

Excerpt from Don Juan, Canto the First
George Gordon, Lord Byron

Wedded she was some years, and to a man
Of fifty, and such husbands are in plenty;
And yet, I think, instead of such a ONE
'T were better to have TWO of five-and-twenty,
Especially in countries near the sun:
And now I think on 't, 'mi vien in mente,'¹
Ladies even of the most uneasy virtue
Prefer a spouse whose age is short of thirty.

'T is a sad thing, I cannot choose but say,
And all the fault of that indecent sun,
Who cannot leave alone our helpless clay,
But will keep baking, broiling, burning on,
That howsoever people fast and pray,
The flesh is frail, and so the soul undone:²
What men call gallantry, and gods adultery,
Is much more common where the climate's sultry.

Happy the nations of the moral North!
Where all is virtue, and the winter season
Sends sin, without a rag on, shivering forth
('T was snow that brought St. Francis³ back to reason);
Where juries cast up what a wife is worth,
By laying whate'er sum in mulct⁴ they please on
The lover, who must pay a handsome price,
Because it is a marketable vice.

Source for text: Project Gutenberg EBook of Don Juan, by Lord Byron. *Project Gutenberg*. Project Gutenberg, 6 June 2007. Accessed 14 September 2015. Web. <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/21700/21700-h/21700-h.htm>>.

Notes by Adam McCune, drawing on notes by Alice Levine

Alice Levine, ed. *Byron's Poetry and Prose*. New York: Norton, 2010. 400.

¹ Italian: "it comes to mind."

² "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41, KJV).

³ Butler's *Lives of the Saints* reports the legend that "the blessed Francis, being strongly solicited one day by the emotions of the flesh, pulled off his clothes and... plunged his naked body into a great heap of snow" (qtd. *The Complete Works of Lord Byron* [Paris, 1835] 682n; cf. Marchand, *Byron's Letters and Journals* 4: 28n). In Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1684), the title character jokingly refers to St. Francis's "wife of snow" (Part II, Canto I, 374). Byron originally wrote "brought St. Anthony to reason," but later remembered that he was thinking of St. Francis and requested the correction (emended from Gutenberg text by Adam McCune, following Levine).

⁴ Fine (in this case, for adultery).