⁷¹

This noble [*Saxon Baron*], going down one day to select the fattest among the geese for a feast he was to give, found his inclinations warm no less keenly towards the goose-girl than towards her geese: and translated her in one moment from the poultry yard to the bedroom. Bored with her after a while, he gave her to his cup-bearer, who gave her to the cook, who in his turn bestowed her upon the pot-boy. This last, being of a single devoutness, exchanged her with a monk for the holy tooth of St Gutlac who, according to the legend, lived and died in great purity in some Mercian ditch.⁷²

In this extract, apart from the ironic analogy that exists between the girl and the hen, repetition has the place of honour: there is an accumulation of past participles (λαβών, ζήσαντος, τελευτήσαντος) and of food-related posts which follow a hierarchical order (οίνοχόος>μάγειρος>χυτροκόρος). In addition, through the use of assonance in the form of repeated phonemes (*l*) or syllables (*-ών / -σαντος*) or words (Γουτλάκου / λάκκου), i.e. internal rhyme, the reader becomes aware of Roidis' ironic distancing from his own narrative matter.

That said, we can conclude by claiming that Byron's teachings place us at the core of Roidian poetics. Roidis reiterated Byron's arguments in order to call attention to the repeated pattern but mostly in order to advance it, or even overturn it. In other words, Roidis skilfully managed to appropriate all those epic / poetic traits he admired in Byron, and what is more, through the polyphonic generic memory of Byron's epic (which echoed not only Homer and Virgil but also Casti), he imitated another genre while contributing to the differentiation, and therefore to the generic evolution, of the novel itself. As a result, in an era when the historical novel met some success in Greece⁷³ and almost all the remaining genres (drama, epic and lyric poetry) were to a greater or lesser extent 'novelized',⁷⁴ Roidis, with his unique eclectic style, 'poeticized' the novel instead and liberated this up-and-coming genre from its own stylisation. Thus, from this blissful literary encounter between the Latin West and the Greek East, came a remarkable offspring: a historical novel of epic descent.

71: On the musicality of Roidis' prose, see Dimaras 2000, 433.

72: Durrell 16.

73: See Sofia Denisi, *To Ελληνικό Ιστορικό Μυθιστόρημα και ο Sir Walter Scott (1830-1880)* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1994), 90 and Linos Politis, *Ιστορία της Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας* (Athens: Morfotiko Idryma Ethnikis Trapezis, 1993), 180.

74: Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 6-7.