Excerpt From Hypotheses/Holes

BYRON

Apparently, my reputation is indeed intact. No need to declare it past what it already dooms me to reveal. So, what is your chosen adventure?

BABBAGE

I have a keen interest in mathematics, though to what end I'm not sure.

BYRON

Oh, equations have never added up for me, so I avoid them so there's no need for and end since there's never a beginning. But isn't Trinity for budding theologians and wastrels, however a tautology that might be?

BABBAGE

I've been fascinated with numbers since an early age, though any facility with maths I might possess was self-taught, as my health prohibited me from staying for long at any institution. My private tutors were interested in the classics and thought me destined for the clergy, so I possess an odd combination of qualities. I read the ancients, but I am at Trinity because Newton was here.

BYRON

Perhaps he sat in that chair you're sitting in now.

BABBAGE

Indeed! Though, I must admit, I find it a bit uncomfortable.

BYRON

Does his ghost stir his astral arse? Get up and switch places!

BABBAGE

No, I meant…Sir Isaac Newton is England's greatest mind. He gave us equations for heavenly motion and a calculus for infinite space! So, far be it for someone as low and inadequate as me to raise even the slightest question, but…his notation is difficult at best, and imprecise at worst. His fluxions are…

BYRON

Newton's handwriting is illegible!

BABBAGE

Shhh! It's the differentials that might work better, though we can't speak of them. The bookwork is dependent on Newton's dictate, and there's no honors graduation without them.

BYRON

Graduation. What an intriguing concept. Tell me more.

BABBAGE

Now that it's the end of Michaelmas term, I am considering a transfer to Peterhouse. I understand that they are developing a position in the sciences.

BYRON

Yes, I suspect that they've heard of Newton over there, too.

BABBAGE

But perhaps I would find others there who might share my concerns about his notation.

BYRON

Every company loves misery. But let's return to this "graduation" thing of yours. What do you plan to do after that?

BABBAGE

Well, teach, of course, and continue to study maths.

BYRON

Sounds…academic.

BABBAGE

So, may I ask what you have been doing since leaving Trinity?

BYRON

Oh, much of what I was doing whilst here, only without the encumbrances of even the slightest pretense of doing otherwise. I'm a poet of some note, as you've likely heard. My debut work, *Hours of Idleness*, created quite the uproar in some circles, or perhaps you know the retort I published to correct my critics's errors entitled *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.

BABBAGE

Er, no, I'm not familiar with them, though they both sound quite important. May I ask what your poems are about?

BYRON

About? Well, they're about me.

BABBAGE

What about you…are they about? You?

BYRON

My experiences. Living life. The truths of the lost past, wrought anew as seen through these eyes and heard in these ears, its scents in this nose and tastes in this mouth. And its touch, ah, its embrace of this body and the bodies of my embrace.

BABBAGE

Do you reach a conclusion?

BYRON

I…well, that would be death, hopefully later rather than sooner.

BABBAGE

I meant with your, er…as I said, I don't spend much time with the arts. I'm sure any poem by you is very entertaining, at least until the end.

BYRON

You eulogize the end of my verse as a death. Well said, my man! I'm sure my readers feel a deep loss when they finish reading my poems.

BABBAGE

That's not what…

BYRON

Though I have a restorative planned for the bereft, as I'll shortly publish the first two cantos of my epic poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in which the protagonist…not entirely dissimilar to yours truly…traipses across the continental ruins of war and bygone beauty. It's a lament of loss, a tragedy of past glory.

(Babbage gestures for a drink refill.)

BYRON

Good thinking! There's nothing more tragic than an empty cup.