Puberty is hardly a poetic subject, much less an epic one. Nor does it seem particularly Romantic. Christopher Ricks has shown us why: it embarrasses. Against the maturity required of the epic, puberty seems hopelessly jejune. Yet I shall argue that puberty is not only Lord Byron’s epic subject in *Don Juan*, but also its truest one. As a volatile moment of bodily transition, puberty threatened categories of sexual and gendered identity. This threat was exacerbated by the fact that puberty was at once a natural and a perverse shift. On the one hand, puberty was a universal “natural” rite of passage. On the other hand, puberty hinted at the perversity of the body, its resistance to neat sexual and gendered categories. By foregrounding puberty, Byron hopes to liberate human beings from the normalizing force of these categories. Puberty allows Byron to question the value of maturity and conventional masculinity; more important, by stretching puberty over seventeen cantos and by making it epic, he insists that, although male/male love has its origins in puberty, it cannot be reduced to adolescent behavior.

Simply put, biological difference was an insecure ground and thus could neither form the reliable basis of gender nor sex. As a moment of biological poten-
tiality in all bodies, puberty allows the youthful body to be read as full of per-
verse potentiality. The body thus becomes a paradoxical ground of latency.
Moreover, because puberty frustrated the sexual categories then available—het-
erosexual, homosexual, molly, effeminate, male, or sodomite—none of these
could accurately capture one’s sexual desires and identities. Even worse, insofar
as the norm is itself mobile, neither normality nor perversity could confer sta-

tility in all bodies, puberty allows the youthful body to be read as full of per-
verse potentiality. The body thus becomes a paradoxical ground of latency. Moreover, because puberty frustrated the sexual categories then available—heterosexual, homosexual, molly, effeminate, male, or sodomite—none of these could accurately capture one’s sexual desires and identities. Even worse, insofar as the norm is itself mobile, neither normality nor perversity could confer stability. Puberty enables Byron not only to make the epic epicene—partake of the characteristics of both sexes (OED)—but also he connects sexual perversity with aesthetic purposiveness. That is, he embodies the contingency of bodily sex in an epic form whose contingent rhymes eschew purpose in favor of purposiveness in much the same way that the narrator of Don Juan eschews reproduction in favor of the mobility of desire. Put another way, rhyme enables the poet to redefine liberation in terms of choosing and shaping the causes one allows oneself to be determined by. Puberty then allows Byron to intervene in compulsory heterosexuality even as it undermines sexual complementarity from within.

Because male puberty presented two very different norms of masculinity—an effeminate norm appropriate for a boy and indeed ontologically prior to a second manly norm—it was the moment in which normality was indelibly tainted by the perverse. The famous eye surgeon William Lawrence captures this belated sense of difference when he remarks that, “in the first years of life, the individuals of two sexes do not differ from each other at the first view; they have nearly the same general air, the same delicacy of organization” (“Generation”). In sum, they are both “innocence joined by weakness.” In puberty, however, “his limbs lose the softness and the gentle from which he partook with the female” (ibid.). Because they were published in Rees’s Cyclopaedia, Lawrence’s remarks achieved wide diffusion. To the extent that effeminacy is the norm prior to manliness, masculine strength can appear to be abnormal. Consequently, any law of gender could seem arbitrary.

Because puberty was thought to be the moment when one feminized sex became two, the manly man cannot escape from his effeminate shadow in this period. The fact that Lawrence is less interested in changes in the female body during puberty (Buffon insisted that women matured much more quickly than men and put great emphasis upon menstruation) indicates the legacy of the one-sex model in England, which tempered differences between the sexes under an essential similitude. Peel back the layers of complementarity and find homology, if not one sex. John Hunter’s conviction that the sexual character was annulled in old age further supported this essential similitude. And if male-male
love was the open secret of sensibility, the sensitive man was doubly cursed. Thus, for example, throughout *Don Juan* Byron understands gender in terms of a “she-condition,” denomenating the whole circumstances under which femininity exists (*OED*), rather than in terms of any clear universal essence.

In part a nostalgic look backward to his own adolescence, a time of sexual play unencumbered by the demands of marriage, *Don Juan* allows Byron to turn back the clock, away from the burdens of his own mature strength—including a sexual narrative that must culminate in marriage—and away from a moment in history in which sex was being embodied in two newly incommensurate sexes.³ Verging on the carnivalesque and the masquerade, *Don Juan* amounts to much more than return to libertinism because Byron is after the recently acquired power of biology to ground sexual difference. For Byron, biology could not ground difference if it itself was vitally dynamic. Moreover, even though Byron could be hopelessly conventional in his gender attitudes, his Brunonian understanding of the body enabled him to challenge biological complementarity, the idea that male strength prepared men for public life while women’s delicate nerves better suited them for the domestic sphere. Based on John Brown’s theory that excitability was the key to bodily health or disease, Brunonianism had the potential to equalize the genders because excitability had no dependence upon structures of the body (neither penis nor clitoris) and because both muscles and nerves had vital power equally distributed (C. Lawrence 9–11). Tellingly, Brown treats delayed, suppressed, or impaired menstruation in women not specifically in terms of the female body but rather of a generalized debility (*Elements* 2:184–85).⁴ Like men who suffer from “indirect debility” when they have too many evacuations, women suffer the same debility when their evacuations are irregular in quantity or in duration.⁵ That Brown suggested the consequences of vice were physical and medical and not theological further made his ideas attractive to Byron.

Byron was schooled in the principles of Brunonian medicine by his physician, George Pearson, and by Sir John Sinclair’s *The Code of Health and Longevity*, of which Byron owned no fewer than two copies.⁶ The fact that Brown insisted that life was dependent upon external causes, a main concern in *Don Juan*, undermined any biological essentialism. As the material equivalent of improvisation and digression (digression also means deviation), moreover, puberty is the moment when bodily semiotics strive to catch up with cultural gender. This gap between the two semiotic systems enables Byron to question the role and value of gender and of sex, along with its political investments. Insofar as Brunonian
medicine understood the body in terms of an economy of excitability where excessive stimulation could lead to debility, it further suggested that any strength gained by men during puberty could be easily lost. Because masculinity was always under threat, Byron can be both more sympathetic to the plight of women, and alive to the costs of reducing male/male love to immature sex.

In calling attention to the role of puberty in *Don Juan*, I aim to complicate our understanding of the poet's gender attitudes and to revise our understanding of Byron's perversity. Puberty means that the body does not become fully sexed until age thirteen or fourteen or even later, and puberty thus throws a monkey wrench into any one-to-one correspondence between sex and gender. Genitals cannot fully signify sex if masculinity is understood, as it was in the Romantic period, in terms of strength. Whereas Jerome Christensen links Byron’s perversion most closely to his oriental tales—arguing, for instance, that Byron did not engage in homosexual acts before visiting Turkey when the geography permitted it and declared it to be normal—the fact that effeminacy is a normal stage of development that all boys undergo means that it will not so easily be written off as perversion. And whereas Christensen argues that Byronic homosexuality cannot be liberation because any such liberation must be regional, and therefore only valid for a particular kind of sexuality, and because such liberation does not represent a “final break with a prior repression” (55), I argue that puberty makes such liberation a process open to all men and that even women are not necessarily excluded if femininity or softness can be redefined and revalued. What’s more, because “liberate” means to free from something, the fact that liberation is never complete—it cannot represent a final break with repression—means that Christensen, following Foucault, is setting an impossible standard for liberation. In the process, he underestimates the good that can come from taking care of obstacles to liberation one by one. Those obstacles include regulatory categories like sodomite, effeminate, heterosexual marriage, and male, and Byron’s point is that personal bodily experience so often resists or exceeds political co-optation and regulation. Furthermore, as Moyra Haslett reminds us, “the poet’s attempt to excuse its libertine hero was therefore in itself a political act because it contradicted the increasing hegemony of moral and political conservatism” (166) as well as the sanctity of property (185). Finally, the fact that Byron at times identified with “softness” instead of with strength underscores the limits of seeing masculinity in terms of “consequential action” (Christensen xviii) and suggests a fundamental ambivalence to class privilege. By indicating that Juan’s softness is the reason why he is an erotic object for men
and women alike, Byron calls attention to the differing forms masculinity and desire may take.

Thomas Laqueur, Ludmilla Jordanova, and Londa Schiebinger have argued that around 1800 a one-sex Galenic model whereby the female was an inferior and inverted version of the male sex gives way to a two-sex model whereby the sexes are incommensurate. In the one-sex model, a penis is not what Robert Stoller has called the “absolute signature of maleness” because women have penises too—just on the inside—and genitals cannot ground gender. For Laqueur, the notion of a passionless woman becomes evidence for this newly incommensurate way of thinking about the sexes since the notion of a passionless male was presumably an oxymoron.

For Jordanova, the evidence lies within nascent connections between musculature and masculinity and nervousness and femininity. And for Schiebinger, the male body—in particular, the male skull—remained the paradigm of human anatomy throughout the eighteenth century, thus illustrating the profound legacy of the one-sex model. This model would only be ruptured by the French Revolution and its emphasis upon egalitarianism (*Nature’s Body* 156–59). As democracy and equality put pressure on difference, sexual differences are reconfigured so that they underwrite hierarchy that does not look like hierarchy. In the name of separate spheres, difference is allegedly equalized and each sex is given its separate but equal and proper domain. Within medical treatments of puberty in the Romantic period, one can discern the collision of these models, and Byron’s focus on puberty—the moment when one sex becomes two—enables him to put pressure on cultural understandings of masculine strength. He can thereby also take issue with notions of female passionlessness as well as the alleged equalizing gesture of the separation of spheres. Puberty enables sexual difference itself to come into crisis. Is there one sex or two? Is the foundation of difference gender or sex? Is sexual desire based on a desire for difference or similarity? What happens when a feminized male desires another feminized male?

If complementarity was an improvement over the one-sex model by which femininity simply meant inferiority to a male, it was undercut by the value that Romantic culture placed on feeling, and even the man of feeling. Claudia Johnson has shown how men declared feeling and sentiment to be their legitimate province in the Romantic period, and this meant that women’s feelings had to be shown to be inferior to men’s and pathological. One way to accomplish this goal was to make women’s bodies hostage to their nerves and reproductive organs in ways that men’s weren’t. Likewise, Lisa Cody has argued that fathers in
the eighteenth century were expected to be more compassionate (303) and that men-midwives helped to straddle the demands of science and of sympathy. The fact remains, however, that feeling was ambiguously gendered. Biological complementarity was under further threat by the medical understanding of genius. Because sensibility was both a delicate sensitivity and brilliance, effeminate men were considered to be creative geniuses who treaded gingerly the line between masculinity and femininity. As John Sinclair put it, the “man of brilliant talent” was cursed with a “delicate frame” (1:79). Andrew Elfenbein has argued that genius was homosexualized in the period, and the price of such brilliance was pathology. Finally, since the one-sex model relied upon the homology of the penis and vagina or penis and clitoris, locating sex in the structures of the genitals, theories of vitality that downplayed the role and influence of localization and anatomical structures undermined the idea that sex could be localized in different—male and female—genitals. In short, vitality threatened to undermine the metonymies by which body part subsumes erotic identity.10

At first blush, puberty offers a rather meager nail on which to hang one’s hat in Don Juan. Indeed, Byron uses “puberty” only once, contrasting it with philosophy: “If you think ’twas philosophy that this did,/I can’t help thinking puberty assisted” (1:93). “This” refers to Juan’s thinking of Donna Julia’s eyes. Yet such a witty couplet sets up a pervasive concern: the role and the needs of the body over that of the mind, social categories, or even language. Byron put it this way in his “Detached Thoughts,” “Man is born passionate of body—but with an innate though secret tendency to the love of Good in his Main-spring of Mind—But God help us all!—It is at present a sad jar of atoms” (Byron’s Letters and Journals [BLJ] 9:46). Whereas the stanzas preceding the one that plays with puberty and philosophy deliberately inflate our expectations to metaphysical heights—Coleridge’s “condition,” we are told, is that he has become a “metaphysician” (1:91)—Byron turns to puberty to suggest the biological bases of any metaphysical speculation. The gulf between reader (what you think) and the poet (I) can only be closed by admitting not only that puberty and philosophy have a common ground beyond consonance, but also that the energies of a sensate and desiring body are perhaps more real and more philosophically consistent than metaphysical speculation. Puberty’s role, moreover, does not have to wait for the poet to realize that he must think about it.

In his distrust of metaphysics, Byron would have agreed with Humphrey Davy’s argument that “man, in what is called a state of nature, is a creature of almost pure sensation” (15). As Byron shows in his famous shipwreck episode,
beneath his or her civilized veneer, humankind is very much a creature of sensation. Davy continues, “Called into activity only by positive wants, his life is passed either in satisfying the cravings of the common appetites, or in apathy, or in slumber. Living only in moments, he calculates but little on futurity. He has no vivid feelings of hope, or thoughts of permanent and powerful action. And, unable to discover causes, he is either harassed by superstitious dreams, or quietly and passively submitted to the mercy of nature and the elements” (15–16). In his “Detached Thoughts,” the poet recalled having hung around Davy, and Byron met up with “the man of chemistry” in Ravenna (7:78). If unbridled sensation might liberate mankind from the dictates of civilization, it might substitute one form of tyranny—civilization—for another, nature.

The role of puberty in Don Juan looks even more substantial once we consider that Byron insists throughout much of his epic upon crossing genders and upon Juan’s boyishness or even girlishness. He is described as having been a “pretty child” (1:69). Although he is sixteen at the start of Byron’s epic, and despite the fact the narrator supposes him to be “then grown up to man’s estate” (1:85), Juan is manhood manqué. “Every body but his mother deem’d/Him almost a man” (1:54). Antonia, Donna Julia’s maid, wonders if Juan’s “half-girlish face” could possibly be worth all the trouble (1:171). Insofar as Juan straddles boyishness and girlishness, he is in the midst of puberty, when manly strength fully transforms one effeminate sex into two.

After the shipwreck, Juan “buoy’d his boyish limbs” (2:106). The pun between buoy and boy reminds us that boyhood is a state of suspension between two sexes. Like women, boys are economically dependent upon men (T. King 67). Puberty therefore also reminds us of how Byron’s serial narrative suspends telos. The narrator insists both Juan and Haidee “were children still” (4:15). One canto later, we are reminded again that “Juan was juvenile” (5:8). One might add like Juvenal: though he condemns effeminate men who engage in same sex acts, in Satire 2, Juvenal praises Peribomius, because he is subject to the “workings of fate” and whose “obsession secures indulgence.” The chain of signifiers—Juan, juvenile, Juvenal—yokes together Juan, youthfulness, and perversity, and implies that youth is a natural breeding ground for perversity. Especially so, in light of the role of the classics in upper-class British education. The sultan refers to Juan as “this boyish, new, Seraglio guest” (6:115). Juan is at once “blushing and beardless” (9:47); while both adjectives make him effeminate, in “beardless,” the sign of masculinity is at least present by its absence. Juan is described as being “in the bloom . . . but not yet in the blush” (10:5), ad-
jectives that again remind us of puberty. Even as late as canto XVI, Byron catalogs the things which “kindle manhood” (16: 108); moreover, in the very last canto, Byron alerts us to Juan’s “virgin face” (17: 13).

In his own life, Byron found puberty particularly traumatic. He writes, “It was one of the deadliest and heaviest feelings of my life to feel that I was no longer a boy,—From that moment I began to grow old in my own esteem—and in my esteem age is not estimable” (BLJ 9:37). Byron once again explicitly refers to puberty in his epic when he states,

Juan, I said, was a most beauteous Boy,
And had retained his boyish look beyond
The usual hirsuite seasons which destroy,
With beards and whiskers and the like, the fond
Parisian aspect which upset old Troy
And founded Doctor’s Commons:—(9:53).

On the one hand, Juan is a boy. On the other hand, the poet informs us that he has passed the “usual hirsuite seasons which destroy” boyhood; yet, he retained his “boyish look.” Byron’s enjambment here extends Juan’s boyishness into the next line, even as he suggests Homeric epic to have likewise been engendered by Paris’s puberty. The question is, is he ontologically a boy, or does he just look like a boy still? To make matters worse, since boyishness at times is equivalent to effeminacy, is Juan more like a girl? When Juan cross-dresses as Juanna, no one doubts her sex: “no one doubted on the whole, that she/Was what her dress bespoke” (6:36).

My point is that as a dynamic and variable biological process, puberty raises problems for gender insofar as it takes longer in some than others, it does not have the exact same signs in everyone, and the process can at times remain incomplete. Byron’s narrator no sooner reminds us that Juan and Haidee are “children still” (4:15), than he insists upon their “mix’d all feelings, friend, child, lover, brother” (4:26). Despite our need to demarcate clearly defined categories of identity, Byron reminds us that feelings and bodies defy such categories. By calling attention to the anomalies within puberty and Juan as an anomaly, he insists upon a gap between sex and gender. His allusion to “Doctor’s Commons”—the legal court devoted to separation and divorce—further implies that even the marital norm has its problems. As Jonathan Gross puts it, “the whole poem is written against ‘straight’ life: against stifling marriages like Julia’s; polygamous one’s like Gurbeyaz’s; and sexless, and more importantly, soulless, one’s like Adeline’s” (144).
Susan Wolfson has shown the surprising ways in which gender is transgressed in *Don Juan*, and she suggests that Juan’s intersexual character allows the poet space for “homoerotic material in disguise” (1987 592), not to mention active questioning of the “she condition” (597). Wolfson insists that Byronic gender transgression is associated with “anomalies of nature” and “monstrosities” (595). Rather, I think, in highlighting a moment of biological transition, Byron is much more radical in his gender attitudes than he has been given credit for, because he exploits the dynamism of puberty to undermine any stable or unitary notion of monstrosity or anomaly. Given contemporary debates about how monsters do not refute God-like design even in their imperfection—they, quite to the contrary, often show the designed developments of the species (see chapter 2)—monsters themselves in the end could prove normality rather than undermine it. Whereas Wolfson insists that “Byron senses the fatal consequences when the law of gender is violated: the annihilation of self in both its social identity and psychological integrity” (601), I argue Wolfson puts too bleak a spin on the loss of identity. Because the breaking of the law of gender is the source of so much of the poem’s comedy, and since Byron knew too well that a sodomitical identity could be imprisoning if not deadly, I emphasize the ludic possibilities in the loss of identity and the gains of what Byron terms “mobility.” In satirizing cultural notions of gender, then, and in showing how the body resists the stability of gender, Byron insists that any law of gender will ultimately be incommensurate with the body, be it monstrous or normal. Puberty is such fertile ground for Byron because it pushes the line between monstrosity and normalcy, not to mention between male and female, in the direction of undecidability. The normalizing categories that society uses to arrest sex and gender always have the potential to be frustrated.

The Compte du Buffon understood that in order for the organs of generation to mature, the process of growth had to be over, and he conceded that many men continued to grow until 23 years of age. “The growth of the body must be nearly complete before a superfluous quantity of organic juices can be accumulated in the parts still undergoing puberty destined for generation” (2:411), Buffon wrote. Byron owned Smellie’s 18-volume translation of Buffon (Munby 1:211), and Buffon’s remarks on puberty were rehearsed in Sinclair (1:48). Buffon also argued that growth lasted in a man until 22–23 years of age (2:436), and that men did not acquire their “most perfect symmetry until age 30” (2:436), and this meant that puberty in man lasted as long as twenty years. Juan therefore is potentially undergoing puberty from start to finish of *Don Juan*. John
Brown likewise insisted that puberty was “a time of great change over the whole system. Now the desire for coition, a stimulus, never experienced before, produces a commotion over the whole body; and in preference to other parts, in the genitals of both sexes” (2:186). The poet credits the Persians with having the right attitude toward this commotion because they teach boys only “to draw the bow, to ride, and speak the truth” (16:1) as they grow from age five to age twenty.

Buffon also argued that the “marks of puberty” are “not always uniform,” highlighting variability in an already dynamic process. The beard, for example, does not always appear precisely at the age of puberty: there are “whole nations who have hardly any beard” (2:411). Juan’s beardlessness thus is normal in some contexts and abnormal in others. To make matters even worse, “beards” were sometimes used in the erotica of this period to refer to female pubic hair (Harvey 97), and thus were hardly unambiguous signs of masculinity. Although perversion assumes a single standard of normalcy, Byron points out that perversion is contextually dependent and therefore far from a universal standard. In his Observations on Madness and Melancholy, which Byron owned (Munby 1:240), John Haslam warned that during the “interval between puberty and manhood, I have painfully witnessed this hopeless and degrading change, when in a short time has transformed the most promising and vigorous intellect into a slavering and bloated idiot” (66–67). Clearly puberty was a time of volatile biological change, changes which threatened the very idea of a norm.

This variability of puberty helps explain why the poet links genitals with both presence and absence insofar as a penis requires the testicles to begin their work in order to transform boys into men. Buffon makes it clear that the onset of women’s menstruation too is highly variable and contingent upon the quality of diet (2:411). Indeed, women who do not get enough iron in their diet have delayed puberty. To wit, not only does Byron align Lord Henry’s erect “perpendicular” with a lack—“something wanting on the whole” (14:71), but also such a mathematical term inevitably recalls his mathematical genius of a wife, his “princess of parallelograms.” A penis, cannot guarantee manhood because in a one-sex model, women have them too. Moreover, men are always in danger of losing them either through castration or through the loss of manly strength consequent to excessive emission. Byron reminds us of this potential loss when he feminizes even this paragon of male handsomeness, and notes that his perpendicular remains “preserved” despite “each circumstance of love and war” (14:71). Presence is presented as being only momentarily present: absence is always in the offing. The culture’s obsession with male impotence, not to men-
tion venereal disease, underscores further the potential loss of virility. Byron’s play on even the male genitalia as being both presence and absence is heightened by the fact that only recently did women and men acquire genitals of their own: instead of having genitals within their bodies as opposed to without as Galen thought, women’s vaginas were no longer considered to be internal penises, women’s uteruses no longer thought to be scrotums, and women’s ovaries were no longer considered testicles or stones (Laqueur 1990 78–93). Furthermore, external signs of sexual difference—namely beards—have no necessary connection to genitals since genitals do not necessarily presage absolute difference. Recall once more Juan’s pointed beardlessness. “Perpendicular” reminds us as well that the penis can only symbolize virility when it is erect. In much the same way that a perpendicular line needs other lines in order to prove its perpendicularity, Byron suggests that the penis cannot be a self-sufficient sign of masculinity. The gap between the penis and the development of manly strength furthermore undercut the significance of the genitals as the marker of sex. Finally, if geometry leads us back to Byron’s “Princess of Parallelograms,” what is the difference between a parallelogram and a perpendicular? Both terms share consonance, the same number of syllables, and a similar geometrical origin.

Nor can the vagina function as the sign of absolute difference. Byron acknowledges this most clearly when he euphemistically refers to the vagina as an “affair of women” in canto 6, stanza 2 (Haslett 153). While one must concede that the poet does align women’s affairs with “strange whirls and eddies,” making the vagina a place of mystery that surpasses the reveries of Jacob Behmen, and while he does suggest a dichotomy between what men do with their heads and what women do with their hearts, any absolute difference is undercut by the fact that Byron uses “affair” in the first stanza of this canto to refer to male orgasm. “There is a tide in the affairs of men” too. “Few have guess’d/The moment, till too late to come again” (6:1), Byron chortles. While Byron’s enjambment defers the moment, his medial caesura, coming in the middle of the second foot, enacts the onset of orgasm whose timing cannot be known in advance. Although aligning the vagina with mystery runs the danger of fueling misogyny, Byron emphasizes as well the unknowability of men’s affairs. Byron may be alluding to the fact that the vagina and women’s reproductive system were very much terra incognita since the human female ovarium was not discovered until 1827. Not only do few guess the moment of no return, but also Byron concludes the stanza devoted to men with “Of which the surest sign is in the end:/When things are at the worst they sometimes mend” (6:1). Although
“surest sign” suggests some certainty, that certainty is undermined by “sometimes” as well as by the circumlocution “of which” which has no clear referent. My point here is that Byron uses the same term “affair” to refer to men’s and women’s genitalia, and this hearkens back to a one-sex model in which the vagina is an internal penis. “Tide” also insists upon fluidity of both organs. As a metonymy for the public sphere, “affair” for both sexes is reduced to sexual affairs, and both sexes are thereby stuck in the private and domestic realm. The dichotomy between women’s hearts and men’s heads is further undermined by the fact that Byron ends the stanza with “heaven knows what!” (6:2). Furthermore, the line, “But women with their hearts or heaven knows what!,” lacks a verb, leaving any dichotomy hanging in mid air. The “or” enhances this dangling, as does the fact that “know,” while ostensibly a verb, here functions as an adjectival modifier to heaven.

Of course, “affair” refers back to Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, when Brutus proclaims “there is a tide in the affairs of men/Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune” (4:3). Though Brutus thinks that now is the time to act, he is on the cusp of his downfall. The point of the allusion is to further undermine any epistemological certainty when human sexuality is at issue. In this light, Byron’s comment that the “able seamen” who navigate the affairs of women have charts which “lay down its currents to a hair” (6:2), pokes fun at the very idea of anatomical localization since all the precision of the charts leads to no knowledge whatsoever. No matter how carefully anatomists map out the contours of the female body, their enthusiasm for cartography outweighs any knowledge gained. How does one chart tides anyway? “Men’s reflection” (6:2), therefore, is essentially impotent. Byron suggests that even the trope of metaphor itself is powerless; not even the “strange whirls” of Behmen “can compare” (6:2). His invocation of the imprecise pronoun “it” in both stanzas—“most of us have found it” in the former, and “lay down its currents to a hair” in the latter—takes away from anatomy’s power to locate sex in the body.

To add to all this uncertainty, Byron’s preface about the suicide of Castlereagh suggests yet another referent for “affair.” Like Brutus, Castlereagh kills himself. Unlike Brutus, Castlereagh kills himself because he fears he will be exposed as a sodomite. Byron’s wry comment—“he was an amiable man in *private* life, may or may not be true” (Steffan and Pratt edition [S&P] 3:2),—hints at Castlereagh’s sodomy.16 The line, “of which the surest sign is in the end.” (6:1), thus takes on the specificity of sodomy, and to the extent that this is true, the typographic colon after “end” represents an anatomical colon. One’s anatomical
part predicts neither the sex of one’s object of desire, nor the means by which one satisfies those desires. “In the” reminds us that this end is to be penetrated. As Byron puts it in Canto 1:

Man’s a strange animal, and makes strange use
Of his own nature, and the various arts,
And likes particularly to produce
Some new experiment to show his parts; (1:128)

Byron heightens the strangeness of mankind, thereby normalizing perversion, and suspends the uses to which parts/genitals are put through his medial caesuras. Indeed, coitus has been so interrupted that reproduction is no longer a clear use. He suggests that sexual experimentation is a particularly human predilection. That Byron links Castlereagh to the Bishop of Clogher, another sodomite, further clues us in to Byron’s innuendo (Crompton 1985 310). In his rejected stanza 76, canto 11, Byron had rhymed the line, “Some, for having turned converted Cullies,” with “while Clogher’s Bishop sullies/The Law.” Because “Cullies” contains the French word for arse, cull, Byron links the passive recipient of sodomy with the sullying power of shit.

Jonathan Gross has shown how Byron equates beginnings and endings with sexual acts. Thus when Byron instructs his readers to “Commence not with the end—or, sinning/In this sort, end at least with the beginning” (5:13), the poet suggests his anatomical book is male but not to be penetrated (Gross 138). However, the fact that Byron’s prohibition deals with beginnings—anal intercourse cannot be a beginning—suggests that sodomy might properly be the culmination of sex. Byron’s placement of “turned” and “converted” near the turn of the verse not only implies that such a perverse turn is as easily achieved as the turn of the verse, but it also hints that such conversions might be easy. Just as the reader is now confused about beginnings and endings—which end are we looking at?—sexual positioning too can be ambiguous since it is dependent upon one’s vantage point. Finally, insofar as seriality in Don Juan frustrates beginnings and endings, not to mention conventional epic purpose, sodomy as anal intercourse is the logical sexual correlative to aesthetic purposiveness. By making this end teleological, Byron thus frustrates the end of reproduction.

The poet’s explicit and repeated pun on “adulteration,” moreover, highlights puberty as the natural process of coming into adulthood even as it makes this natural process one of degeneration rather than growth or maturity. John Brown likewise considered life a process of degeneration since we are born with a cer-
tain amount of excitability and eventually lose it. Byron initially confines puberty to the ages between thirteen and sixteen (1:69), and he frames this change neutrally in terms of an “alteration” (1:69). Later, however, Byron pokes fun at Lady Adeline by comparing her to a bottle of decanted wine: “both upon occasion,/ Till old, may undergo adulteration” (15:6). If Buffon declared marriage to be the next step after puberty, Byron suggests that puberty and marriage are not mutually exclusive. In the same way that the adulteration of wine is an unpredictable process, so too is puberty. Byron too hints that the scythe of time has gone rusty, and now may go slower and to shave us more smoothly (14:53). “Shave” suggests that Juan’s beardlessness may be less natural than it is willful. Linking adultery, sexual experience, and the coming into adulthood—can one be an adult without adultery?—Byron undermines as well societal emphasis upon a woman’s honor as being solely localized in her private parts. Here, the poet may be recalling Buffon’s remark that it was jealousy alone which “bestowed a physical existence upon female virginity” (2:414). The metaphor of adulteration implies that like a bottle of wine that will inevitably and eventually go bad, even honorable women are destined for adulteration. Describing the flirtation of a “cold coquette” in terms of “not quite adultery, but adulteration” (12:63), Byron once again naturalizes adultery as a process of social and sexual maturation. Perhaps one reason that adulthood is like the corruption of adulteration is that desiring bodies then further rigidify into cultural identities. In terms of the male sex, “adulteration” suggests masculine strength to be a spurious admixture to a pure but effeminate male body. Not only does this strength make Lord Henry less attractive rather than more, but also it defines that strength—usually considered as a presence into an absence of effeminacy. “Something was wanting” (14:71). The consequences of this point are that masculinity as strength can be understood as a perversion of an original male effeminate norm, and that the effeminate can become a legitimate object of sexual desire. Indeed, the narrator makes Don Juan the subject of his erotic gaze (Gross 137).

Just as adulteration intertwines the normal with the abnormal, and just as puberty reminds us that normal biological growth is bound up with deviation, Byron suggests that sexual perversion is an error that has as much moral weight as a typesetting error. Perversion thus is to be expected. Describing Queen Semiramis, Byron muses,

That injured Queen, by Chroniclers so coarse,
Has been accused (I doubt not by conspiracy)
Of an improper friendship for her horse
(Love, like religion, sometimes runs to heresy);
This monstrous tale had probably its source
(For such exaggerations here and there I see)
In printing “Courser” by mistake for “Courier”:
I wish the case could come before a jury here. (5:61)

By comparing love to religious heresy, Byron makes sexual perversion the logical outcome of any freethinking individual. No sooner is the category created—proper friendship, let’s say—than the category will be exceeded. Formally, Byron hints at his support for the improper by making lines two and four exceed their syllable count, by interweaving enjambment and end-stopped lines, by having the parenthetical aside threaten to overtake this stanza, and by stretching the final rhyme between “Courier” and “here.” While it seems as if the parentheses and the colon will arrest any heresy, Byron suggests that this could not be further from the truth when he equates the sins of improper friendship with a graphical error or even a printing error. The early draft of this stanza had “printing” in the place of writing and noted “an erratum of her horse for Courier” (S&P 5:61). The poet’s equation of a sexual sin with a printer’s mistake, inevitable so long as books were typeset by hand and by printer’s devils no less, gives perversions of print and sex the equivalent moral weight. In his review of Ireland’s Neglected Genius, Byron mused that “the malicious fun of the printer’s devil in permitting it [the error] to stand, for he certainly knew better” (Nicholson 19). Somewhere between inadvertent error and conscious choice, the Queen’s rumored bestiality is as commonplace as an erratum, just as monstrosity originates in a typesetting mistake. Since genitals can predict neither sexual aim nor object, heteronormativity lacks both logic and inevitability.

Moyra Haslett has argued that Byron’s coarseness and sexual innuendos are part of a larger strategy by which the poet makes fun of the gendering of contemporary reading. Byron found absurd the notion that women were to be chivalrously protected from carnal knowledge, and despite knowing the fact that he had attracted a wide female readership, the poet refused to bend to notions of delicacy (221–25). Because the Queen Caroline Affair made the sexual lives of the royals common knowledge, Byron sees little point in decorousness. Moreover, if women are as sexually passionate as Byron claims, then his work would teach them what they already knew. Indeed, the stanza above on printing mistakes alludes to Queen Caroline’s trial for adultery. Byron thus wonders why
the Queen is to be punished for her alleged sexual intrigues while the Prince Regent literally gets off scott free.

Byron undermines the ability of biology to ground sexual difference in a number of ways. He highlights the dynamism of biological change to show that biology is a precarious ground of difference. Because puberty cuts across gender lines, lines demarcating biological sex, and lines dividing natural and unnatural forms of sex, it is rife for comedy and political subversion. Thus, for example, Byron ponders which pronoun accurately captures Juanna, the cross-dressed Juan, and remarks,

And next she gave her (I say her, because
The Gender still was Epicene, at least
In outward show, which is a saving clause)
An outline of the Customs of the East,
With all their chaste integrity of laws,
By which the more a Harem is encreased,
The stricter doubtless grow the vestal duties
Of any supernumerary beauties. (6:58)

At a superficial level, Byron exploits the comedic potential of drag. More deeply, his choice of “epicene” derives from the Greek *epikoinos*, which means “upon the common,” and thus seeks to understand gender not upon the ground of difference, but upon similitude.18 The epicene nature of gender itself is enhanced by Byron’s addition of “supernumerary” letters to Juan, the “na,” as if gender itself is so easily changed. Juan is made equivalent to Juanna by Byron’s use of “or” (6:57). Although he claims that gender here is only epicene in its outward show, by calling attention to this clause as a “saving clause,” Byron takes away any readerly satisfaction in the outward show when he hints that an outward show (dress) may disguise an inward one (the body); show and disguise are thus hopelessly entangled with one another. The fact that Don Juan’s boyish body lacks the hirsute outward form of manhood, coupled with the fittingness of his feminine disguise, shows that Juanna, and even Juan, exceed the binary demands of gender along with the heterosexual imperative. Juan’s ambiguous gender extends to his body and not just to his clothing, frustrating the need for even cross-dressing to reinforce heterosexuality: cross-dressing was legitimate during this period so long as it furthered heterosexuality (Harvey 99). Insofar as Byron here describes a seraglio—a place where women do indeed occupy the position of Lacan’s “phallus” since they “circulate in patriarchal societies as vis-
ible and acquirable symbols of masculine power” (Yiu 86)—epicene enacts itself by taking on unexpected forms of figural embodiment. Brunonian medicine would suggest as well that growth could be advanced or hindered by the balance or imbalance between the body’s internal excitability and its external stimulation. By rendering the body as much of a garment as the dress, the poet suggests that gender may resist bodily superimposition.

In his original draft, Byron wrote that “The Gender[s] still [were] Epicene” (S&P 3:35), and this suggests that although “epicene” can be used to indicate effeminacy (OED 2nd ed.), Byron is after a collapsing of gender difference itself, one whose ontological equivalent is the body in puberty. The fact that “epicene gender” applies to Latin and Greek grammar, indicating nouns which, “without changing grammatical gender, may denote either sex” (OED), enables linguistic perversion (the phrase is nonsense in English) to take on sexual perversion. Such a collapse is furthered by the poet’s playing with the chastity of a harem and the lewdness of the East: as comical as the notion of a harem devoted to vestal duties is, so too is the idea that Eastern harems are about profligate sexuality untainted by the leering gaze of the West. Byron’s play on “supernumerary,” a word that highlights Juanna’s surplus status along with his supernumerary member, deflates a sign of virility into an excess supplement. That his final couplet has supernumerary syllables further renders gender into textual play: the feminine rhymes (duties/beauties) not only enhance Juan’s cross-dressing, but also literally effeminize him.

Byron further undermines confidence in gender binaries by calling our attention to the addition of a third sex, the eunuch. He wonders if all the money the Pope makes in a year will allow him to find “three perfect pipes of the third sex” (4:86). That the perfection of the pipes must come at the expense of the mutilation of the male body allows Byron to ask if the gains are worth it. Nor does Byron miss an opportunity to foist perversion onto the Roman Catholic Church. Now one might ask on what grounds can a castrated male be another sex, especially if sex is taken to be an ontological given. Yet to call an eunuch a “third sex” is to situate sex somewhere between nature and culture. In order to be able to map gender onto the body, a third gender that suggests effeminacy must be available, else the third sex will have no gender that corresponds with it. This is the reason why Randolph Trumbach labels the effeminate sodomite as the third gender in the eighteenth century. As heterosexuality became the mark of the true gentleman, the bisexuality that was accepted among men of rank since the Elizabethan period became redefined as effeminacy (Cash 35;
Trumbach chaps. 2 and 3). The problem is that although an effeminate male might be analogous to a eunuch, gender can only map itself onto sex if, in the case of men, castration acquires both literal and figurative ontology. In other words, for a third sex to correspond to a third gender, it must be possible for a man to castrate himself figuratively, and if this is so, figuration will always demand at least a slight gap between gender and sex, else the figure is no longer a figure. Perhaps this explains why the poet refers to the “confusion of sorts and sexes” (11:3). “Third sex” is also open to women to the extent that they have masculine traits. The Duchess of Fitz-Fulke’s dressing up as a male monk implies that women too can exceed the binaries of gender. Byron’s use of “third sex” thus moves sexuality beyond complementarity and symmetry and toward contextualization (Garber 1995 12), and his emphasis upon context can be seen especially in his yoking of gender and condition as in “she-condition” (14:24). To the extent that there is a third sex, one that exceeds male and female, sex must take on other disciplinary forms beyond binaries.

When Byron lists the kinds of love, he reminds us that behind the “third sort” of love, “Marriage in Disguise,” lies a third sex. Ostensibly “marriage in disguise” refers to a now outlawed clandestine marriage, usually a marriage between a man and woman of a different social class that would not have parental approval. In as much as “disguise” also metonymically names Juan’s effeminacy, Byron exchanges one form of prohibition for another, homosexual love. “Disguise” is thus a metonymic closet for all forms of clandestine desire. This allusion gains credence when we consider that the poet begins the stanza with the line, “the noblest kind of Love is Love Platonical” (9:76), and Byron recalls Plato’s sense that sexual relations between males is the highest form of love since only men can represent intellectual beauty. Byron’s careful qualification of the kinds of love to be “noted in our Chronicle” further implies that there are kinds of love he dare not catalogue, although his mention of “burning Sappho” hints at another form that he cannot enumerate. In his early draft of this lyric, Byron wrote the “Lesbian Sappho” (Isles of Greece 1) further making explicit the object of Sappho’s passion, along with the possibility of the dispensability of men in matters sexual. Men might be irrelevant when it comes to sexuality. Although the epic catalogue relies upon enumeration as knowledge, Byron suggests that this trope falsely assumes that cataloguing is a form of knowledge, since there are kinds of love which resist naming.

Because Byron sees a culture’s gender attitudes as a crucial index of the legitimacy of governmental authority over the individual (Franklin 116), he is espe-
cially wary of how women are socialized into being women. He actively won-
ders if any woman would truly choose the “fetter” of domesticity over public
life when he states, “but ask any woman if she’d choose/(Take her at thirty, that
is) to have been/Female or male? A school boy or a Queen” (15:25).

Byron’s sustained focus on effeminacy in \textit{Don Juan} affords him space from
which to undermine sex as a given fact about the human body. Unlike the Romans
who associated effeminacy with political, social, and moral weakness (C. Ed-
wards 65), Byron can be more ambivalent about it because effeminacy makes
clear that neither masculinity nor femininity have exclusive purchase upon gen-
der.\textsuperscript{23} In suggesting that gender is not a binary opposition, Byron challenges the
conventional understanding of gender. In much the same way that there are
three sexes—men, women, and eunuchs—there are at least three genders—mas-
culine, feminine, and some combination of the two, sometimes referred to as
“she-men.” Byron also confesses that Juan is “warm in heart as feminine in fea-
ture” (8:52). To be sure, Byron can be virulently homophobic, and his favorite
strategy of delegitimation is to demasculinize his political targets. Bob Southey
is a ”dry bob” (Ded. 3), meaning that he partakes of coition without emission,
and Lord Castlereagh is an “intellectual eunuch” (Ded. 11) because of his exces-
sive despotism. “Eunuch” obliquely refers as well to the fact that Castlereagh
thought he was about to be exposed as a sodomite, and thus committed sui-
cide.\textsuperscript{24} As Southey’s employer, Castlereagh shares his subordinate’s fate.

Gary Dyer has shown that although the references to sodomy “are read most
easily as being unsympathetic,” Byron’s homophobia is directed toward the pas-
sive recipient of the act, not the act itself, and the poet allows readers to take the
subject position of the active sodomite (573). Because the potential price of ho-
mophilia was death at the hands of an angry mob, one’s declared homophobia
could protect oneself, leading readers away from thinking about Byron’s obses-
sion with Juan’s pretty boyishness. Indeed, Don Juan is continually presented as
an object of erotic interest. Although wary of effeminacy, Byron is most open to
it when effeminacy becomes a matter of individual choice rather than a pre-
scribed identity, because effeminacy gives men a vantage point from which to
choose or reject strength, a sense of the limitations of strength, and an aesthetic
that redefines agency in terms of choosing and shaping the circumstances that
one is to be determined by.

Effeminacy is furthermore the male’s first natural state, and Byron makes this
clear by foregrounding Juan’s original pre-pubescent and feminine body. To the
extent that effeminacy is a normal point of origin for a man, then strength
threatens to become a potential deformation. At the outset we are told that everyone, except his mother, deemed Juan “almost a man” (1:54), and deep into the next canto we find him in “very spacious breeches” (2:160). Because his spacious breeches will eventually fall down, Byron here may be coding Juan’s sodomy (Dyer 572). The implication here is that if clothes make the man, Juan does not quite measure up. As a long-standing sign of the proper beginnings of boyhood (Fletcher 297), breeches further mark culture’s false imposition of gender on the male body. The poet’s awareness of the gaps between breeches and Juan’s body, therefore, exposes breeches as a sign of aristocratic wish fulfillment. Marjorie Garber further reminds us that “boy” in and after the Renaissance referred to the players who took the parts of women on the Renaissance stage, and that “boy” became a code word for males homoerotically attractive to male spectators (Vested Interests 10). That is, “boy” could also be code for effeminacy. Garber implies that boys and women are somewhat interchangeable objects of desire, an interchangeability that further mucks up the binary of gender. The Sultan thinks Juan is a “pretty” girl (5:155). Trumbach argues that since in the eighteenth century, middle-class men had to see prostitutes in order to prove themselves not sodomites, heterosexuality was potentially a closet for sexual perversity. He further suggests that the eighteenth-century marks the beginnings of compulsory heterosexuality. By emphasizing Juan’s pubescent gender ambiguity, Byron at least momentarily considers that male strength is a belated addition to an otherwise effeminate norm. When Lord Henry’s strength (14:71) makes him less attractive, not more, Byron links that strength with adulteration, not purity. And when we factor in Byron’s antipathy to war, Don Juan’s relative passiveness within it potentially serves as a critique of epic values, heroism, and martial forms of manliness. In any case, the ontological priority of effeminacy to strength undermines the normality of that strength.

When Byron terms Juan quite “a broth of a boy” (8:24), he turns to an Irish colloquialism, but he does so in such a way as to empty out its certainty. Steffan and Pratt gloss this line as meaning “what a real boy should be” (S&P 3:171). But what exactly should a real boy be, especially given that Juan has shown himself to be more passive than active (even in the heat of battle), looking the part in his feminine disguise, and more infantile than boylike. The fact that Byron himself was taken for a beautiful boy at 21 underscored the fact that “boy” was more of a relative than absolute term. Ali Pasha’s ability to consider Lord Byron a child even in spite of his strength implies that the narrative of Greek homonormativity left plenty of room for interpretation. Byron recounted this meet-
ing to his mother, “he told me to consider him as a father whilst I was in Tur-
key, & said he looked on me as his son.—Indeed he treated me like a child, send-
ing me almonds & sugared sherbet, fruit & sweetmeats 20 times a day” (BLJ
1:227–28). Pasha, moreover, was “pleased” with Byron’s “appearance and garb”
(BLJ 1:227). Although Byron may have identified himself as a man—he is espe-
cially happy that Pasha recognizes his aristocracy—that self-identification did
not prevent others from foisting its opposite upon him. Byron obliquely re-
members in Don Juan the fact that Ali Pasha admired “the delicacy of [his]
hand” (4:45). When he met Pasha’s son, Veli, Veli called him a “beautiful boy”
in Greek and threw his arm around Byron’s waist (cited in Crompton 1985 149).

As late as canto 15, Juan is still being described as “soft” (15:14), and Byron
himself confesses that he might have made a better spouse if he weren’t in a “soft
condition” (15:24). Despite the fact that Byron acknowledges that in England
Juan’s mind “assumed a manlier vigour” (15:11), he immediately compares him
to Alcibiades, who was know for gaining men’s affections, not to mention his
lust for Socrates. Of course, “assumed” reminds us that manliness is a garment
even as it exposes the male ass. Although in the first example “soft” literally
modifies Juan’s “whole address,” Byron places the adjective before the noun it
modifies to suggest that his address is not the only evidence of softness. The
connotations of “soft” run the gamut from pleasant to “weak, effeminate, and
unmanly” (OED). As Byron’s own journal notes reveal, he recognized softness
of voice itself was sign of effeminacy. The poet records hearing a “beau” asking
“in a very soft tone of voice” for a “glass of Madeira Negus with a Jelly” (BLJ
9:29). This prompts a “Lieutenant of the Navy immediately [to] roar out
“Waiter—bring me a glass of d——d stiff Grog—and rub my a——e with a
brick-bat” (BLJ 9:29). How quickly signs of softness can fade into effeminacy,
which itself so easily becomes sodomy. Why else would the lieutenant have
asked for his arse to be rubbed with something no less phallic than a brickbat,
a fragment of brick? I note here how easily the body you don’t fuck with is
imagined as the body to be fucked. Nonetheless, since brickbats were some-
times hurled by mobs (OED), the soldier might allude to a veiled threat: pun-
ishment by the pillory, where an accused attempted sodomite would be subject
to whatever the mob decided to throw at him.

But whereas the Lieutenant’s response seems little more than virulent homo-
phobia, Byron cops to the fact that his “soft condition” has been “proved,” and
he admits that his softness is precisely what made him an indecent spouse (15:
24). For a poet who so prided himself upon his aristocratic strength, what could
possibly make him identify with softness? Byron writes, “I think I should have made a decent spouse,/If I had never proved the soft condition” (15:24). Given the poet’s hostility to marriage generally, it is not clear if Byron is apologizing for or proudly declaring his softness—or the proof of it—as a badge of honor. In any case, softness is framed as the antithesis to decent marriage, and, by logical extension, becomes indecency. Of course, since it is the reader who must extend this logic, Byron can once again claim that any indecency is the reader’s not his. Given Juan’s and his own declared softness, when Byron bemoans the fact that “few of the soft sex are very stable/In their resolves” (15:6), it is not clear to which sex he is referring. Although this stanza alludes to Lady Adeline, Byron refers to Juan’s natural softness a mere eight stanzas later. Toward the end of stanza 24, Byron links softness with poetic ability, the wearing of “the motley mantle of a poet” (15:24, emphasis mine). When coupled with the poet’s own declared soft condition, “mantle” again deftly transforms the essence of manhood into a garment that can be taken on or off. I might add that “condition” fudges the ontology of softness; he may have been in the condition of softness, but that does not mean softness is an inescapable essence. The poet’s linking of softness with both sexes, his use of garment imagery, and his emphasis on “condition” implies that effeminacy is a choice, and to the degree that Byron sees liberation in terms of “personal relationships that will extend the boundaries of the self” (Franklin 132), even effeminacy plays a key role in that extension. In defining the “motley” garb most appropriate to the poet, and in making gender clothing, Byron hints that part of the poet’s role is to confuse gender and sexual laws, to mix them up.28 Susan Wolfson argues that Byron’s softness is at times equivalent to the humane (Borderlines 148), and I would simply add that softness enables the poet to see masculinity as a lack.

In addition to the fact that effeminacy is a boy’s normal state, James Sinclair’s Code of Health and Longevity may help explain why Byron could value softness even in men.29 Sinclair argued that vivacity was associated with the softness of bodily fibers and vessels, and the fact that women had softer fibers showed why they generally lived longer than men. Sinclair writes, “in the human species, in particular, the male is commonly not only larger than the female, but his muscular fibres are firmer, and more compact, and his whole frame indicates a superior bodily strength, and robustness of texture. But as in women, the bones, cartilages, the muscles, and every other part of the boy, are softer, and less solid than those of men, they must require time in hardening to that degree which occasions death” (1:63–64). Sinclair continues, suggesting that “men who have
a weakly appearance, and who, approach the nearest to women, often live longer than those males who are more robust” (1:64). When we consider that Sinclair credited women as the origin for a child’s “talents and . . . structure of mind,” arguing that “the abilities of many families may be traced to one distinguished female, who introduced talents into it, or, according to a common expression, mother-wit” (1:42), we recognize that softness and effeminacy could have their strengths: vivacity, intelligence, and longevity. Moreover, since death was a process of hardening of the fibers, women would eventually lose their softness, making even feminine softness inherently unstable.

If Sinclair gave women too much credit for wit by gendering it as feminine, the fashionable doctor J. M. Adair insisted that “every faculty of mind is equally dispensed to both sexes” (11). In September 1812, Byron wrote to John Murray, asking him to send him “Adair on Diet & regimen just republished by Ridgway” (BLJ 2:191). Perhaps with an eye toward flattering his wealthy female patients, Adair insisted that “the apparent superiority of our sex, in other mental accomplishments, proceeds entirely from difference of education” (11). Hence, the poet not only emphasizes Haidee’s intelligence, but also makes it clear that Haidee and her father are “alike, their features and/Their stature differing but in sex and years;/Even to the delicacy of their hand” (4:45). I note that sexual difference is confined to features and stature; that sexual difference alone doesn’t explain these differences, age plays a role too.30 Byron minimizes sexual difference in an age that sought to maximize them. He relegates differences to a parenthetical clause. Difference is, moreover, surrounded by and even perhaps dwarfed by likeness. Contributing to this minimizing of sexual difference is the fact that “delicacy of hand” recalls the Ali Pasha’s admiration of Byron’s own hand. The hand bridges any gap between male and female. Despite Byron’s disparagement of bluestockings and of “ladies intellectual,” he was much more sympathetic to Aurora and Adeline and took care to situate their intellectual equality within the context of their upbringing (Franklin 162).

The norm of male strength was under further threat by the popular notion that luxury and civilization had conspired to make men generally more effeminate. Luxury is, for example, much to blame for Sardanapalus’s effeminacy: Salomenes points his finger at both “the weakness and wickedness of luxury” and “the evils of sensual sloth” (1:iii). In Don Juan, Byron puts it this way: whereas in previous eras men made manners, now “manners make men” (15:26). Luxury and excess combine to demasculinize men; yet that demasculinization can appear to the poet as more erotic. On the negative side, this means that effemi-
nacy and its growing links to sodomy\textsuperscript{31} are a majoritizing threat to all men. As Caroline Franklin argues, against a narrative of the French Revolution that sought to essentialize the ancien régime as effeminate, Byron insists Europe’s post-Revolutionary leaders are no less effeminate (116–17). Byron’s majoritizing of effeminacy seeks in part to normalize it. Moreover, since he refutes the relegation of effeminacy to the aristocratic past, he does not allow the end of it to underwrite a narrative of liberal progress.

Unlike the effeminacy of Castlereagh or Southey, and despite Juan’s own disavowals of the effeminate, Juan’s effeminacy thus can be potentially positive as long as it is about agency. Effeminacy not only allows Byron to critique the martial emphasis of the standard epic, but also enables him to consider whether feeling is necessarily a feminine characteristic. Like Horace, whom Byron emulated, Byron turns away from warfare his and other masculine exploits, preferring instead to write about such feminine subjects as love. Aligning feeling with femininity or even feeling with masculinity does not allow one to consider the possibility that the display of feelings can be a highly manipulative process. Thus, Byron wryly notes that men who display their sympathy for the plight of women may be doing so for the sole purpose of seduction. “Man’s very sympathy with their [women’s] estate/Has much of selfishness and more suspicion” (14:24). Feeling is thus best divorced from gender so that one might consider what is being gained by the public display of any one feeling. At the same time, just as the \textit{OED} reminds us that effeminacy “did not have to imply reproach,” suggesting compassion and sympathy, Byron suggests that men need to have compassion especially when they consider how a woman risks everything in falling in love. Donna Julia pleads that men have the world of resources while women have “but one,/To love again, and be again undone” (1:194). Here, Byron undermines the naturalness of the separate spheres by noting the inequalities they actively perpetuate. Because he occupies both the position of effeminacy and masculinity, Byron undercuts the logic behind separate spheres.

It is only fitting that, if gender and sex are shown to be malleable essences, so too is effeminacy. Already in \textit{Sardanapalus}, Byron shows the effeminate tyrant to nonetheless be capable of martial heroism. The fact that he is effeminate does not preclude his acting like a hero in battle. Byron makes this clear from the very outset of the play when Salemenes declares that in “his effeminate heart/There is a careless courage which corruption/Has not all quench’d” (1.1). While effeminacy is thus framed as a luxurious corruption of masculinity, Sardanapalus’s enemies make the mistake of seeing his effeminancy as a depletion
of masculinity when in fact he is capable of “re-manning” himself so long as he is determined to do so. Arbaces sneers that “the she-king,/that less than woman, is even now upon/The waters with his female mates” (2.i). I want to suggest that modern critics make an analogous mistake when they too easily solidify the links between effeminacy and a passive sexual role. Sinclair, after all, suggests that softness could paradoxically imply mental strength and even corporeal longevity. As he grieves, Sardanapalus fears that he “grows womanish again” and vows to “learn sternness now” (4.1). Indeed, Sardanapalus claims that “all passions in excess are female” (3.i). By making his declared gender a willed choice—sternness, we cannot forget, must be learned—Sardanapalus reminds us that effeminacy to Byron is overwhelmingly about the choices one makes rather than an ontological state. To support this, Myrrha, Sardanapalus’s lover and female slave, imagines the mind as being essentially unembodied, “all unincorporated” (4.i). In death, corporeality will at most be “a shadow of this cumbrous clay,” flitting and stalking, yet no longer beholden to the fear of death. That effeminacy is about choices is furthermore in keeping with a post-Revolutionary view of health that defined it as an ideal to be striven for instead of an ontological condition (Outram 47). Health became an assertion of control over one’s own environment, over the “non-naturals” like “air, food and drink, motion, rest, sleep and waking, evacuation and retention” (ibid.). Despite Byron’s emphasis upon the mind’s ability to assert gender, his emphasis upon the symmetry between Sardanaplus’s effeminacy and his self-immolation, like Indian widows undergoing sati, implies that, at very least, the male mind has considerable work cut out for it if it is to escape the pejorative associations of effeminacy.

Not only did all males begin with effeminate bodies, but also a prevailing medical belief in a spermatic economy meant that vigorous masculine bodies could revert to a literal state of effeminacy at any time with too much expenditure of semen. Not enough expenditure was also unhealthy: for this reason, Byron stipulates that “health and idleness to passion’s flame” are “oil and gunpowder” (2:169). By equating health with oil and idleness to passion with gunpowder, Byron seeks to make sexual activity a sine qua non of health even as he implies that restraint will only add to the explosiveness of passion, not diminish it. Hunter’s anatomy collection, with his filigree of sperm ducts filled with quicksilver, and the famous surgeon Astley Cooper documented the elaborate and intricate pathways for the semen to travel, and they proved semen to be an especially lavish bodily expenditure. This fluid idea of the body as spermatic economy or balanced menstrual evacuations was heightened by medicine’s emphasis
upon the body’s changeableness. Of course, it was in medicine’s best interest to insist upon the malleability of the body and the efficacy of any given prescription or regimen. Such a spermatic economy made effeminacy much more than an embryonic phase before the onset of real sexuality because it always accompanies and threatens to disrupt heterosexuality and masculinity. Indeed, excess heterosexuality itself could lead to effeminacy. Because he saw masculinity as being surrounded by effeminacy—boys begin as effeminate, boys can be naturally attracted to effeminate boys, and men who have too much sex can revert to being boys—Byron is rightly skeptical of masculine strength as an essence. He is also rightly skeptical about the putative naturalness of heterosexuality. John Sinclair, for example, refutes the idea that the “bones, cartilages, muscles, and other solid parts, being once formed, are permanent, because the identity of the individual is permanent” (Appendix 2:83). Rather, he insists, “every part and particle of the firmest bones, is successively absorbed and deposited again. The solids of the body, whatever their form or texture, are incessantly renewed. The whole body is a perpetual secretion, as the saliva that flows from the mouth, or the moisture that bedews the surface” (Appendix 2:84). By emphasizing the body as a form of secretion, Sinclair highlights its essential fluidity and underscores the value of the spermatic fluid for men. That Byron’s friend, the pugilist J. Jackson to whom Byron refers as his “corporeal pastor and master” (cited in Dyer 564), was the source of much of Sinclair’s remarks on the role of exercise in health, meant that Byron likely would have paid especially attention to these remarks. The poet trusted Jackson enough to ask him to get another bottle of a “Lamb’s-Conduit-Street remedy” so Byron could ask a physician to test it (BLJ 1:169). In the appendix to his first volume, Sinclair apologizes for his necessary reticence on the subject: “the semen is a discharge of infinite importance to the human frame, but for obvious reasons, cannot much be dealt with in a work of popular nature” (Appendix 1:16). He warns nonetheless that “if indulged before the body is fully formed, it stints the growth, and brings on languor, debility, and various other disorders. . . . Manhood is the proper period of life for these gratifications, which are then natural and useful, but even then they ought not to be indulged into excess” (ibid.). This advice did not help Byron, who claimed that he lost his sexual innocence at the age of eight at the hands of his female servant.

In Byron’s case, this threat of effeminacy was all the more serious given his epic struggles over body weight and his ideal of a slim body. If slenderness was somewhat of a feminine ideal, Byron’s abstemious diets perhaps were in part at-
tempts to make him look more boyish, youthful. The poet lost fifty-eight pounds in the spring of 1807 and upon his return to Cambridge he was unrecognizable. Even his love, John Edelston, did not know him: he “told me he saw me in Trinity walks twice, & knew me not, till pointed out by him, by his Brother or Cousin” (BLJ 1:122).

To lose weight, Byron took up boxing. Boxing sets up another important context for thinking about Byron and effeminacy. Dyer clues us in that the sport is tied to “an underclass for whom the gallows was an ever-present threat” and that Byron’s sexual practices made him no less criminal (563). In one sense, boxing could enhance one’s manliness and lean muscularity. At the same time, boxing, like the ancient Greek gymnasium, could allow men to ogle male bodies. Boxing, thus, paradoxically reinforced one’s manliness even when it made male bodies objects of desire; because men were permitted to view muscular male bodies whereas softer male bodies were the exclusive province of the female gaze (Harvey 128), boxing enabled softer men to strengthen themselves while ogling other men.

Potter’s 1795 Dictionary of Cant and Flash Language, which Byron owned (Munby 1:212), clearly suggests ways in which boxing could push masculinity in either direction. “Flash” designates men of sport, “men of the ring” (OED). Defining a “cock alley” as the private parts of a woman, and a “commodity” in terms of the “private parts of a modest woman,” this dictionary showed how heterosexual activity was essential to masculinity, so much so that a woman’s genitals were unambiguously the place of a man’s. Nonetheless, it listed no fewer than five code terms for sodomite: backgammon player, back door gentleman, indorser, madge, and madge cull (a buggerer). A “madge cove,” moreover, was “a keeper of a house for buggerers.” Byron telling compares the slave mart in canto 5 to a “backgammon board” (5:10), and he thereby aligns passivity, sodomy, and commerce. Of course, Byron’s point is that the marriage mart in England is little better than slavery. By implication, heterosexuality/marriage does not exclude sodomy; marriage therefore can be a closet for perversion. Despite the fact that this Dictionary was dedicated to the justices of the peace, promising to help the middle class avoid being victimized by such men, the Dictionary could let others in on an elaborate code so that one sodomite might find another. Not only did Byron himself search for William Beckford, “the great Apostle of Paederasty” (BLJ 1:210), but he also contemplated writing a treatise “to be entitled “Sodomy simplified or Paederasty proved to be praiseworthy from ancient authors and modern practice” (BLJ 1:208). The fact that a cultural ideal of
athletic masculinity was inseparable from sodomy meant that boxing could provide an effective and pleasurable closet for homoeroticism if not homosexuality.

When he claims that “No lady e’er is ogled by a lover. . . . As is a slave by his intended bidder” (5:26–27), Byron stretches the simile across two stanzas to show that despite their ostensible differences, slavery can shed light on marriage. While such overt ogling might be frowned upon in the marriage market, in sober truth, the ogling is just more restrained. In a Greek context, the slave would have been expected to take the passive sexual position, and this context further stretches the simile between marriage and slavery. While it is crucial to note that Juan later protests his feminizing garb and to being circumcised, Byron invites the reader to take the subject position of the slave as well as the position of the married woman (Donna Julia, Lady Adeline). He thereby suggests some sympathy and identification with this role. We also witness Juan being reduced to a sexual object. As Byron understands only too well, human sexuality means ideally that one is both sexual agent and object of desire. If intimacy is to stand for power relations based on equality, agent must become object and vice versa. His ability to identify with the object—to take the female or slave’s role—makes Byron skeptical of the claim that sodomites could clearly be divided into passive and active roles. Identification is the solvent of identity. Juan, moreover, is often actively passive, a collapse that further undermines not only the law of gender, but also the meaning of certain sexual positions. Finally, if even Lord Byron can imagine the vantage point of a slave, these positions are hardly mutually exclusive or ironclad.

If slimming suggested a modicum of mental control over the body, that sense of control was undermined by Byron’s sense that too much sex was depleting his constitution. A few months later in February 1808, Byron was advised by his physician, Pearson, to stop seeing prostitutes. Byron writes, “I am at this moment under a course of restoration by Pearson’s prescription, for a debility occasioned by too frequent Connection” (BLJ 1:158). Two days later, Byron again confesses to Hobhouse that “I am at present as miserable in mind and Body, as Literary abuse, pecuniary embarrassment, and total enervation can make me.—I have tried every kind of pleasure, and it is ‘Vanity’” (BLJ 1:160). Enervation captures his feminized self in terms of nervous disease even as literature and money and sex combine to make him literally effeminate. One of the key evils of masturbation or of too frequent connection was that it prevented the reabsorption of the semen into the male body, thus denying it its strength. Hence, Byron “began to apprehend a complete Bankruptcy of [his] constitution” (BLJ
When excess heterosexuality leads to absence/bankruptcy, the norm begins to look uncannily perverse.

William Munk’s *Roll of the Royal College of Physicians of London* lists two Pearsons: George and Richard. Pearson was likely George (1751–1828), not Richard. Both were practicing in London in 1807–1808 when Byron went for consultation and treatment, but George Pearson was an enthusiastic follower of John Brown, who believed that health was predicated upon the right amount of excitability. Brown adopted “excitability” from his mentor, William Cullen, but generalized it beyond the nervous system. Brown believed that we begin life with a fixed quantity of excitability and that as we are exposed to stimuli, they waste excitability, and this waste was only with great difficulty restored. In his letter to the Reverend John Becher, Byron notes, “I have this moment received a prescription from Pearson, not for any complaint but from debility, and literally *too much Love* (BLJ 1:157). He later confesses to Hobhouse that he is “under a course of restoration by Pearson’s prescription, for a debility occasioned by too frequent Connection. —Pearson sayeth, I have done sufficient with[in] this last ten days, to undermine my Constitution, I hope however all will soon be well” (BLJ 1:158). In George Pearson’s *Principles of Physic* (1801), he notes that, “if the organs be excited too violently, or for too long a time, the excitability becomes so far diminished, that the ordinary excitants to healthy motions cannot produce them; such a state has been called indirect debility” (18). Pearson’s and Brown’s emphasis upon the role of the environment upon the body was very much in keeping with Byron’s sense in *Don Juan* that man was a creature of circumstance. For Brown, life is a reaction to changing stimuli (Risse “Brownian” 46). Byron would have found helpful Brown’s notion that health is the balance of internal excitability and external stimulation. Finally, it was Pearson who convinced Byron that “there is no sterner moralist than pleasure” (3:65). When Byron understands “the quickening of the heart” in terms of “how much it costs us” (2:203), he shows his Brunonian understanding of excitability.

Pearson adopts Brown’s idea that excessive excitement caused “sthenic diseases,” but, if stimulation were increased still further, the store of excitability would become depleted, resulting in deficient excitement, “asthenic diseases,” or indirect debility (*Principles* 18). Brown writes, “Anyone who has lived luxuriously . . . labors not under plethora, but under indirect debility” (1:86). He continues, “To restore vigor, a debilitating plan of cure is to be avoided” (1:86), and he based this idea on the fact that deficient excitement would benefit most greatly by “reproducing the lost quantity of blood” (2:5). Curing asthenia re-
quired the “encrease [of] deficient excitement likewise all over the system” (1:286). Semen, we recall, was thought to be essentially refined blood. Not only did Brown thereby equate the upper classes with disease, but he also paradoxically suggested that the cure to high living, at least in terms of diet, was more high living. Some capitalist fantasy! Brown offers the medicinal equivalent of having one’s cake and eating it, too, and he goes so far as to index abstinence with “not less immoral and irreligious than excess” (2:347). He urged physicians that in cases of debility they must “not to give way to a weakened appetite” (2:7).

Lots of alcohol and opium were crucial to his therapy (Risse “Brunonian Therapeutics” 46). Perhaps this helps to explain much of the popularity and influence of Brown. He was revered by no less than Hegel and Kant, and the 1788 English edition, in runs of a thousand copies, frequently was out of print (Overmier 311). Echoing Brown, Pearson writes, “By still further repeated excitation, the parts gradually lose their power of acquiring excitability” (Principles 16). Although rich eating and drinking were encouraged, Brown warned his patients sternly that “in every degree of debility that high force of the passions, that produced indirect debility, must be avoided” (1:304). Pearson’s and Brown’s debilitated patients could stimulate themselves, as long as they sublimated their stimulation from sex to food.

Brown began to link asthenic diseases to sthenic ones because of his own battles with gout. Under the care of his mentor, William Cullen, he did not get better. Like most physicians, Cullen thought that gout was caused by excess vigor and as a result recommended abstemiousness with regard to food and drink especially. Frustrated with Cullen’s therapy, Brown decided to begin eating and drinking richly, and, coincidentally, Brown’s attacks of gout subsided. He therefore decided that gout was caused by indirect debility rather than excess vigor, and thus his mode of treatment, contrary to received wisdom, was stimulation via a high-protein diet and other stimulants such as alcohol and opium. Brown’s emphasis on stimulation as the route to health was echoed by Sinclair, who insisted that “ascetics are a proof, not of the length of life, which temperance insures, but of the premature old age which abstinence brings upon us” (Appendix 2:85). The pugilist John Jackson, whom Byron referred to as his “corporeal master,” also recommended wine and malt liquor (cited in Sinclair Appendix 2:101–2). Thus, when Byron links Malthus with asceticism—“but certes it conducts to lives ascetic, /Or turning marriage into arithmetic” (15:28)—he implies that the reduction of sex to math will make human beings unhealthy.

Posing as a patient without complaint, as if “complaint” might overly femi-
nize him and undermine his aristocratic status, Lord Byron learns to read libidinous excess as indirect somatic debility, a debility that threatens to make him quite literally effeminate. He will later describe himself in terms of “total enervation” \((BLJ\, 1:160)\). When excess is transformed into a lack, the body’s symbolic economy becomes based in paradox, acting more like a text than a body. Within his epic, Byron wryly notes that although we “sneer” at physicians when in health, “when ill, we call them to attend us,/Without the least propensity to jeer” \((10:42)\). Our skepticism therefore depends upon our condition of health. That Byron originally wrote “they teaze” and changed this to “we teaze” \((Nicholson\, Facsimile\, 25)\) emphasizes the shifting grounds of our skepticism. In any case, since Brunonianism transformed an excess into a lack, it demanded an aesthetic reading of the body and its pleasures, one that might lead to unexpected consequences. In the same way that the dots connecting anatomy to destiny were far from predictable, Byron frustrates narrative teleology, going so far as to allow the contingency of rhyme to move the narrative forward.

Pearson also helps unpack the significance of Byron’s stanza listing a prescription, placing this stanza in the context of Brunonian medicine. Indeed many of the ingredients are designed to treat the indirect debility Byron himself believed he suffered from: too much coitus. In the original draft of the stanza, Byron refers to what looks like “Doctor Rogeson’s prescription” \((S&P\, 3:245)\), and Nicholson’s manuscript facsimile supports this point.\(^3\) In any case, not only do Pearson and Rogeson sound distinctly similar, but both also treated patients who had too much sex. Byron writes,

But here’s one prescription out of many:

“Soda-Sulphat. 3 vi. 3.s. Mannae optim.
Aq. fervent. F. 3.ifs. 3ij. tinct. Sennae
Haustus.” (And here the surgeon came and cupped him)
“R. Pulv. Com. gr. iii. Ipecacuanhæ”
(With more beside, if Juan had not stopped ’em.)
“Bolus Potassae Sulphuret. sumendus,
Et Haustus ter in die capiendus.” \((10:41)\)

Since Brunonianism argued that indirect debility had to be cured by more stimulation, Pearson prescribes a host of stimulants. According to George Pearson’s \textit{Arranged Catalogue of the Articles of Food, Drink, Seasoning and Medicine} \((1801)\), Ipecacuanhæ was the best specific stimulant to “excite secretions in certain organs, and produce evacuations” \((41)\), the best manna was a stimulating laxative,
while “dry cupping” helped to “excite Action or Motion of the Muscular Fibres, Nerves, and Mental Faculties” (32). Indeed, vomiting was particularly good for “exciting peculiar action in particular organs, especially the secretory” (Principles 142). “Secretory” is a polite way of referring to the seminal secretions, nocturnal emissions being their most neutral form, and menstrual evacuations. Carthartics like Mannae Optim (best Manna) also helped to stimulate the secretory system (ibid.). Aqua fervent (heated water), moreover, was a “stimuli of life” (Principles 132–33) and helpful to the operation of other medicines (Catalogue 43) while Sennae Haustus was in small and limited doses another purgative stimulant, meant to increase the circulation and “stimulate the intestines” (44). This combination of excitants is in keeping with Pearson’s comment that “in different parts, different kinds and degrees of action may be excited at the same time by different kinds of excitants” (Principles 17). Given that Rogerson, Queen Catherine’s physician, was called in to treat Lanskoi, another favorite boyish lover of Catherine, Rogerson’s prescription recalls Pearson’s.

Byron’s regimen would also include a solid diet of meat, wines, ales, beers, and gentle exercise (hence his regimen of boxing), along with a “stimulating” drug like opium or hashish. The pill of sulphurated potash was a strengthener or tonic (Arranged 63, 65), and Pearson recommended it “for morbidly diminished power of motion or action to usual healthy stimuli” (Principles 145). Sulphuric acid topped the list of his recommended chemical “external excitants” (Principles 134). Taken together, the ingredients for this prescription are designed to ward off enervation or a return to effeminacy and to restore the body to its original condition of excitability. Indeed, just five stanzas earlier, Byron depicts “the gentle Juan” (10:37) as a shrinking sensitive plant. Sensitive plants in eighteenth-century British erotica were complex metaphors for the penis: because they receded even from a woman’s touch, sensitive plants transformed the penis from a virile member to a “tender thing of feeling” (Harvey 137).

Because Byron worries if Juan’s “withered form” will be “further drain[ed]” (10:38), along with the poet’s description of Juan’s “delicate state” and “wasted cheek” (10:43), this prescription is quite likely not far from the ones Pearson actually dispensed to the poet in 1808. Lest we forget, Juan is at this point trying to satisfy Catherine the Great’s voracious sexual appetites for boyish men, what Byron refers to as “her preference of a boy to men much bigger” (9:72). Brown suggests that excessive evacuations, moreover, threaten to return the body to its prepubescent, effeminate, norm. If effeminacy could be treated through prescription, this suggests that gender was much more mobile in the Romantic pe-
riod than we have acknowledged. To the extent that the Romantics felt the need to “colonize the feminine,” they recognized the essential tenuousness of masculinity, its likelihood of being lost (Richardson 1988 13–25). Such a link between masculinity and loss made Byron more sympathetic to the plight of women.

In 1819, Byron confessed to Douglas Kinnaird that his enervation had returned, and thus in the midst of finishing canto 2 would have had Pearson’s treatment very much on his mind. “The air of this cursed Italy enervates—and disfranchises the thoughts of man after nearly four years of respiration—to say nothing of emission” (BLJ 6:232). Pearson furthermore suggested that the body could be in a state of “Morbid Strength” whereby “ordinary excitants produce extraordinary motions” (Principles 24), and this helped to push strength into the side of pathology. Pearson thus enables Byron to see strength as a pathology and, in so doing, question strength as a necessary gendered good. Finally, since the very worst climate for asthenic diseases is a frigid one, Byron has an excuse to ship Juan to a warmer clime, to England. If the climate caused the body to produce sweat, it would become further weakened by relaxation (Brown 2:8). Hence, in the same way that Pearson suggested that a change of climate and scene were good in cases of debility (Arranged 32), Juan’s doctors recommend immediate travel (10:43).

In light of Trumbach’s suggestion that prostitution was a supplement to sodomy for middle-class men and because Byron has only just been alluding to his love for Edelston in letters to his Cambridge circle, Byron’s wanton display of heterosexual excesses makes it look like he doth protest too much. When coupled with Byron’s sense of himself as literally depleted by heterosexual sex, so much so that a doctor has to be called in to treat him, the homosexual innuendos within his letters perhaps suggest that Byron is playing doctor. Having diagnosed himself with the symptoms of effeminacy, he attributes its cause to too frequent connection with prostitutes when in fact that cause might be a cover for his homosexual desires. When Byron refers to his seminal “Bankruptcy,” might he be alluding to his friend, William Bankes? In 1820, Byron admitted to Murray that he “loved Bankes” (Crompton 358). Here I want to take issue with critics like Jerome Christensen who insist that nothing happened in England so that sodomy can be equated with the journey east. Yet, in order for nothing to have happened, sexuality must be reduced to acts, leaving questions of desire behind. Louis Crompton (1985) and Fiona MacCarthy have argued that Byron did consummate his relationships with boys while in England, even going so far as to suggest the poet had a fling with his servant Rushton
Byron himself declares his skepticism that feeling can be so easily disciplined and categorized: Juan and Haidee gaze at each other with “looks of speechless tenderness,/Which mix’d all feelings, friend, child, lover, brother” (4:26).

If Pearson helped to show Byron how important it was to moderate his sexual desires because indirect debility was not far from death, Samuel Solomon’s *Guide to Health* would reinforce these lessons. Moderation thus could liberate the body from the tyranny of desire even as it situated desire within an aesthetic framework, one that could lead to meaningful choices. Originally published in 1795, Solomon’s book went through sixty editions (*BLJ* note 7:229). Oft quoted is Byron’s unkind remark that Keats’s “writing was a sort of mental masturbation” (*BLJ* 7:225), but Byron gets the substance of his remarks from Solomon. Writing again to John Murray, complaining of the attention Keats is getting from the critics, Byron asks, “Why don’t they review & praise ‘Solomon’s Guide to Health’? it is better sense and as much poetry as Johnny Keates” (*BLJ* 7:229).

Solomon remarked that “the great alteration which takes place in the boy of the male at the time when the semen begins to be formed and collected, is so manifest that it appears to the common observer; for the rise and continuance of the beard and cloathing of the pubes depend thereon; and a wonderful alteration takes place in the voice and passions of the mind, for hitherto crying boy now becomes bold and intrepid, despising even real danger” (94). Although Byron takes great pains to distinguish his own poetry from that of Keats, using his aristocratic status and strength as bulwarks against Keatsian onanism, Solomon reveals that neither aristocracy nor heterosexual sex can prevent emasculation. Even the heterosexual “immoderate use of coition depresses the spirits, relaxes the fibres, and renders the whole frame weak and exhausted” (95).

Although Solomon allows Byron to project his own fears of emasculation upon Keats by solidifying links between Cockneyism and effeminacy, his *Guide* in the end brings the two poets down to the common level of masculinity under threat. Of course, Byron’s boxing background meant that his intimate knowledge of the Cockney underclass might make him too more Keatsian than he wants to admit. Likewise, despite his sense of himself in the stronger, more active role, Byron is not beyond effeminacy. In point of fact because of the connections between luxury and effeminacy, Byron’s social class makes him more vulnerable to effeminacy than Keats, not less. Perhaps this is why he converts nobility to mobility, thus aligning the mob and nobility (Haslett 153). Perhaps
this is also what enables Byron to stand outside of class privilege and to see the normalizing powers of masculine strength.

Solomon also helps explain why Byron refers to eunuchs as the third sex and why he links the third sex with foppery. Byron muses, “From all the pope makes yearly t’would perplex/To find three perfect pipes of the third sex” (4:86). The poet noted that both the sultan and the pope are the “chief encouragers of this branch of trade” (S&P 3:115); by calling them castrators, he foists perversion onto Roman Catholicism even as he connects the Church with wanton Oriental sexuality. Writing about the changes in boys during puberty, Solomon argues that these changes “are prevented by destroying the organs which serve to separate the liquor that produces it: and just observations evince, that the amputation of the testicles at the age of virility has made the beard fall and the puerile voice return! After this, can the power of its operation be questioned?” (94). “Third sex” thus reifies the effeminate boy as a normal middle ground between male and female. Such a middle position implies the inadequacy of the male/female dyad.

Byron reminds us that puberty is a highly variable process, leaving some men like Juan without the most visible sign of manhood—a beard. Byron’s narrator suggests that he can “find no spot where man can rest eye on,/Without confusion of the sorts and sexes” (11:3). The world, he concludes, is at the worst a “glorious blunder” (11:3). In an age that sought to make sex correspond unambiguously with gender, Byron ruptures the mapping of gender onto the body by making masculinity ineffable. All is blunder and confusion. Noteworthy is the fact that he begins a description of Juan as a negation.

Juan was none of these, but slight and slim,
   Blushing and beardless; and yet ne’ertheless
   There was something in his turn of limb,
   And still more in his eye, which seemed to express
   That though he looked one of the Seraphim,
   There lurked a Man beneath the Spirit’s dress.
   Besides, the Empress sometimes liked a boy,
   And had just buried the fair faced Lanskoi. (9:47)

In fact, this entire stanza circles around absence because not only is Juan not like any of the “nervous six-footers” in the previous stanza, but also he resembles the dead and buried Lanskoi. By alluding to the nervous six-footers that Juan is not, Byron makes him an even paler shade of masculinity because nervous men are
already under feminization by nervous diseases. Syncope (the elision of a syllable in ne’ertheless) becomes in Byron’s hands an apt figure for a playful and not entirely negative effeminacy: absence normalizes the line into pentameter. Analogously, does effeminacy normalize men? “Seraphim,” moreover, brings Juan close to the angel of the house that will be firmly enshrined in the Victorian period even as it embroils angelicness within serpenthood. The OED suggests that the seraphim may or may not be aligned with the serpent. Moreover, with his play between “ne’ertheless,” “beardless,” and “still more,” the poet suggest that less is more. My point here is that Byron makes it difficult to localize masculinity and makes it very difficult to map onto a sexed body. The closest linguistic signifier we get to masculinity here is “something,” and even that is under erasure by an angelic metaphor that may hint at the presence of a burning serpent. And if “turn of limb” offers more certainty, that too is compared to a turn in the eye which “seemed to express/. . . there lurked a Man beneath the Spirit’s dress.” Indeed, manhood is itself in drag, dressed in spiritual clothing. Yet there is one further turn. “Turn of limb” verges on the very turn of the verse, and it is perhaps fitting that gender is itself figured as a turn, a trope. The poet was not beyond dressing his prostitutes or lovers like boys.

Byron makes Juan more the object of conquest rather than the agent of it in part to show agency as a gendered fiction: we are more creatures of circumstance than persons of principle. As Byron puts it, “Men are the sport of circumstances, when/The circumstances seem the sport of men” (5:17). The vagaries of assonance reinforced in the rhyme thus drive the narrative of the poem instead of any predetermined plot. But his emphasis upon Juan’s passivity along with his status as victim of seduction rather than active perpetrator of it, is more importantly designed to undermine the biological and legal grounding of activeness in the male body and of passivity in the female body. Initially, he “seem’d/Active, though not so sprightly, as a page” (1:54). The poet’s emphasis on seeming and the fact that his seeming activeness is immediately negated by his not being as active as a lower-class boy erases the power of gender to confer activeness. Moreover, if page is also a servant, Juan’s activeness is placed in the passive role, of being at the beck and call of the upper class. Byron’s depiction of Juan as a nursing infant in the Haidee episode renders him into a most passive object of Haidee’s care, just as Haidee is described as active: “in her air/there was a something which bespoke command” (2:116). Haidee’s “something” presages Juan’s “something”: not only is that thing not anatomical, but also Juan can acquire it from Haidee. Once again, both sexes are accorded the same
“something.” The poet is not just being coy here; the ineffability of that something deliberately undermines the notion that gender can be reduced to an anatomical locus. Trumbach demonstrates how the legal system sought to codify further manhood in terms of activeness. After age fourteen, even the passive participant in sodomy was considered as guilty as his active partner (59). Despite the legal system’s efforts to instantiate a magic age when a boy became a man, and despite its efforts firmly to align activeness and manhood, Byron celebrates the manifold ambiguities of puberty because it enables him to question sexual and gendered norms. Here, this questioning extends to the narratives underwritten by the body, the very idea of anatomic localization of sex.

Byron furthermore has little truck with the idea of female passionlessness, arguing that women have desires equal to or surpassing those of men.45 In making most of the sexual advances come from women, Byron thought he was being true to nature (cited in Wolfson 602). Against a trend toward a biology of incommensurability that dictated that only men need to achieve orgasm in order to procreate and women were passionless, Byron insists that the sexes are evenly passionate.46 Byron not only makes his women characters sexual initiators, but also shows what is lost when women are reduced to sexual purity. Adeline goes through the motions of morality, in the process stultifying into a cardboard character. By contrast, the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke looks hard at Juan after his first nightmare encounter with the Black Friar and determines then that she will masquerade as the friar in order to seduce Juan. The poet most clearly argues against complementarity when he notes that man’s “sympathy” with the female “estate” “has much of selfishness and more suspicion/Their love, their virtue, beauty, education,/But form good housekeepers, to breed a nation” (14:24).

Here Byron suggests that the price of complementarity for women may be too high: femininity entails their domestic enslavement and reduction to breeders. As Donna Julia makes clear, men have the world at their disposal, while women are reducing to falling in love and being undone (1:194). Byron furthermore suggests that women have coded their sexual desires in terms of worship of military figures like Nelson and Wellington (Haslett 196–97). Sexual repression thus demands that both men and women closet their real desires so that they can act on them.

In Don Juan, Byron makes a passing reference to “soft Abernethy” (10:42). The noted physician John Abernethy helped buttress Byron’s skepticism about the complementariness of the two sexes because of Abernethy’s insistence that life does not depend upon organization.47 Although historians of sexuality have
paid a great deal of attention to how sexual desire gets localized in the body and within psychiatry, they have neglected to pay enough heed to how biological sex gets localized in the body.\textsuperscript{48} The resistance to the role and importance of structure and anatomy in the Romantic period by such key figures as Abernethy and Brown points to a larger resistance to the mapping of biological sex onto a specific body part. The gap between specific anatomical parts and biological sex undermines the notion of sexual complementarity. Recall here Byron’s resistance to localizing sex to an anatomic part; his refusal to specify sex in other than “something” allows him simultaneously to draw attention to the logic of metonymy—we want a sign in the place of that something—and to defer that metonymic substitution. The poet thereby asks why we want the figural work of metonymy especially when sex is at issue. Both Brown’s and Abernethy’s theories of the body deliberately resist that move toward metonymy, since they seek to understand the body as a coherent whole rather than in terms of anatomical localization. To the extent that the genitals no longer embody the teleology of sex, sex allegorizes Byron’s overall resistance to epic purpose. Epic once again becomes epicene.

Abernethy argued that in the same way life is superadded to structure, mind is superadded to life (4:95); therefore, humankind “possesses a sensitive, intelligent, and independent mind” (4:95).\textsuperscript{49} Although he did not specify that this was also true for women, the fact that Abernethy thought the source of most diseases was in the common digestive system meant that his pathology had little need for sexual complementarity. Abernethy’s mantra that local diseases are “precipitated by general disorders . . . of which the disordered state of the digestive organs is an evidence, and may have been the cause” (1:196) further suggest skepticism about the absolute and incommensurate difference between men and women. Because John Hunter had shown that even remote parts of the body are in sympathy with one another, Abernethy believed that the “subtle substance” of life pervaded the body, bringing it into one whole (4:91). Thus, he insisted that not even diseased structures “arose from any particular organ. . . . All the digestive organs [are] concerned for during this state” (National Library of Medicine MSB 366 “Notes from Lectures by John Abernethy, 1805”). Byron alludes to Abernethy’s insistence that the digestive system is at the root of most bodily illnesses when he claims that the use of the intellect “depends so much upon the gastric juice” (5:32).\textsuperscript{50} Like John Brown, Abernethy rejected organ localization because the proximate disease was merely a symptom of a larger more generalizable condition.
Abernethy might well be the source of Byron’s cryptic comment about the “confusion of sorts and sexes” (11:3). He referred to beards as “delusive signs” (4:175) and argued, based on John Hunter’s claims, that “those occurrences which denote the sexual character are to be considered as the effects of sympathies existing between remote parts of the body, which like other instances of sympathy, are liable to occasional failure and considerable variation” (4:175). Beards thus get dissolved into corporeal sympathy. Abernethy further repeated Hunter’s claim that “when age has annulled the sexual powers, their appropriate external evidences are not only discontinued, but sometimes those of an opposite character are displayed” (4:176). The fact that women after menopause grew facial hair meant that even beards might be misleading. He continues, “The difference of form and character between the male and female of most animals, is, in general, considerable and striking, and denoted by circumstances very diversified but not reducible to any general rules. Yet this difference does not seem a consequence of necessity: for there are some species of animals in which it scarcely can be said to exist; and in others the female is the larger and stronger, partaking more of what we usually deem the masculine character” (4:176). Although sexual difference exists, it cannot be codified. Nor are these differences necessary or essential.

Byron would also have agreed with Abernethy’s assessment that Gall and Spurzheim had vastly underestimated the role of “education, habit, and association” when they urged that we equate the form of the head with innate propensities (4:364). As he put it elsewhere, “Nature may have made us, she has at least given us great powers of forming and fashioning ourselves” (4:185). Abernethy anticipated “nothing but mischief” from their “Physiognomy and Cranioscopy” (4:364), and he did so because he felt that their stress on specific organization overlooked larger sympathetic relations between body parts. It is surely no accident that Byron understands Spurzheim’s “philoprogenitiveness,” what Spurzheim referred to as a specific and localizable organ of parenting, to mean a love of the act of generation. Byron wrote, “For my part, /I think that ‘Philogenitiveness’ is—/Now here’s a word quite after my own heart, . . . methinks that ‘Philogenitiveness’ /Might meet from men a little more forgiveness” (12:22). In a poem whose hero believes in serial erotic encounters instead of domestic stability, Byron’s perversion of Spurzheim’s organ of heteronormativity into an organ of sexual bliss largely without reproduction reinforces the values of pleasure rather than of function. Then and only then can it be a word after his own heart. Pondering the strangeness of the propagation of life, Byron
mused that “a bubble of Seed which may be spilt in a whore’s lap—or in the Or-
gasm of a voluptuous dream—might (for aught we know) have formed a Caesar
or a Buonaparte” (BLJ 9:47). Once again the poet emphasizes waste and plea-
sure rather than procreation. Although Haidee does give birth to Juan’s only
child, she is unable to explore her philoprogenitiveness for long before both she
and her baby succumb to illness.

In the same breath that Byron mentions “soft Abernethy,” Byron refers to
“mild Baillie” (BLJ 10:42). Baillie was not only called in to examine the poet’s
club foot, but also became the poet’s physician. Lady Byron tried to get him to
testify to Byron’s insanity or even perhaps to his sodomitic tendencies. Along
with Abernethy, Hunter, Brown, and Sinclair, Baillie, too, reinforced Byron’s
skepticism about sexual complementarity. Matthew Baillie argued that the en-
larged clitoris is a natural defect (1793 283). “At birth, the clitoris in such a case
is often larger than the penis of a child of the same age” (284). He elaborates,
“It has a well formed prepuce and glans, together with a fissure at its extremity,
so as to resemble almost exactly the external appearance of the male organs. Fe-
male often been baptized for males” (284). The fact that men-midwives and
physicians could not always tell the difference between an elongated clitoris and
a penis can be partly attributed to a one-sex model, which made the clitoris an
analogous penis rather than its own organ. Tellingly, Baillie moves from ana-
tomic evidence to belief when he claims that the “clitoris enlarges as child
grows, but I believe, not in the same proportion as the penis would do” (285).
When inverted, the vagina sometimes allowed the child to be mistaken for a
hermaphrodite (279).

If women were baptized for men, men could also be mistaken for women.
Baillie notes that “labia joined together by common skin” so that “the appear-
ance of the labia is lost entirely” (286). This defect, however, can be “remedied
by art” (286). Baillie then describes a woman with a remarkably masculine look,
with plain features, but no beard (Appendix 139). “The labia were more pendu-
lous than usual, and contained each of them a body resembling a testicle of
moderate size” (Appendix 139–40). Far from being unambiguous signs of sex,
the genitals were prone to “natural defects.” Byron’s club foot made him espe-
cially sensitive to natural defects. To underscore the fluidity of the human body
further, Baillie noted that “habit has considerable influence in regulating our
sensations, as well as many other functions of the body . . . it can even change
the nature of sensations, rendering those which were originally agreeably indif-
f erent, or perhaps even disagreeable; and, on the contrary, rendering those at
length pleasant which were originally disagreeable to us” (*Lectures* 137). Baillie insists that the bounding line between nature and culture was fine indeed, so much so that habit could have anatomical effects. In sum, Abernethy and Baillie demonstrate that even the genitals are a kind of clothing to the body in that they have the potential to hide the body’s sex. Beneath Byron’s fascination with cross-dressing, then, is a body that refuses to unambiguously take on sex. This is exacerbated by the fact that ambiguous genitalia can be considered “natural defects,” which only makes the ground of sex all the more tenuous. If sex made bodies intelligible, it also threatened to falsify bodies into neat categories.

The Roman poet Horace further enables Byron to step outside of complementarity and compulsory heterosexuality. From the beginning of the poem, when Byron alludes to Horace’s having made “medias res” the “heroic turnpike road” (1:6), Byron alludes to Horace in *Don Juan*. In 1820, he revives his interest in Horace and publishes his *Hints from Horace*, his translation of Horace’s *Ars Poetica*. Perhaps reading Horace was literally part of his treatment from the enervation from four years in the hot climate of Italy, not to mention his emissions. John Brown recommends wit as an additional stimulant for debility; in particular, the odes of Horace. Brown waxes, “How fine was that feeling in Julius Caesar Scaliger, when he declared he would rather be the author of Horace’s few stanzas of Lydia and Telephus. . . . How delightful must the feelings of Horace have been, in whose works every Ode is an effort of the most beautiful, and, frequently, of the most sublime, conceptions of human genius!” (1:304–5). In light of Horace’s refusal to commit to a single woman as well as his serial encounters with women and the boys Gyges and Ligurinus, Horace as cure could easily become poison. Even Adam Smith noted that the “gallantry of Horace [is] always agreeable” (29). To which we might ask: even when directed toward boys?

In keeping with the eighteenth-century’s understanding of Horace as a classical model of aristocracy, Byron identifies himself with Horace. Horace not only defines the summer and autumn of one’s life as the proper time for erotic pursuits of both men and women—summer and autumn being the analogous season to puberty—but also in advocating retirement from public life as a gentlemanly pursuit of manhood, he and his Sabine farm could undermine the gendering of the separate spheres since the private life was not necessarily antithetical to manhood. In book II, ode 5, Horace notes that Lalage is not yet “ready for the obligations of a wife,” and he invokes oncoming autumnal imagery to suggest it will soon be time. “Soon vari-colored autumn/will tinge for you these
blackish clusters/to purple red” (Alexander 63). In his “Epistle to Augustus,” Horace, moreover, urged that “what they learned erstwhile as beardless boys/Must now be put away with other toys” (Kraemer 369). To the extent that privacy and retirement could become legitimate male pursuits, the idea of complementarity could be shown to be incoherent. Horace makes retirement from the public sphere and ironic distance suitable for masculinity. Byron thus quotes Horace, “‘Beatus ille procul!’ from negotiis” (14:77): blest is he who is free from business.

In the same way that Horace deflated the epic values of warfare, replacing martial battles (grandia) with erotic ones, Lord Byron turns away from battle. In book I of his odes, Horace announced to Agrippa that, whereas Varius would celebrate his courage and martial achievements, “modest is the Muse who presides over my peaceful lyre,/forbidding that I praise illustrious Caesar and you, Agrippa,/diminishing them by the defect of my wit” (Ode 6, 12).54 Horace then turns to “virgins in combat” (ode 6) and argues that this change of focus does not in any way diminish the ode. Like Horace, Byron lists military men only to claim that they are “not at all adapted to my rhymes” (1:3). Byron then considers his virgins in combat, arguing similarly that the epic form is not diminished by a turn to erotic matters considered private. As Horace claimed in his Ars Poetica that “Nature shapes first our inner thoughts to take the bent of circumstance” (400), so, too, does Byron insist upon the circumstantial in Don Juan.

But perhaps the most crucial lesson Byron would learn from Horace concerned the role and value of the middle. Byron credits Horace with having taught him that the “medias res” is the “heroic turnpike road” (1.6). Writing on love, Byron later notes the many “ways that lead there, be they near or far,/Above, below, by turnpike great or small” (9:80). Byron sexualizes turnpikes and hints at the body’s many orifices, above and below, near and far. Spatial metaphors level any moral distinctions between them; all are equally sacred. Moreover, in canto 6, stanza 17, Byron writes, “In short, the maxim for the amorous tribe is/Horatian, ‘Medio tu tutissimus ibis,’” (6:17). While the line “in the middle is the safest path” comes from Ovid’s Metamorphoses, and not Horace, the fact that Horace is now twice credited with the middle suggests that “middle” must be a kind of code. Crompton has demonstrated that among his Cambridge circle, Horace was a code for bisexuality (146). Given that the OED lists intermediate and intervening as possible definitions of “middle,” I suggest that it encodes both puberty and bisexuality. Even in Ancient Rome, puberty not only cuts across gender with the younger male looking more feminine (C.
Edwards 78), but also if Horace defines puberty in terms of summer and autumn, puberty is literally the middle of one’s life. Buffon also insisted that puberty was a middle stage between childhood and manhood. In his “Hints from Horace,” Byron translated Horace’s sense of the stages of one’s life thusly, “Till time at length the mannish tyro weans,/And prurient vice outstrips his tardy teens!” (McGann 1: 297, lines 221–22). Byron, of course, makes Juan a mannish novice, and his coupling of tyro and weaning further suggests masculinity to be a developmental process. By converting mannishness from a noun to an adjective, he underscores that manhood is about process. “Middle” further suggests for the “amorous tribe” a position outside conventional heterosexuality: neither part of the norm nor completely outside of it. I would add that “middle” emphasizes perspective and relationality in ways that sexual acts and identities don’t. The value that Byron places upon digression teases the Horatian middle beyond its decorous restraint. Hence, where Horace divides life into clear phases—for, example, beardlessness and beyond—Byron muddies the distinctions between them with phrases like “Mannish tyro.”

Middle thus is code for puberty and bisexuality. By highlighting puberty, Byron is able to undermine the logic of two incommensurate sexes and suggest the costs of a mandatory heterosexuality. Thinking about bisexuality and puberty together allows Horace and Byron to insist upon change, that any rules about sexuality are contingent on the stage or season of life that the person is in. Such contingency undermines the possibility of a secure sexual or gendered identity. Puberty further suggests that bisexuality is itself natural in that in as much as the body itself moves from one sex to another, it must, like Tiresias, understand multiple sexual objects. In fact, Byron invokes Tiresias:

There is an awkward thing, which much perplexes,
Unless like wise Tiresias we had proved
By turns the difference of the several sexes:
Neither can show quite bow they would be loved. (14:73)

Men can be like Tiresias to the extent that they recall that in puberty bodies have literally shifted from one sex to another. In getting his audience to sympathize with both the conditions of men and women, and in showing how their conditions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, Byron has been trying to get us to identify with and be like Tiresias. Because “proved” recalls Byron’s own having been “proved the soft condition,” Byron announced his own Tiresias-like transformations. But, whereas Tiresias was alternately man and woman,
Byron’s insistence upon “several” obscures the number of sexes at the same time that it hints that even this sage’s experiences might be limited. Finally, Byron underscores that despite any differences, the knowledge of the several boils down to the very same thing: “neither can show quite how they would be loved.” The italicized “how” hints that there might be ways of love that cannot be shown. By ending his stanza with “upon whose back ’tis better not to venture” (14:73), he begins to show us what cannot be shown. Because the “how” is so various in sexual object, sexual aim, and sexual act, Byron highlights the naturalness and polymorphisms of perversity.

Although Horace insists that one must conduct oneself in ways appropriate to one’s season in life, he also makes it clear that while rules may be rules, not even he, nor his ironic speakers, are immune to their infraction (Arkins 113). Thus, despite Horace’s suggestion that amorousness is itself appropriate for the middle—telling Venus that he knows he is too old and “neither girls nor boys now delight” (4:1)—Horace declares that “in my nocturnal dreams I now/hold you [Ligurius] captive” (4:1). Like Horace, Byron adopts the pose of the detached viewer only to make clear that he himself is not above his own critique. Because boys and women were somewhat interchangeable objects in Roman love poetry, and because in puberty effeminate males became strong men, Horace’s sense that in summer and fall a certain sexual playfulness is appropriate does not prevent him from chasing after Ligurius in his dreams even though he is in winter. That Horace refers to his “nocturnal dreams” as the time he spends chasing the cruel Ligurius connects homosexual desire once again with puberty. Nor is Byron immune from sexual behavior he satirizes. As he put it in “The Edinburgh Ladies’ Petition to Doctor Moyes, and his Reply,” love is “subject to no jurisdiction,/But burns the fiercer for restriction” (McGann 1:197). In Greece, Byron would soon encounter his own cruel Ligurius, Loukas Chalandritsanos, and he laments the fact that “it be my lot/To strongly—wrongly—vainly—love thee still” (cited in Gross 147). As Byron imagines it, love chafes against all forms of social restriction, even to the point of eroticizing restriction itself. He would also there encounter his own Horatian Lycus, Nicolo Giraud (see MacCarthy 129).

But Byron’s Horatian code is even more specific. Byron owns Richard Hurd’s 1766 edition of Horace (Munby 1:219). Hurd lambasted readers of Horace’s epistles for not recognizing that Horace’s “seeming posture of neglect and inconnexion” (ix) was really a careful method of didacticism. The “wrong
explication” of it derived from “inattention to the method of it” (iii). Moreover, critics have “never looked for, or could find a consistency of disposition in the method” (iv). Method, it turns out, is a crucial term in Byron, and he used the term “méthode” to indicate sodomy (Crompton 1985 129, 145; Gross 136; Dyer). Seen in this light, Hurd’s “inconnexion” has a decidedly sexual resonance to it, recalling Byron’s illness due to too frequent connexion. If for Hurd, method is a code for a hidden didacticism that is screened by a seemingly haphazard epistolary method, for Byron, method with an “e” is a double screen for a dissident sexuality that stands outside of the usual method. Hurd wants his readers to pay attention to the unities of Horace so that method equals a kind of formalist attention. Byron, in turn, takes a method that stands for a unity, making that unity stand for puberty and the biological transition from one sex to another and for bisexuality. Hurd’s formal unity thus takes on the bent of perversion because in puberty one can choose multiple sexual objects and because the very idea of unity is necessarily fractured between mobile biological states and multiple sexual objects. The méthode, then, of Byron’s Don Juan, one might say, is to show that within any seeming unity are multiplicities and heterodoxa that threaten to undermine the very idea of unity. From the vantage of puberty, sex seems more of a position, a stance, a way of looking at the world, than an identity. Although Don Juan coheres around the idea of puberty, puberty is an unstable center that has the potential to undermine the naturalness of masculine strength and the normality of heterosexual desire.

If puberty and bisexuality provide Byron with a place to intervene in compulsory heterosexuality and gender complementarity, they also help him to see the limits of connecting sexuality with identity. Moreover, insofar as he could stand outside any one sexual identity, he could see the extent to which locating sexuality within identity was dangerous in that it allowed desire to become more effectively policed. As the law in the eighteenth century increasingly narrowed its definition of “sodomite” to capture sexual acts between men from a label that originally encompassed all forms of sex that did not lead to intercourse, it struggled to find ways of making sodomitic desire visible. The legal proof required for sodomy was both penetration and emission (Crompton 1985 21), and emission was very difficult to prove in an era before DNA testing and blue dresses. Thus, undercover agents had to resort to the lesser charge of “assault with an attempt to commit sodomy,” and this could be proven by a solicitation invited by a plainclothes man who had gone to a homosexual rendezvous precisely to
entrap someone (Crompton 21). Because of the need to make semen biologically present to convict for sodomy, the law turned to an effeminate identity and the molly house, collapsing male effeminacy with sodomitic desire. Trumbach documents that, although many men and boys charged with sodomy and sodomitic assault showed no conventional signs of effeminacy, they were represented as “mollies” at trial (59–62). Acts did not provide enough prosecutions. Identities did. Because the Romantic period is the one in which effeminacy is pushed closer to sodomy (Elfenbein 1999 21), proving that one was effeminate became a crucial step in proving sodomy (Trumbach 101). My point here is that, as sexual acts get consolidated into identities, perverse sexualities become more easily policed. At the same time, this condensation of desire into identity could be useful to a coterie of sodomites who could turn to an elaborate code, as Byron and his Cambridge circle did, to escape surveillance and to begin to recognize the potential for sodomitical desire in others.

Byron’s example thus suggests a new approach to the acts versus identity debate in the historiography of sexuality. Rather than understanding the absence of sexual identity as an ontological given before 1869 when the word homosexual was invented, we need to think about the obstacles and disincentives to thinking about a sexual identity. Because one could not claim a homosexual identity for fear of capital punishment, this means that homophobia is almost a baseline position. To the extent that homophobia becomes a necessary screen for homoerotic desire, the presence of homophobia does not discount the presence of homophilia. Because homophobia could mask homophilia, the denial of identity can paradoxically become a claiming of it. Moreover, since puberty suggested a necessary incommensurability between biological sex and the body, not to mention gender and the body, the very idea of a stable identity based on gender and sex becomes a problem. To read gender and sex in Byron is to be reminded that, although we consider the penis and vagina to be unarguable signs of sexual difference, which in turn implies incommensurability between the genders, the genitals then could not encapsulate difference because of the recent shift from one sex to two as well as the emphasis upon secondary sexual differentiation as real differentiation. Medical theories of the body that emphasized vitality throughout the body rather than the localization of vitality further undercut the idea that sex could be localized in the body. These gaps then imply that sexuality cannot be coextensive with identity since identity is itself inchoate during puberty. The gap between the gendered body that is clothed as masculine or feminine and the
physical body that is not yet fully masculine or feminine, moreover, is a place where gender distinctions unravel. Our acceptance of genital difference as the sign of difference, then, has come at the high price of forgetting the body as a site of dynamic change.

Byron’s emphasis on the middle reminds us that in the Romantic period masculinity was caught between prostitution, on the one hand, and the effeminate sodomite, on the other. Masculinity is thus caught between two poles of perversion. Byron shows that rather than being an either/or decision, one could choose both, thereby displacing the erotic couple and replacing them with triangularity. My attention to the triangulation of masculine identity that takes place within puberty, a transition that Buffon thought lasted for twenty years and one that always threatened to return further supports Marjorie Garber’s point that in imagining the erotic triangle, Girard and Sedgwick reduce the erotic choices to either/or instead of both.\(^57\) In triangulated desire, a rival’s desire rather than the love object itself sets into motion a complex power dynamic that captures societal relationships of power. As a form of triangulation ontologically prior to the traffic in women, puberty allows us to see how, for example, a feminized male could legitimately choose as erotic object between another feminized male and/or a masculinized male and/or a woman (Garber *Vice Versa* 426–29). Even worse, because an effeminate male might make as his erotic object another effeminate male, especially since the effeminate male is ontologically prior to the manly male, Girard and Sedgwick occlude the fact that bisexuality constitutes the dynamics of human sexuality because that sexuality contains ambiguities and interstices. As Garber puts it, these models “prove only that the shortest distance between two points is a triangle” (*Vice Versa* 428).\(^58\)

Triangulation also made Byron increasingly resistant to the idea of a sexual identity in part because desire for him did not seem fixed into any one kind of sexual object. Brown’s sense of excitability throughout the body not only undermined the power of anatomical localization to pinpoint sexuality in the body, but it also opened the door to gender equality because structures such as the penis and clitoris were only metonymies for excitability. Of course, for sexuality to subsume identity, metonymy must enable the equation of a specific bodily part with an erotic practice and consequently an erotic practice with identity. More to the point, triangulation implies that desire is subsumed beneath a web of relationships that undermine the neat labels of homosexual or heterosexual, male, female, sodomite, and molly. To the extent that one embraced the dy-
namism of bodily sex, one gained the capacity to see beyond normalizing categories of sex and gender. Hence, Lord Byron not only repeatedly figures manliness as a garment, but also unexpectedly explores the positive dimensions of effeminacy. Insofar as Byron’s epic frustrates purpose/teleology, it is especially fitting that he celebrates sexual acts that resist the finality of reproduction. Moreover, puberty enables him to think in terms of sexual positions that shift depending upon one’s vantage point rather than in terms of sexual identities. In this way, identification can be a solvent for identity, even when that identity is aristocratic strength.