

WITHOUT REGRET

by M. J. Brown 

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Elle vous suit partout

Byron, Don Juan and elsewhere

PROLOGUE

i

For naught, the world is often thought to turn,
But 'tis not so, my learned reader; friend.
Too many lives are like the dying fern
Despoil'd by drought before their natural end.
Too many souls who simply do not learn
That cowardice of mind will surely rend
Apart the best and worthiest of hearts.
Be resolute! Fear not life's poison darts.

ii

Most bottles now are "non-refillable".
"Do not re-use", the labels often say.
We see, "rejectable", "disposable",
Presented as the buzz words of our day.
This hedonistic creed is suitable
For all. You need not work or cry; just play.
What has become of life's most treasured pearls?
True love is lost. The boys just fuck the girls.

iii

"Uncouth! Deplorable!", you shout. Agreed.

You'll find no quarrel with me on that account.
If only I could make the whole world heed
Its foolishness. Alas, its tantamount
To heresy to question those who cede
So easily life's treasures. Life's sweet fount
Of highs and lows is run so quickly dry.
How sad it is! They know not even why.

iv

But misjudge not the purpose of my verse.
Relax, for I will not impose on thee
With sanctimonious advice, or worse
Than that, put forth in jeopardy
My work; while making its reception terse.
This story's just a fleeting memory.
It's sometimes funny; sometimes sad. Betimes
You'll find, the grammar's bad. Most times, it rhymes.

CANTO I

i

The world is filled with people who have dreams
 Beyond their means; but only silly folks
Like me would dare to put to pen what seems
 So irrefutably will fail. I coax
Each rhyme. My mind goes blank, and then it teems
 With wasted agitation. Error pokes
Its head from each new draft. Ability
Eludes my words as you must surely see.

ii

But be that as it may, we shall press on.
 To look a fool to those who never try
What they can't do, is only to have drawn
 The laughter of a bigger dolt.
The shy and timid sort is just as bad. Each dawn
 Brings forth a challenge we must meet. To fly
Away from it is but a coward's route.
This sage advice, my hero won't dispute.

iii

My hero's name belies his ancestry.

Jose Yucknanaches is what he's called —
Pronounced (not easily you'll quickly see)

"Yuck n?n ? chez." When young, he was appalled
With this cruel twist of fate. The dysphony

His surname brings is clear. What's more, it galled
Him to the core to think that he, a shrewd,
True-blue American had been thus screwed.

iv

Jose was always puzzled who had played

This dirty trick. No parent should invent
Such punishment. To him, the name conveyed
Iberian or Portuguese descent.

His golden hair quite clearly would persuade

One otherwise. He was an accident
of passion from an unknown father's past.
When two days old, he touched his mother last.

v

To most of those who kept our friend, he meant
An extra welfare cheque; no more. Jose
Was glibly passed from house to house. It rent
His youthful heart in two for him to play
This role. Yet those who could have helped prevent
Such pain, just told the boy to go away.
And so his sorrow grew from year to year.
Things got so bad, he'd nothing left to fear.

vi

When one year short of half a score, and half
Of that again, our poor Jose had met
The end of all that he could bear. A laugh,
A hug, a warm embrace — he'd never get
These things. The magic of a Hebrew staff
Would scarcely be enough to bring regret
Upon the slime who'd brought him to this point.
The devil's work, his blood would soon anoint.

vii

He took a gun from out its resting place.

His so-called father pro'bly left it there
To help ensure success in just this case.

He clasped the cold black steel. He did not care
About the pain that he would shortly face.

A single shot would be his only prayer.
He had no friends; much less the will to fight.
He left that house and walked into the night.

viii

The air was cold. A strangely silent wind
Sent shivers up his spine. He'd worn no coat.
There was no need for that. He'd not rescind

His plan. He'd go alone. He'd leave no note
Behind. By now the trees ahead had thinned

So that a cliff he saw. It was remote.
The ideal spot to close the book of life.
A shot rang out to end our hero's strife.

ix

A bluish light escaped the waning moon.
Its glow revealed a river just below
A granite cliff. Throughout this stream were strewn
Great rocks that bore a froth as white as snow.
Yet not one soul was left to hear the tune
The water played. Then off the high plateau
A body rolled. With increased speed the young
Lad plunged until the waves he was among.

x

A raging torrent swirled about the limp
And lifeless form. From rock to rock the boy
Was fiercely tossed. The Devil did not skimp
With punishment that night. He seemed a toy,
Our dead Jose, for Satan's wat'ry imp.
What life was left, the river would destroy.
And as the crescent moon began to flee,
The corpse began its journey to the sea.

xi

The details of the trip I need not cite.

The odds he'd reach the bay were one in ten
Times ten, and yet he was swept on. Despite
The pounding current's strength, our citizen
Of Hell moved swiftly forward through the night.

By dawn he'd somehow reached the sea, and then —
A miracle occurred. The Devil fled.
Jose, with life, was once more slowly wed.

xii

The rising sun soon warmed the sand below
That mound of flesh. As life returned, Jose
Began to stir. At first he moved one toe,
And then he moved his foot. Without delay
He tried each battered limb. He soon would know
How well his swollen eyes could see. Would they
Betray him now? His lids were slow to part;
And what he saw, did nearly stop his heart.

xiii

A female form, before the young lad stood.

She seemed to be the matriarch that he
Had never known. How old was she? He could
Not tell her age. He'd guess that thirty-three
Was somewhere near the mark. A leafy hood
Of shadow masked her face. He hoped that she
Would come to him; he could not get to her.
She seemed to understand, and did concur.

xiv

Remember now, our suffering hero's age.

He'd barely reached his teens one year before.
What's more, his weary mind could not assuage
The pain that spread from every cut and sore.
Despite all this, he sensed another page
Of life had turned; a thought he'd not ignore.
He reached to touch his living reverie;
And her response, showed more than sympathy.

xv

It's hard for you or I to understand,
 (And it was harder still for poor Jose)
To understand how young Jose had spanned
 The gulf from boy to man in just one day.
Yet none the less, emotions he'd not planned
 Appeared. His thoughts were thrown in disarray.
A sensual woman's touch he'd never known;
Much less the other things he'd soon be shown.

xvi

This mixture made of pain and virgin fire,
 Then got the better of our wretched friend.
Sleep grabbed Jose away from all his mire,
 And gave him dreams he'd not misapprehend.
Through slumber, young Jose would soon acquire
 The strength so critical for him to mend.
Three times across the sky the sun then crept.
It was that long the young Van Winkle slept.

xvii

Jose awoke on Wednesday morn. He'd met
 The fourth of June; the year was sixty-nine.
A clump of wild violets, still wet
 With morning dew, adorned a silver stein
Upon the stand beside his bed. A set
 Of hand embroidered sheets helped warm his spine.
A bright and pleasant room he was within;
A better place to be than where he'd been.

xviii

The crackling sound of cooking bacon gave
 Sporadic proof that he was not alone.
His room soon filled with smells that made him crave
 The food which he had missed while lying prone.
Who caused this tempting, aromatic wave
 Of hunger would, for now, remain unknown.
Jose sat up. He saw an open door.
The source of all these smells he'd now explore.

xix

From out the covers one leg slowly swung.

The other joined its friend upon the floor.

With weak and wobbly steps, Jose's hamstrung

Appendages propelled him toward the door.

He pushed aside this wooden guard that hung

Across his path. A hallway stretched before

His eyes and ran for fifteen feet ahead.

Beyond the hall, a cheery kitchen spread.

xx

It took him twice the time he'd usually take,

But perseverance fin'ly won his goal.

Jose walked weakly to the stove where steak

And bacon cooked. A fire of wood and coal

Brought life unto some bubbling johnnycake.

The merits of such food I'll not extol.

Just let us say that our Jose ate all.

A nearby chair gave him a place to fall.

xxi

A belly full of food, a good night's sleep,
The feeling of security he'd found;
These strange but welcome friends he hoped to keep.
With hazel eyes he scanned the room around
His wooden throne. The walls were blue; not deep
Or royal shades, but powder blue. All gowned
In white, an open casement greeted Sol,
While through the damaged screen a house fly stole.

xxii

Beneath his feet, a hardwood floor out-stretched.
Its brownish silken finish amply showed
The hues which linseed oil baths had etched.
Behind Jose, a well worn broom was stowed.
His plaster sky was white, yet wood smoke sketched
The faintest scenes where otherwise it'd snowed.
Most trivia of modern life were gone.
Hand pumps and oil lamps he came upon.

xxiii

Amongst these divers sights and smells, the scent
Of new-mown hay crept forth. No perfumed maid,
Nor just-shaved gigolo, could compliment
The nose with such a gift. A chaste brigade
Of Avon's purest belles could not invent
Eau de cologne of a more fragrant grade.
The smell of fresh cut grass is not forgot;
A single whiff — and boy from man is wrought.

xxiv

Perhaps 'twas more than just the smell that bade
Jose to rise before he'd planned. Premiers
Could his perception well afford. The lad
Was often struck with thoughts beyond his years.
Insights he had at twelve, would take a chiliad
For me. Unconsciously, he knew his fears
Stemmed from the allegory which, one day,
Creation's muse would write within this hay.

xxv

The story's oft been told, but nature tells
 It best. Alfalfa's life and death presents
A metaphor of man. In youth there dwells
 A growing hope, imbued with redolence;
But then the scythe of puberty soon spells
 The death of clover's freshest flow'rs. Torments
And pain abound at such a time as this.
Jose had felt the blade, but missed death's kiss.

xxvi

This metamorphic juncture on the road
 Of life, is where Jose then stood to rest.
Prepotent salves of sun and wind bestowed
 New life upon the fresh-cut stalks. The test
Of time would show the skill with which he'd sowed
 His seeds; yet harvesting he'd like the best.
With proper care, he'd harvest food unthought.
Neglect, would see a worthless harvest wrought.

xxvii

'Twas these amorphous thoughts that wandered through
His head. Instinctively, he found the door
Through which these smells had made their first debut.
As if a dog in hot pursuit, he bore
Upon his prey. The dew was gone; the view
Was not. A luscious growth of ferns, did more
Than wood could do, to frame the distant sea.
The path he trod, led past a hemlock tree.

xxviii

The sun had midway run its race a crossed
The sky. All life below (both animal
And plant) could feel the blooming warmth embossed
Upon its flesh. The day seemed magical;
Jose felt good. So good — he'd almost lost
The purpose of his quest. Though gradual
The gradient, a growing scent returned.
Again, Jose with searching was concerned.

xxix

It was a quarter mile, maybe more

And maybe less, before the trail gave way
To what he'd hoped to find. The meadow wore
A blossom covered coat of half-cut hay.

A figure with a scythe, endured no chore

It seemed. Each swing helped smoother to portray
The farmer's skill. Jose moved silently,
While listening to the sickle's melody.

xxx

Before Jose was seen, he'd closed the gap

To only fifty feet. About that time
A nesting pheasant felt it best to flap
(Most noisily I'll add) away. No rhyme
Could move one's eyes so fast. This thunderclap

Of wings had brought Jose and Ann (for I'm
Quite prone to overuse my daughter's name)
Each eye to eye. Surprise did both inflame.

xxx*i*

Jose knew not, this woman that he saw.

The lad was still agape from finding not
A man. The converse proved less true; the awe
He felt, was not reciprocal. He got
A terse, "'It's you," from out this tall macaw. —

Perhaps my metaphor's unjust. 'Tis fraught
With slurs galore upon my parrot friends.
Their speech and looks both follow better trends.

xxx*ii*

With these two words, Jose was fast dismissed.

The scythe returned with vengeance to its task.
This Ann (*Ms. Ann* insisted she!) could twist

A turnip and get blood to fill a cask,
Or maybe even three. A Bolshevist

Jose'd once met, was more benign to ask
A question of; yet ask is what he did.
He asked her name, but 'cross deaf ears it slid.

xxxiii

One benefit Jose's cruel youth had earned,
Was tolerance of both indifference and
Abuse. Thus armed with his sad past, he'd learned
Insensitivity did not demand
Revision. 'Twas this trait, that now concerned
Ms. Ann. She didn't like his quick, offhand
Dismissal; aimed by him at her rebuff.
Jose's fourth question proved to be enough.

xxxiv

She stopped her work, and looked him in the eye.
Her voice held more authority than you
Would say her sixty years could safely buy.
The terse, antagonistic tones she threw
His way, left little doubt to mollify
The loathsome disregard Ms. Ann felt due.
At least her words helped clear the recent past.
Jose's amnesia was erased at last.

xxxv

She told of how her daughter'd first passed by
His lifeless corpse, at Inlet Bay; a bay
The Strait of Juan de Fuca does supply.

(This brings to mind fond thoughts I now replay,
Of yet another Juan.) To satisfy

Herself that he was dead, she thought to stay
And check his pulse or such, for signs of life.
As it turned out, she'd helped to ease his strife.

xxxvi

The daughter's name was Sam. Ms. Ann thought it

A joke, to name her female bastard thus.
Ms. Ann was so devoid of love, a fit

Of bitchy heat had marked the total fuss
With which Sam's hapless father had been smit.

Jose had found it most fortuitous,
That Sam cared little for her mother's ways.
Sam knew of better games to fill her days.

xxxvii

As explanations go, Ms. Ann's was not
The sort of tale to rate a perfect score.
The basic facts were there, and yet, a lot
Of what she told Jose", seemed rather more
Designed to show contempt than clear his thought.
Each spoken word grew more profane.
She swore her vile oaths upon both God and man.
The flames of sacrilege her words did fan.

xxxviii

At first, it seemed this objurgation had
Been loosed upon Jose in err'.
Jose did not know why Ms. Ann was mad.
Between her "hells" and "damns", he hoped to snare
A word or two that might, with luck, just add
Some sense to this maniacal affair.
It was not long, before a clue arrived.
Each one whom Sam had loved, Ms. Ann had knived.

By now, a tale of butchery had flood

Her words. She spoke with pride of how she'd dealt
A mortal wound upon that hairy stud

Who was the first of many more to pelt
Young Sam with prurience of deed. The thud

Of fallen chastity had raised a welt
Of anger on the mind of this Ms. Ann.
She'd sworn a vow to kill each dapper Dan.

Then all too soon, her plan turned crystal clear.

It seems Ms. Ann had lost all sense of what
Was right and what was wrong. A pink veneer

Of rage envel'ped her face. Ms. Ann had shut
Her mind upon the truth. There'd be no tear

For this young buck who'd blotched her filial slut
Again. She'd have his hide; as he'd had Sam.

Her wrath continued on ad nauseam.

xli

An oracle of truth would show her speech

Rang false. There was no need for Ann to weep.

Her Sam had met no ill while on the beach.

Too soon for that, Jose had fall'n asleep.

If facts were known, it seems the only breech

Of rules Sam'd made, was when she'd asked to keep

This unknown helpless lad beneath their roof.

Ms. Ann misjudged such facts as wanton spoof.

xlii

Convinced beyond a doubt of Jose's guilt,

Ms. Ann began a Don Quixote charge.

With flailing scythe, she streaked ahead full tilt.

If Ann could get her way, she'd slice a large

Red piece off what's beneath a Scotsman's kilt.

(If Englishmen wore kilts, I'd rhyme with barge,

But since they don't, I shouldn't use this dodge.)

She missed her goal, but did his pants dislodge.

xliii

Our poor Jose was then a sorry sight.

A life he'd hoped to lose he'd found again,
Yet to this life which had been saved, he might
Soon say, "Amen". And yet — it seemed that when
His pants were lost, all thoughts of death turned quite
Subordinate to thoughts of whom might then
Be looking toward his well exposed physique.
For him, such modesty was not unique.

xliv

Despite his plight, Jose was just as shy
As any other post pubescent lad.
He crossed his hands before himself to try
And hide those parts with which Ms. Ann was mad.
(Perhaps you think good taste has gone awry;
And yet — that Whitman's hairy chest has bade
No ill for *Leaves Of Grass* you can't deny.
If he can shock the masses, why can't I?)

xliv

Ms. Ann perceived that now her chance had come.

Amidst Jose's confused embarrassed state,
She thought the lad would be an easy plum
To loosen from the vine of life that date.

She raised her scythe above her head.

With some Degree of glee, she'd deal Jose his fate.
With all her might, Ann swung another swing.
She missed again. The wasp herself did sting.

xlvi

Jose had scarcely seen her bite the dust,

Before he turned his back and ran away.
He couldn't quite be sure if fear, or just

The sight of blood, had made him disobey
The rules (which rules, St. John would us entrust).

In any case, he took no time to stray.
He planned to run beyond where he had slept,
But as he ran; into Sam's path he stepped.

xlvii

Sam felt his heart beat twice to match her one.

She knew Jose was scared; he looked half-dead.
The lad was too afraid to let speech run.

Sam took him to her house — and to her bed,
Where quickly fear was lost to thoughts of fun.

Jose decided that he shouldn't spread
The details of Ms. Ann's demise just then.
Perhaps he'd first confirm Ann's thoughts on men.

xlviii

Sam stroked her raven hair seductively

Aside and breathed, "What's next for you and I?"
"A plethora of. this; a paucity
Of that," intoned Jose with his reply.
A bit of self-taught etymology

Brought forth from Sam a condescending sigh.
She never learned the truth about Jose.
She thought the lad had read too much *Roget*.

xlix

Despite this unbelievable exchange,
The lust within Ann's Sam grew stronger still.
She had no need to consciously arrange
Seductive moves. These flowed with dev'lish skill
Upon her unsuspecting prize. A strange
Erotic air usurped his weakened will,
As Sam disarmed Jose's innate alarms.
The man's not lived, who could withstand such charms.

l

So now I'll tell (it seems the die is cast)
Of how Jose's virginity was lost.
The flippancy he showed two stanzas past,
Fast turned to heat, as clothes aside were tossed.
Enough lascivious skills were soon amassed
To pauperize The Shah if bought at cost.
The trouble was — the skill all lay with Sam.
Our poor Jose could only say, "Yes ma'am."

li

But "Yes," is what he said. In fact, 'twas said
So well that with that "Yes," he'd spoke, he'd spoke
The last he'd speak 'til night. His lips were led
To other tasks, more pleasant to invoke.
The date (at least the year) was in Sam's head,
And thoughts to facts of action she awoke.
Despite his worldly past, Jose was licked;
He felt that he should not now contradict.

lii

If you and I would go the whole world 'round,
We'd prob'ly never meet the likes of Sam.
While by all tales her skill was most renowned,
It seemed somewhat unjust for Sam to slam
The door on abstinence and thus compound
The problems of this unsuspecting lamb.
Yet if to him advice had then been cast;
It's doubtful our Jose would kept more chaste.

liii

Jose was never one to take advice;

A trait astucious readers won't admire.

For you, a word of guidance should suffice.

Just throw the next four pages in the fire.

With this command, our goats will wax precise

In what they read. 'Til death most men aspire
To what's perverse, so "Laissez faire to them."

Reviewers should read on ad hominem.

liv

Then listen carefully my lettered friends.

You'll find herein no ostentatious claims
That this is poetry, or even pretends

To be. 'Twas done upon a lark. It shames
The very quick within to tell who lends

Their name against adjudication's flames.
A mother's love can fill the largest room.

A mother's name can make a nom de plume.

lv

"And why so sensitive, if penned in jest?"

You ask. "And fair enough to ask", is my
Retort. What's born in easy fun will test

The bile of this poor wag before my wry
But literary joke is run. The quest

At first was but eight lines to versify.
Upon those eight, eight more, less quick, were tacked.
With sixteen more, this writer may go cracked!

lvi

Now please! Don't brood about that couplet past.

I told you long ago my grammar's bad;
(I guess that pun has been outworn at last)

Since adverbs, less than adjectives I add.
Yet by her joke, this joker is harassed.

I see myself a fool, or maybe mad.
The Arts and Letters route I've been before;
I got reviews that we shall all ignore.

lvii

And now you see how bad reviews can choke
The novice bard; yea, stop his poetry.
For even to formulate this paltry joke
Has meant no small amount of work for me.
So please; take time before things bad are spoke
About the works you read. No rhapsody
Will likely come beneath your marking pen.
Just give support; 'til Byron lives again.

lviii

The poetry in Newfoundland is prone
Blank verse to be. But no — I should say, free.
Amongst a book of thirty bards is shown
But scarce a single rhyme! While I'll agree
That rhyme's not verse; verse should have feet. I've grown
Accustomed to a mixture of all three.
Just indentation will good verse not make.
To use it thus is but a fool's mistake.

lix

But now it seems as though the judge is being
 Adjudged by me. Perhaps 'tis I'm the fool.
To bite the hand that feeds is not a thing
 That fledgling writers find most bountiful.
Conjecture if you will who's hankering
 To paint "The Mugging Of A Muse". No rule
Of law should make one's thoughts on art a crime
Even all of Wordsworth's words are not sublime.

lx

It's been four pages now that we digress.
 The years of our Jose will soon grow old
(Or cold my readers' tolerance I'd guess.)
 Let's once return this story to its mold.
'Twas dark when last we left Jose. Success
 At love had placed him in The Sandman's hold.
The dreams he dreamt, you'd really like to hear;
Yet were these spoke, then censorship I'd fear.

lxi

From eight 'til one, Jose lay peacefully

 Upon the supple female breast of Sam.

From time to time he'd wake and watch to see

 Her lungs expand, as breath through nostrils swam.

It was during such a vigil then that he

 Recalled the death of Ann. Was it a flam?

As thoughts of danger welled within his head,

Ms. Ann and scythe appeared before his bed.

lxii

As quick as lightning she bestowed a blow;

 Then struck repeatedly at both Jose

And Sam. She didn't any mercy show

 Until the bed was red with blood that day.

When both Jose and Sam seemed in death's throe,

 Ms. Ann began her final prayer to pray.

I'd like to tell the tale of what came next,

But Father Time now sees my efforts vexed.

lxiii

There comes a time in every voyage through life,
 When deep sea blue gives way to shallows' green;
When mighty ocean swells turn beaches rife
 With foam; when surf and salty spray demean
Those land-bent souls, who've conquered storm and strife.
 The sailor come to shore is an obscene
Facsimile of what the sea has known.
And yet, some trips ashore one can't postpone.

lxiv

You see — Our ship has reached the harbour buoy.
 This craft of words we sail upon has run
Both time and talent dry. I must enjoy
 Some R&R before this canto's done.
With apprehension then, I cast this foy
 Of mine upon the fickle sea. Someone,
Somewhere, may find the merit in my rhyme.
If this be so, we'll meet again in time.

lxv

And so, for now, a solid anchor's set.

The mainsail's struck, the jib and jumbo's furled.
Our schooner's sailed a worthy voyage. The threat
Of danger's past. Those hackish squid who swirled
Our dory 'round while shore was made will get
Their due reward as by the beach they're birl'd;
For what's been penned — I've penned without regret,
And what's been done —
— 'tis done.

Note: This work was entered in the [Newfoundland Arts & Letters Competition](#). Here are the adjudicator's typewritten comments:

No. 47 Without Regret

A brave venture in the Byronic style. It doesn't quite come off, but so what? "To look a fool..." (p. 3) This and other gems — "'Tis fraught / with slurs galore..." (p. 18) and "The sailors come to shore..." (p. 34) — are worthy of the great G.G.

Unfortunately the press of excellent entries this year removed this poem from the prize winning bracket.