BYRON'S TREATMENT OF THE HEROIC COUPLET

By David V. Erdman

—I took Moore's poems and my own and some others, and went over them side by side with Pope's, and I was really astonished...and mortified at the ineffable distance.... between the little Queen Anne's man, and us of the Lower Empire.

—Byron in 1817.

The heroic couplet has been of all measures the most thoroughly studied both in its development in the seventeenth century and in its flowering in the eighteenth, but what it became in the hands of Byron in the nineteenth century, or rather, why in the hands of the only major poet of the Romantic Period who made extensive use of the heroic couplet it did not become again a mold for enduring poetry—this question has never received more than passing consideration.

The exploration of such a problem in prosodic history, while requiring first of all a careful description of the symptomatic behavior, so to speak, of the verse in question (primary concern of the present paper), cannot properly be pursued without an attempt, at least, to comprehend the relations of the observed prosodic behavior to the wider framework of the social process. While Byron's uneasiness on "the Great Horse" may be adequately described in terms of erratic variations in the rate of enjambement and the like, viewed in perspective it appears ultimately as a manifestation, microscopic but definable, of the nineteenth century English social revolution.

Even the bare chronology of Byron's use of the heroic couplet suggests an unresolved conflict, some quarrel between the poet and his tools, which led him, after he had got his start in this measure, to abandon it for over eight years. Having emerged, after some six years of training in slavishly regular couplets, as the
poet of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), apparently able to combine a mastery of the traditional pattern of the heroic couplet with the dynamic impetuosity of a rebel, Byron strangely failed to "train on." In his next five poems in heroics he either continued the traditional pattern with relative sterility (*Hints from Horace* and *The Curse of Minerva*, 1811), or burlesqued that tradition (*The Waltz*, 1812), or broke from it in clumsy and uncertain experimentation (*The Corsair* and *Lara*, 1813–14), and then, apparently unsatisfied with his experimental deviations, he turned to other measures altogether for his major work.¹ When at last he did return to "the good old and now neglected heroic couplets"² eight years later, it was only to prove, as it were, his incompatibility with this measure. With *The Age of Bronze* (December-January, 1822–23), a poem comparable in technique and force to *English Bards*, scarcely dry from the pen, he embarked immediately upon that curious aberration, *The Island* (January-February, 1823).

Why did Byron feel that he had not "trained on," that his "style" in *Age of Bronze* was "a little more stilted"³ than the style of *English Bards*? Why, having in *Age of Bronze* successfully controlled and modified the traditional pattern of the heroic couplet to suit the needs of the Byronic rhetoric, did he relax all control in *The Island*, letting the verse gallop about between the extremes of apish regularity and wild abandon? The burlesque *Waltz*, following *English Bards*, and the erratic *Island*, following *Age of Bronze*, seem to be, in spirit and execution, expressions of sharp protest. It is apparent that Byron felt uncomfortable either with the traditional heroic pattern, or with the modifications of the traditional pattern which he found himself making—probably with both.

Byron's career with the heroic couplet, taken as a whole—the

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¹ In heroic couplets Byron wrote *The Caledonian Address* and *To Sarah* (1814), *A Sketch, Monody on Sheridan*, and *A Fragment* (1816), and then not a line for six years.


³ *Ibid. Letters and Journals*, ed. by R. E. Prothero, VI, 164.—Hereinafter referred to as *L & J*.
curious sequence of relative success followed by parody and abandon-
ment—and his expressed dissatisfaction with his best efforts in this medium suggest the existence of some psychological con-
flict outside the simple problem of mastering prosodic technics, some disturbance of which the technical conflict may be in large part merely a reflection.

Byron, it must be remembered, was, in Dowden's phrase, a
democrat among aristocrats, an aristocrat among democrats. Swept along by and himself accelerating the progressive current of his times, the tide of constitutional republicanism, his own impulses nonetheless were often neo-feudal. Rebelling against the dislocation of the good old system whereby a baron's generous and ample purse was supplied by a steady flow of gold from his thriving tenancy, a dislocation experienced directly in the form of rising taxes, extortionate interest charges, and rent-defaulting tenants (some of them starving weavers with whose "Luddite" terror against the master hosiers he could easily sympathize), Lord Byron joined the aristocratic fringe of the English Reform movement (formally through the Hampden and the Radical Rota Clubs, in 1812 and 1818), seeking not democracy but a "restora-
tion" of the "constitutional" balance of King, Lords, and Com-
mons established by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Unlike his fellow peers, however, who drew back in fear that a new revolution might not be so bloodless, Byron welcomed "action," not turning his face from the disconcerting prospect (distant, perhaps) that his own deeds and songs for Liberty might swell a flood which would threaten not to restore but to overwhelm aristocracy itself and fell "the highest genealogic trees,"1 even his own (for this he was prepared with a feio de se, planning to have his own Don Juan end on the guillotine). Yet not without reluctance did Byron accept the coming of the Republic as inevi-
table; he was always "sorry for it," always having an inward battle to fight, an account to settle with the aristocratic demon

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1 Marino Faliero, iii, 614.
of cynicism which was "a part of the pose which his class-consciousness demanded." 1

Many Reformers of the time—William Cobbett and Major Cartwright, for instance—convinced themselves that their radicalism was essentially the true conservatism. Yet the desire to "restore the constitution" through "the pure principle of reform" 2 as well as the attempt to repeat the "perfect versification of Pope" is an anachronistic delusion. In each case the reactionary form hides a revolutionary impetus. In this sense, perhaps, Byron's "extravagant admiration for the great literary conventionalist, Pope," may properly be considered "merely another aspect of his pervading liberalism," 3 but it is the false aspect, the cloak of pride. It is this "aspect" which pervades Byron's efforts to maintain his inherited estates and the traditions of his baronial rank: his response to the threat of bankruptcy ("I must sell, but not Newstead. I will at least transmit that to the next lord"), 4 his refusal to accept profits accruing from the sale of his poetry, his concern, between meetings in Italy with the "gentlemen who make revolutions," to have the proper thing done at home to uphold his titular rights in the British Coronation procession. 5 Ultimately Byron found himself, and defiantly remained, in the camp of the "puir hill folk" fighting for Liberty, but "How must the modern revolutionary spirit," exclaims Roden Noel, "have contended in this man for mastery with the temper of a haughty English aristocrat." 6

These contending forces, it is true, were not exact opposites; yet it is not surprising that "The Grand Napoleon of the realms

2 Lord Byron's Correspondence, ed. by John Murray (London, 1922), II, 148.—Hereinafter referred to as Corr.
3 A. W. Benn, Modern England, I, 89.—William Cobbett's veneration of Pope is interesting in this connection.
4 L & J, I, 200.
5 See L & J, IV, 406 and V, 45.
6 Byron, p. 64.
of rhyme” should have found room to coordinate his ambivalent tendencies only in the wanton anti-classical medley tradition of the octave stanza, in which it was quite proper to break all Aristotle’s rules and Priscian’s head, rather than in the balanced, closed couplet of Pope, in which he was always haunted by the compulsion to imitate, to go backwards. Nor is it surprising that a young British peer, since childhood acutely conscious of his rank from the very lack of its usual appurtenances, should at first have written poetry avowedly and conscientiously that of a young lord; should all his life display a consciously patrician veneration of Pope and of the heroic couplet as “the good old style of our elders and our betters.”

Byron looked upon the conflict of “polish” versus “force” in art as a reflection of the ancient class contrasts of patrician versus peasant and mechanic—or, in their contemporary manifestations, Dandy (resplendent but ephemeral) versus Blackguard (sturdy, menacing):

What would (Burns) have been, if a patrician? We should have had more polish—less force—just as much verse, but no immortality

Greatness ("immortality") in the age of revolutions seemed the exclusive property of the lower classes—who were not to be confused with the "shabby-genteel" "vulgar" bourgeois upstarts, such as Byron considered Keats to be. Yet even though he thought himself compelled to sell his title for cash to live on, and even though he felt convinced of the mortality of his own class, of the decadence of "polish," Byron was but the more loftily

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1 Don Juan, I, 120 and XV, 24.
2 L & J, III, 213.
3 L & J, II, 320.
4 See L & J, V, 591–592 for the distinction between ineffable "vulgarity" and good honest "blackguardism."
5 "I may if possible convert my Title into cash." L & J, I, 150. "If I can't persuade some wealthy dowdy to ennoble the dirty puddle of her mercantile Blood (vulgar bourgeoisie),—why—I shall leave England." II, 12. Cp. I, 332–333.
ashamed of the appearance in his own verse of "force," a sign of "lowness," and apologetic about his own "lazy" neglect of the tradition of "polish." If he were to begin again, he vowed, he would model himself strictly in the tradition of Pope.

Nevertheless, when Byron found himself carried rudely along on the rebellious Pegasus of his own times, although he might protest, he kept on riding:

I am convinced [he cried] that... all of us... are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system, or systems, not worth a damn.... But we keep the saddle, because we broke the rascal and can ride.

Hypothetical answers to our introductory question already emerge: Byron could have made a successful vehicle of the heroic couplet only by conforming in full faith to the tradition of polish—impossible for one whose conformity cloaked a rebel spirit—or by sensibly modifying the traditional patterns of the couplet to accommodate his own tumultuous force—impossible for the conscientious emulator of Pope. English Bards represents Byron's nearest approach to success in the first direction, Age of Bronze his nearest in the second. Why do we find no other major poet, attempting traditional heroic couplets in this period? Perhaps because no other major poet was trying to be an aristocrat and a revolutionary at the same time; to "restore" the "good old times" of 1688 by overthrowing the tyrants of Tory repression and "Holy" legitimacy in 1815.

In its specifically technical manifestations, which we must now examine in detail, the dilemma of Byron's efforts to use the heroic couplet appears as an unresolved conflict between his persistent and frequently mechanical attempt to model his verse on the practice of Pope and his clandestine and frustrated but dynamic tendency to make spontaneous modifications of the heroic

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1 Unkindest cut of all came when, according to the London Magazine (October, 1824), Byron was told "by some of his aristocratic friends, that he had become low, that the better English thought him out of fashion, and voted him vulgar."
2 L & J, IV, 169.
3 L & J, IV, 168-169 and 196-197.
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structure. On the one hand, his conformity to the Augustan tradition is a conscious effort, sapped by the uneasy feeling that "I have not the cunning"; on the other, his deviations from the Popean standard, as soon as they become pronounced enough to reach the poet's consciousness, are ruled out as invalid—or are turned to burlesque.

Careful examination confirms the impression that Byron's conscious model in composing couplets was always the fountainhead of classical style, Pope, rather than the feeble rivulets of later coupleteers. His respect for Rogers, Gifford, Crabbe, and others whom he called "the postscript of the Augustans," together with the fact that his verse is often nearer the aesthetic level of these poets than that of Pope, has often led critics to assume that Byron's style owes more to his contemporaries than to Pope. But the truth lies nearer the formulation of Weiser, who some time ago asserted that while other poets show some of Pope's peculiarities, Byron follows Pope much more closely than they do and docilely imitates even Pope's faults. Departures from Pope in which the late Augustans indulge, Byron does not follow. While these poets represent the gradual drift of a tradition, a simple culture lag, Byron endeavors consciously to preserve or indeed recover the lost glories of a departed age—if only to find himself, willy-nilly, carried toward a future.

The poems Byron wrote in heroic couplets may be studied conveniently in three groups:

I. Popean.
   A. Strict imitation. Everything before 1812.
   B. Burlesque deviation. The Waltz, 1812.

II. Experimental.
   Struggle against Originality. Corsair, Lara, 1813-14.

III. Byronic.
   A. Uneasy maturity. Age of Bronze, 1822-23.
   B. Relapse. The Island, 1823.

1 L, Σ J, II, 150.
2 L & J, IV, 196.
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I. A. IMITATION OF POPE.

16 Juvenile pieces, 1404 lines, 1805-08.
English Bards, 1070 "" 1808-09.
Hints from Horace, 844 "" 1811.
Course of Minerva, 312 "" 1811-12.

In all fourteen hundred lines of Byron's juvenile heroics, although the earmarks of the Popean model are dutifully reproduced and the author ventures upon no license, not once permitting himself the grace of a triplet or an alexandrine, and only once allowing the verse to flow from one couplet into another without a mark of punctuation,1 nevertheless the "whole art" of what Byron worshipped as the "harmony of Pope and Dryden... the Exquisite beauty of their versification"2 has, needless to say, nowhere been captured by "George Gordon, Lord Byron, a minor."3 For if the "prevailing tempo" of the verse of Pope and Dryden is andante, inviting the reader to give "single-eyed attention to the logical value of its words and phrases,"4 on the contrary the logical value of the words of Byron exerts so little compulsion against the clang of the meter that the prevailing tempo is allegro crescendo, the very "facility" of the diction forcing the reader to gallop. Here, perhaps, we have the sole indication of the rebellion to come: the incompatability of Byronic speed and neoclassic balance suggesting a conflict, suggesting that we are confronted not with mediocre Augustan verse in need of technical improvement but with wretched Romantic poetry whose "force" is cramped in the neo-classic frame.

In English Bards Byron's force has partly annealed and retempered the old satiric weapon. He seems to use it, as Dowden remarks, as a cutlass rather than as a stiletto; yet this effect is largely unintentional; he apes the footwork and thrust of Pope as well as he can. In those technics which he can consciously control, he disciplines

1 Childish Recollections, 214. Even in this case the sense requires some pause.
2 L. & J. IV, 489.
3 Title page of Hours of Idleness.
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his verse after Pope's "purest" strain, restricting, for example, the alexandrines and triplets so freely used by contemporary coupleteers and of old by "doubly strong" but "less smooth" Dryden¹ to special and semi-burlesque uses, following Pope's practice and recommendation.² And it is a matter of simple observation that of the two kinds of heroic couplet which constitute, in varying proportions, the traditional style of this measure, Byron's work in his imitative period is composed predominantly of curt or sharply patterned sort and contains but a sprinkling of the looser sort of couplet "which moves more freely within the line and accompanies a slight tendency to overflow."³

When Oliver Elton called the style of English Bards "a rude amalgam of the styles of Pope and Churchill,"⁴ he put the matter ineptly. Byron's force and carelessness may be subjectively similar to Churchill's, but Churchill's deliberate modification of the heroic pattern⁵ and Byron's deliberate preservation of in are opposite phenomena. On the one hand, enjambment in Churchill's lines averages about 20%,⁶ with one couplet in every eight overflowing, whereas Byron speeds up his verse without allowing himself the longer, blank-verse-like strides of Churchill. Considering his tempo, it is remarkable that Byron kept his enjambment to a level of 11% throughout this period,⁷ for this is a technic

¹ English Bards, 114.
² See Root, op. cit., p. 35.—English Bards has two triplets, two alexandrines. Hints, Curse, and Wa tz have none.
³ The two sorts are defined by George Williamson, "The Rhetorical Pattern of Neo-Classical Wit," MP, XXXIII (1933), 55.
⁶ This is the level of English Bards and the three poems following. The juvenile pieces vary between 7% and 8%.
⁷ William E. Mead, The Versification of Pope in Its Relation to the Seventeenth Century, (Leipzig, 1889), pp. 32-33, made an error in reckoning, copied by subsequent critics, giving percentages for enjambment in Dryden almost double what they should be (e.g., 18.6 instead of 9.8 for Absalom and Achitophel); his figures for Pope, on the other hand, being reliable, many critics have been led to suppose a much greater difference between the two poets than actually exists.
not mathematically controllable. Byron’s aiming at Pope’s level (6%) carried him to Dryden’s (10%). If he had aimed at Churchill’s, we may judge from Byron’s other prosodical behavior that he would have out-run him. Indeed, run-on couplets, eschewed by Pope but not by Dryden, Byron keeps down to two in English Bards and one each in Hints and The Curse, thus, in contrast to Churchill, carefully keeping his enjambement within the couplet where it does not upset the Popean “balance.”

On the other hand, the proportion of balanced lines in English Bards is exactly the same as the proportion in Pope’s Essay on Criticism (17%); whereas for Churchill, and for Byron’s contemporaries, Gifford and Rogers, balanced lines are relatively few (around 7%).

Thus, in the definitely controllable and even in the more obvious of the only partially controllable technics of the heroic pattern, Byron has forced his verse to conform closely to the best model of the tradition of polish. How superficial and incomplete this conformity is, nevertheless, can be seen when we look for the more subtle and supplementary veins and vessels of Pope’s versification. For while the main artery of the patterned couplet is the balanced line, the line of two halves centrally poised, yet the full body of Pope’s verse included numerous and various arrangements of parallel or antithetical phrases not commensurate with the line or half-line. Now, although single balanced lines have the same distribution in both poems, when we count all classifications including the balance of whole line against whole line and couplet against couplet, we will find that in the first 450 lines of Essay on Criticism only 32% of the lines are not involved in some kind of balanced phrasing; while in English Bards as many as 43% are not so involved. Or, to put the difference more significantly, Byron relies more completely for his balance upon its least subtle form; Pope employs other varieties of pattern more often, and the patterned couplet is, consequently, more densely distributed in the verse of Pope than in that of Byron.

Pope, furthermore, distributes his balanced phrases more con-
ningly, while Byron does not always escape the tendency to fall into a corrugated sequence of identical rhythms. For instance, whenever Pope has one line of a couplet more sharply balanced than its mate, he almost invariably places the sharper line in the second position, with effect of giving a strong close to the couplet; whereas Byron, with less genuine feeling for the slow, couplet-held cadence (even while mechanically stopping his couplets), places his balanced lines relatively more often at the beginning of the couplet, in a position where the "see-saw" has an accelerating effect. Yet Byron in this first period is much closer, in both frequency and distribution of patterned couplets, to the Pope of Essay on Criticism and Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot than are any of the other poets examined, even—Dryden.¹

As for the looser sort of couplet, here too Byron was careful not to go beyond the restraint of Pope, although in this matter many of "the postscript of the Augustans" were equally cautious. The looser couplet, with Pope, and with Byron at this period, is in essence simply an extension of the rhetorical loom from two lines to four, since whenever the end of one couplet is not strongly stopped, the onward movement of the verse is only the more firmly halted at the end of the following couplet, with the lines thus grouping themselves into a quatrain. Occasionally a sequence of six or eight lines will be found in which there is no stopping heavier than a comma, but such cadenzas are rare with both poets—indeed rarer with Byron than with Pope.² Churchill, in contrast, indulges generously.³

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¹ Rhetorically Dryden, Pope, and Byron use antithetical about as often as parallel structure! Churchill and Gifford use relatively little of the former.

² Byron has one of 8 lines, one of 7, four of 6 in Bards! Pope has three of 8, seven of 6 in Rape, but only one of 6 in Criticism.—In this matter Mead's statistics are simply corrupt. He lists only fourteen cases from all Pope's works of sequences of four lines or over.

³ 22% of Churchill's lines and 12% of Gifford's are in sequences of five lines or more.—Percentages of lines involved in sequences of four or more lines follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pope,</th>
<th>Criticism 15.2</th>
<th>Byron,</th>
<th>Bards 23.8</th>
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<td>Rape 20.5</td>
<td>Hints 19.3</td>
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<td>Arbuthnot 16.7</td>
<td>Curse 18.5</td>
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<td>Churchill</td>
<td>Times 46.5</td>
<td>Crabbe,</td>
<td>Borough I-II 13.0</td>
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<td>Bav. &amp; M. 40.0</td>
<td>Rogers,  Pl. of Memory 22.7</td>
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But these longer sequences are nearly always built of whole-
line segments. It is within the four-line groupings that enjambe-
ment generally occurs, lightening the internal balance of the
couplet only to emphasize that of the quatrain. In English Bards,
each of the two instances of enjambement across the couplet is
no more than a special form of the quatrain, with the balance
asymmetrical, viz.:

And sure great Skeffington must claim our praise,
For skirtless coats and skeletons of plays—
Renowned alike; // whose genius ne’er confines—
Her flight to garnish Greenwood’s gay designs. (598–601)

Here is no suggestion of the blank-verse cadences of Churchill. 2
Byron, like Pope, is always careful to return to the pattern of
the closed couplet after the slightest departure.

So far, then, the young lord who hoped to rank “amongst
‘the mob of gentlemen who write’ ” has ventured “o’er the path
which Pope and Gifford trod” only to achieve a doggedly unori-
ginal imitation of Pope, lacking his neat handling of antithesis,
his nice modulation of phrase, his variation of rhythmic design. 3
Is this the whole story? Obviously not. Such force has seldom
animated verse as that which now and again lifts the paragraphs
of this “furious rhapsody.” If Pope’s richer variety of rhythmic
shapes and rhetorical patterns, his preference for the more cadential
second line, his bare minimum of enjambement are all part and
parcel of his program of working within the couplet as a structural

1 The other example is in lines 23–26.
2 Compare, for instance, The Times, lines 592–596:
   They shall reward your love, nor make ye grey—
   Before your time with sorrow: // they shall give—
   Ages of peace and comfort: // whilst ye live—
   Make life most truly worth your care, and save—
   In spite of death, your memories from the grave.
3 Extensive counting in Dryden, Pope, and Byron reveals no appreciable statisti-
cal differences in the weighting of lines nor in the number of “inversions”—except
in the opening syllables, where Byron shows a significantly larger proportion of iden-
tical rhythms.
unit, of keeping the reader pleasantly occupied at a slow pace, then in actuality if not intention the relatively less varied, less compact, less nicely balanced quality of Byron’s couplets is likewise necessary to his different tempo, the tempo of tumultuous acceleration. English Bards may well be said to have the virtue of its defects. It is precisely in those half-dozen verse-paragraphs (any reader will recognize them) in which a swift and powerful cadence differentiates, largely by its prominence of climax, the Byronic gallop from what Johnson called the “steady even trot” of Pope’s “coach and six” that Byron’s true vitality appears.

In Pope’s paragraphs there is an economy of rhythmic compensation whereby an evenness of pressure is maintained; the last line is often strong, yet it has little more than its own momentum. In Byron’s characteristic paragraphs the force is accumulated through a long, rapid sweep until it seems to burst into final laughter. Here is a satirist threatening not simple “fools” who err, but the whole structure of folly and error of which his own Lordship is but one of the more colorful Errors. Unhappily, whenever the Byronic “force” subsides, as it quite often does even in English Bards, we return to the mediocrity of a largely synthetic “polish.”

Ample evidence that Byron had no intention of straying from the ideal of the patterned couplet is his composition, two years later, of Hints from Horace and The Curse of Minerva, in which even the few licenses observed in Bards are eschewed. These later poems, more lifeless than Bards, lack any strong paragraphic cadences, but otherwise they are on the same technical level—except for one curious passage of “lingering” description which reveals that Byron, when he does retard his tempo, is quite capable of a rich variation of rhythmic design.¹ This passage is “the opening lines of the Curse of Minerva, as far as the first speech of Pallas,”² which Byron wanted to reprint with Childe Harold

¹ Indicated in the much greater initial stress inversion: 29% here as compared to 19% in Bards.—Cp. Dryden, 28%; Pope, 30%.
² L & J, II, 179.—These 54 lines were later attached to the third canto of The Corsair.
"as a descriptive fragment" "because some of the readers like that part better than any I have ever written." Languid in the worst neo-classic tradition, it is thick with syntactic inversions and mawkish personifications, e. g.:

O'er the hushed deep the yellow beam he throws,
Gilds the green wave that resembles as it glows. (5-6)

B. DEVIATION TOWARD BURLESQUE.

*The Waltz*, 257 lines, 1812.

In every verse-form Byron uses, rebellion against classical models first makes its appearance in the guise of burlesque, a respectable form of rebellion since ostensibly *not serious*. Dignified poets in the Augustan age had disguised romantic tendencies under the cloak of parody—the urge to describe "wild" scenery or peasant life, for instance, finding expression in the burlesque pastoral or in a carefully patronizing parody of Spenser. Indeed, the stanza of Spenser—delightful romantic aborigine, according to neo-classic judgment—had become a sanctuary for inhibited romanticism,¹ and when Byron felt the urge to write about his feelings and Self it was inevitable that he should have chosen the mock-Spenserian tradition of Thomson's and Beattie's "droll" hero-poems, a tradition in which rebellion, in both spirit and technic, had already achieved a certain odor of sanctity. In the stanzas of *Childe Harold* his abundant force rapidly carried him beyond Thomson and Beattie, models much less formidable than Pope, and he developed a flexible theatrical style of long, broken cadences that kept pace with brooding soliloquy or with rapid action such as the description of a bull-fight or a waterfall.

Strangely, there was no carry-over of this flexibility when Byron returned to the heroic couplet in *Hints and Curse*; but in *The Waltz*, a year later, his "force," under the masque of burlesque, at last broke loose from the restraint on imitation. True, in this poem there is only a barely appreciable decrease in the

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percentage of balanced lines, and no increase in enjambement; there are slightly fewer quatrains and a complete absence of longer ones; the architecture is still of half-line and line segments; the couplets, in brief, are still in their structure Popean couplets. But the pace is no longer even approximately Popean. Byron is still driving Pope's coach and six, but he has taken to a frenzied laying-on of the whip.

The subtitle, "An Apostrophic Hymn," announces the procedure. Each paragraph opens with a Hail! and ends with a bang of the fist. As the toasts multiply—

Hail, nimble Nymph!....
........................
Hail, moving Muse!....
........................
Imperial Waltz!....
........................
Oh, Germany!.....
........................
To You, ye husbands..
........................
To You, ye Matrons....

—the verse at length gets reelingly sentimental:

Oh ye who loved our Grandmothers of yore,
Fitzpatrick, Sheridan, and many more!

and at the end maudlin:

Voluptuous Waltz! and dare I thus blaspheme?
.................................
Terpsichore, forgive!....

In the course of this veritable drinking bout of a poem (it has been called humorless, but there is this sort of humor in it) Byron seems to indulge the rhetoric of entrance-refrain (anaphora) past all measure. Yet even in this mad career he probably got under way by imitating a favorite passage from Pope.¹ And even in

¹ Compare Rape IV, 3–10 with Waltz, 83–92.—Pope's series is of single lines; Byron goes by couplets.
the quantity of lines involved in anaphora (the identical opening of line or half-line segments, a device which proves a handy index to the evolution of couplet rhetoric) Byron does not yet exceed Pope. The qualitative transformation, however, which takes place in Byron’s use of anaphora affords a striking illustration of the simultaneous conformity in letter and revolt in spirit that characterize Byron’s treatment of the couplet, for the very same rhetorical device which was Pope’s most obvious aid in enforcing the balance of the patterned couplet becomes in Byron’s hands the strongest weapon with which he overthrows the balance of the couplet in favor of longer, stanza-like sweeps of “force.” The overthrow does not take place in the verse of The Watz, but the transformation of the weapon of anaphora does.

Pope was apparently able to employ or inhibit as he chose the technic of entrance-refrain, the number of lines involved ranging from 13% in Essay on Criticism to 40% in Arbuthnot, but always Pope favored proportionately the type that sharpens the identity of the couplet, namely anaphora of two members, which we shall call simple in distinction from multiple anaphora of three or more members. In each of Pope’s poems the simple type accounts for between two-thirds and three-fourths of all the lines involved in anaphora. The two types of anaphora are at about this same proportion in English Bards and Hints, but in The Curse the ratio drops to half and half and is then completely reversed to one-third simple and two-thirds multiple in The Watz.† Thereafter Byron’s rhetoric contrasts with Pope’s in that with Byron an increased use of multiple anaphora is always accompanied by a decrease in simple anaphora, and vice versa. It is further remarkable of the rhetoric of The Watz that pairs of anaphora falling within the couplet take up less than 1% of the total number of lines, whereas in English Bards they comprised 9%, or about the average

† This reversal is due to an absolute decrease in simple anaphora (Bards, 14%; Watz, 7%) and an increase in multiple anaphora from 6% to 15%. Pope employed as much as 15% multiple anaphora, in Arbuthnot, but only in conjunction with 24% simple.
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for Pope. With this transformation of anaphora an important bulwark of the traditional heroic pattern has disappeared.

*The Waltz* is, in its way, a more entirely successful poem than any of Byron’s first period. In the break-neck whipping-on of its apostrophes, as in the comparable strong paragraphs of *English Bards*, the release of Byron’s impetuous energy carries him above the slavery of imitation. The style of *The Waltz*, unlike that of *Bards*, partakes of the mock-heroic character of Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*. But Byron’s tone is more fully than Pope’s one of burlesque—as if, having too slavishly imitated the heroic couplet, he were now parodying it. Here is no gentle apotheosis of folly such as *The Rape* but a condemnation, cloaked in burlesque, of the entire social masquerade of heroics and waltzing and fiddling while rogues roar for bread. *The Waltz* was written at a time when Byron, fed up with the “Lilliputian sophistries” of a Parliament in which he had recently endeavored to play an earnest part, was moving from Whig to Radical, still on good terms with the moderate Holland House wing of the Whig aristocracy but beginning his affair with the Radical Lady Oxford and ready to enjoy Lady Holland’s disapproval of that connection. Disenchanted, mocking, but young, dropping the pomposity of *Hints from Horace* and becoming “Horace Hornem,” “a country Gentleman of a midland country” demoralized by London lasciviousness, Byron swings into the stride of a lightly devastating social and political irony:

The Court, the Regent, like herself were new;  
New face for friends, for foes some new rewards;  
New ornaments for black—and royal Guards;  
New laws to hang the rogues that roared for bread;  
New coins (most new) to follow those that fled;  
New victories—not can we prize them less,  
Though Jenky wonders at his own success;

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1 Weiser considers it the least imitative of Byron’s *juvenalia*. *Loc. cit.*., p. 256.
2 Phrase in Byron’s second speech, April 21, 1812.—For an analysis of Byron’s political position in 1812 see my “Lord Byron as Rinaldo,” PMLA, LVI (1941).
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New wars, because the old succeed well,
That most survivors envy those who fell;
New mistresses—no, old—and yet 'tis true,
Though they be old, the thing is something new;
Each new, quite new—(except some ancient tricks),
New white-sticks—gold-sticks—broom sticks—*all new sticks*.

Pope at the end of such a long train of multiple anaphora would let the voice fall back gently to relish the concluding phrases; Byron rises to a shout, emphasized by italics and exclamation point.

Yet "Horace Hornem" seems to have been somewhat shocked at his own drunken heresy:

Gods! how the glorious theme my strain exalts,
And Rhyme finds partner Rhyme in praise of "Waltz!"

When the orgy was over, did he feel that he had blasphemed against the heroic tradition? He felt, apparently, no inclination to go on with the forceful style he had begun to develop; for the next ten years he wrote no more than a few lines in the satiric couplet, although he did not abandon the couplet entirely until he had had a try at its narrative use.

II. STRUGGLE AGAINST ORIGINALITY.

*The Corsair*, three cantos, 1794 lines, 1813.
*Lara*, two cantos, 1272 lines, 1814.

The conflict between Byron's aristocratic conscience and his rebellious impulses is clearly exposed in his introduction to *The Corsair." Fearing it is "not the most popular measure certainly," he is nevertheless penitently resolved to take his chance once more with "the good old and now neglected heroic couplet." He "confesses" that the stanza of Spenser is the measure most after his own heart, but apologizes for having "deviated" into that and other measures. Now, despite his own heart and "what is called public opinion," Lord Byron has nobly determined to revive and uphold "the best adapted measure to our language."
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Let us see with what success he manages, in this poem and its sequel, to curb his "wrong revolutionary poetical" tendencies and tread once more the strait and narrow path.

In many respects Byron does begin all over again. In use of anaphora, enjambement, quatrains, and balanced lines, the first canto of The Corsair is strikingly close to Bards and Hints. And the echo of Windsor Forest in the first four lines suggests that he has recently thumbed through his Pope to get the swing of his master's non-satiric couplet. But we are confronted, in The Corsair and Lara, not with the humble apprentice-like imitation that we found in Byron's first period, but rather with an open battle of contradictions. While the general run of the verse, from mere absence of matter and from reliance on monotonously few rhythmic types and consequent overimportance of rime, has a singsong sameness, yet a kind of centrifugal force seems to throw into relatively condensed clusters now a number of patterned couplets emphatically balanced with antithesis and parallel, and now a sequence of quite freely enjambed lines.

The patterned couplets are heavily pseudo-classical, often wretchedly inverted, as:

Sunburnt his cheek, his forehead high and pale
The sable curls in wild profusion veil.

Shrieks the shrill whistle, ply the busy hands.

On the other hand, the looser couplets, even when not run-on,

1 Corsair I: simple anaphora, 13.7% (Bards, 13.8%), multiple, 5.4% (Bards, 5.7%), enjambement, 13.5% (Hints, 13.1%), balanced lines, 12.8% (Bards, 16.9%, Waltz, 14.8%), quatrains or longer, 19.3% (Hints, 19.3%).

2 Cp. Windsor Forest, 254–256.

3 If we classify well-defined rhythmic treatments of the line into types and designate these by letters of the alphabet (saving x for unclassified lines), we find the following sequence for the first 34 lines of The Corsair: aaabccccxcccadeddxxbxxexceeecedd. We can find a similar monotony of types in Crabbe, although I see no reason to lay Byron's monotony at Crabbe's door. With Pope, however, while it is possible to distinguish types, these have so many subvarieties that any comparable classification is impracticable.
are sometimes quite free and "romantic" in movement:

She looked and saw the heaving of the main;
The white sail set—she dared not look again;
But turned with sickening soul within the gate—
"It is no dream—and I am desolate!"

Is it that Byron sometimes lets his story absorb his attention, leaving the verse to fly loose, "con amore," and sometimes remembers he is deliberately writing in "the good old style"? Frequently the type of subject matter seems to determine his use of heavily patterned lines, as for example the character portrait of sections x, xi, and xii. However it may be, there is a progressive decrease of balanced lines from canto to canto; there is also a slight fall in the use of anaphora, especially of the simple type; and of the latter fewer pairs now are kept within the couplet.

Crabbe has been suggested as Byron's model, and Crabbe's later work, such as The Borough (1810), is reasonably comparable to the first canto of The Corsair, although even here Byron's verse differs in the relative proportions of related devices. But Byron's verse develops in an opposite direction; the later cantos of The Corsair and Lara are nothing Crabbe-like, nor does Byron follow Crabbe in his one observable license, his practice of frequently resting his unspirited Pegasus in the shade of a triplet lengthened by an alexandrine.

In The Corsair, however, we see but glimmerings of a freer style, chiefly in a few significant cases of enjambment across the couplet and in an interesting and quite un-classical use of the

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1 Percentage of balanced lines in these sections (100 lines) is 23%; average for entire canto, 12.8%; last 200 lines, 5%. Canto II: average, 9.2%; average excluding two bunched passages totaling 37 lines, 7%. Canto III: average, 6.4%; no dense passages. Compare Bards, 16.9%; Rogers, Pleasures, 8.5%; Crabbe's Village, 13.5%; Borough I-II, 8.1%; Pope, Windsor Forest, 15%, Rape, 11.2%.
3 Enjambment is comparable, but quatrains much lower in Borough; anaphora is higher, but balanced lines lower.
4 Three in Canto I, eight in II, four in III. In some the architecture of line and couplet segments is not really disturbed, but in others there is real overflow, e.g II, 186-189.
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triplet. Canto Two begins:

In Coron's bay floats many a galley light,
Through Coron's lattices the lamps are bright,
For Seyd, the Pacha, makes a feast to-night.

Here is new service for a triplet. The three lines do not lead into each other or counter-weight each other in the old fashion. And in not one of the two triplets in this canto and the five in Canto Three does Byron go back to the alexandrine, as he might if Crabbe were his model.

Byron's first actual break for freedom takes place in Lara. In the first canto, after several passages well weighted down with balanced lines, overflowing couplets gradually makes themselves felt, and then in section xvi the old bonds are spectacularly burst:

Vain thought! that hour of ne'er unravelled gloom→
Came not again, or Lara could assume→
A seeming of forgetfulness, that made→
His vassals more amazed nor less afraid.
Had Memory vanished then with sense restored?
Since word, nor look, nor gesture of their lord→
Betrayed a feeling that recalled to these→
That fevered moment of his mind's disease.
Was it a dream? was this the voice that spoke→
These strange wild accents; his the cry that broke→
Their slumber?....

The last two phrases especially are stronger than the lines they run over:

Was it a dream?
was this the voice that spoke These strange wild accents;
his the cry that broke their slumber?

And the line-architecture is only returned to by a sort of compromise—a long phrase fitted to a short one brings the halt at the line end:

his the oppressed, o'er-laboured heart / That ceased to beat,
the look that made them start?
Yet it must be remarked that even with this much enjambement the quatrain stopping is carefully observed.¹

Byron's new style may best be described briefly as an expansion of his cadences from the limits of the closed couplet to the limits of the closed quatrain.

Pope frequently paired his couplets in quatrains, it is true, though only rarely with enjambement. But Byron's new quatrains are losing the architecture of paired couplets; their internal units are less often half-line and line segments. Even while superficially observing the boundaries established by Pope, Byron has been sweeping away the internal checks and balances of the traditional pattern to make stanza-room for his swift Pegasus. Indeed, we may say that in Lara Byron is forging a four-line stanza, something "after his own heart," out of the "good old" but uncongenial heroic couplet.

There is a degree, perhaps, of conscious intention in this expansion, for Byron later claimed that he had "striven to vary" the prosody of each of his tales. "The versification of The Corsair," he said, "is not that of Lara."² No doubt he recognized, at least after the event, the increase of enjambement, which mounts from 15% in The Corsair to 21.8% in Lara I. Yet even, this much innovation seems to have disturbed Byron's conscience, for the second canto of Lara is less emancipated than the first. Run-on lines drop back to 16.5%, and run-over couplets, having reached the prominent total of 14 in Lara I (over thrice the ratio in The Corsair), fall to half that number. And there is a corresponding increase of simple anaphora,³ indicating an increase in patterned couplets—although the proportion of singly balanced lines remains unchanged.⁴

Nevertheless the striking fact about Lara is that a new, freer

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¹ In a sequence of over four lines there is always a comma, at the fourth. In Lara II, 161–166, a triplet and couplet together form a five-line cadence.
² L. 264.
³ Lara I, 14.7% ; II, 17.2%.
⁴ I, 11.4% ; II, 10.2%—both somewhat higher than the last part of Corsair.
treatment of the couplet, which had only fitfully disturbed the rapid but patterned flow of The Corsair, here distinctly emerges. Even though not so dominant in the second canto, sporadic examples of the new style are still notable; twice in the second canto, for instance, cadences run for ten lines without more than comma pauses, and the total of lines in sequences of quatrain length or over (already high in the first canto) rises to 30%. Byron’s cadences, in spite of his ambivalence, are definitely expanding, until at this point, but not at the level of English Bards, some comparison to the blank-verse movement of Churchill might be apt.

Yet within both cantos the reversion to a rigid see-saw pattern is still frequent. Contradictory tendencies seem to have reached a deadlock. Byron’s characterization of himself in English Bards describes the predicament:

E’en I—least thinking of a thoughtless throng,
Just skill’d to know the right and choose the wrong.

For a “patrician” as he knew himself to be, the only proper versification was that of “the little Queen Anne’s man.” When his insurgent “force” led him, sinner that he was, to “deviate” from the heroic tradition, he might claim he was making an experiment, but he could only feel he was choosing the wrong. In the Spenserian stanza, a measure not towered over by a great classical tradition, Byron had been able to evolve satisfactory technics. In ottava rima, which had a libertine medley tradition, he would be at home immediately. But in the heroic couplet he was both unable to follow and ashamed to deviate from the tradition of Pope. Lara was to be his last try for eight years.¹

¹ In Corsair I, sequences (quatrain or over) were 19.3%, about the mean of Byron’s first period; they dropped strangely to 8.8% and 9.4% in II and III. In Lara they mounted again: 26.2%; II, 29.3%.

² The fragment, Could I Remount the River of My Years (40 lines, 1816), is curiously not heroic. Nearly half the lines are run-on and three of the couplets. It was written concurrently with the blank verse Dream and Darkness, and is, in design and cadences, simply blank verse with the addition of time.
III. A. UNEASY MATURITY.

The Age of Bronze, 778 lines, December 1822-January 1823.

During the period of the Manchester Massacre and the first cantos of Don Juan, the Cato Street Conspiracy and Hobhouse's incarceration in Newgate for a seditious typographical error, the period, that is, of 1819-20, Byron often felt a strong urge to sail back to England and straighten things out. On the political plane this urge took the form of an offer to head a charge of horse in a rebellion which would restore the glorious constitution of 1688 from the corrupt "system" of Castlereagh on the one hand and save England on the other from the "low, designing, dirty levellers, who would pioneer their way to a democratical tyranny." On the poetical-critical plane it took the form of prefaces and open letters to the press chastising upstarts, giving "battle to the blackguards," and attempting to restore a proper respect for Pope and "polish" and a true "aristocracy of Poetry," in all of which there was a good deal of proud self-chastisement.

"For the last few years," he complained in 1820, "there has been a kind of epidemic concurrence" of the "systematic depreciation of Pope." Claiming to be particularly annoyed by that young "tadpole of the Lakes," John Keats, who says "easy was the task" of imitating Pope, or it may be of equaling him, I presume. I recommend him to try before he is so positive on the subject [Byron had not found it easy], and then compare what he will have then written and what he has now written with the humblest and earliest compositions of Pope,

Byron announced that he was "at last" losing all patience with the atrocious cant and nonsense about Pope, with which our present blackguards are overflowing... If it goes on, it will destroy what little good writing or taste remains amongst us.

1 Corr., II, 148.
3 Quotations in this paragraph are from L & J, IV, 485, 493, and 425-426.
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He was ready if need be "to battle it alone." Perhaps he might publish his ten-years-old Hints from Horace, in which he had advised "our bards" to "stoop, like Pope, to polish by the way." Or he might do a new English Bards, which I perceive some of your people are in want of, and which I only wait for a short visit to your country, to put me more in possession of the nonsense of some of your newer ragamuffins, to commence.¹

In 1821, while plotting for a free Italy, "the very poetry of politics," Byron dashed off as his contribution to the Bowles-Pope controversy some open letters in which, with "the cavalier assumption of patrician manners" (Hazlitt),² he defended the "highest" poet of the "poetical aristocracy" against the "blackguards," the "ragamuffins," "the Cockney-and-Water washing-tub Schools" of "the democracy of poetry." In deeds he was preparing to fight the "barbarian" invaders of Italy and Greece; in words he turned upon those "more barbarous than the barbarians," the "renegadoes, with...their convenient treachery in politics," the Pantisocrasts turned Tory, with whom he tended to identify all the "six or seven new schools."

His Lordship does not, of course, "presume that there ever was, or can be, such a thing as an aristocracy of poets," but he does insist upon an aristocracy of poetry. For "Gentlemenliness" is what the "vulgar" lack, and "neither poet nor poem will ever be good for any thing without it." In other words, although a poet need not be an aristocrat, he'd best behave like one. And gentlemanly poetical behavior is to respect and imitate Pope; "the rest are barbarians"; even Shakespeare and Milton are but "burnt brickwork" compared to the marble of Pope's "Greek Temple." Specifically, "gentlemenly" critical standards, according to Byron, maintain satire above romance (instead of "stooped to truth" Pope should have written "rose to truth"), poetic but

¹ L & J, V, 388.
² In an article in the London Magazine, June, 1821, Hazlitt took Byron to task for his Lordliness.—The Byron quotations in this and the next paragraph are from L & J, V, 559-560, 277, 559, 600, 587-588, 591, 274, 554, and IV, 490-491.
rational diction above prosey or inflated, the "symmetry" of Pope's tallid verses above the "variazioni" of Keats's is enjamed couplets, and, at minimum, rime above blank verse—although the touchstone is of course the heroic couplet:

Blank verse...unless in the drama, no one except Milton ever wrote who could rhyme....but, with all humility, I am not persuaded that the Paradise Lost would not have been more noble [sic] conveyed to posterity, not perhaps in heroic couplets, although even they could sustain the subject if well balanced [n. b.], but in the stanza of Spenser or of Tasso, or in the terza rima of Dante...

To Byron it is a sign of the sad decay of poetry that "there is not a living poet (except Rogers, Gifford, Campbell, and Crabbe) who can write an heroic couplet." And his conviction that he himself has "shamefully deviated in practice" is based on the consideration, first, that he has been using other measures, and second, that he has given way to a fondness for more loose-jointed rhetoric and has not taken the pains "the smooth, inlay, and chip, and fit" which Keats, the upstart, has pronounced so "easy"!

Notions about imitating Pope did not disturb Byron when he wrote his great poems in the stanzas "of Spenser or of Tasso," for these stanzas, with their own brands of "legitimacy," were libertine and anti-traditional by tradition—just as the Italian nobility of the Carbonari were both aristocratic and revolutionary. But when Byron returned to the couplet, as he must if only as a pledge of his sincerity, he was once more impeded by his belief that he must "toil after" the "well balanced" rhetoric and the structural symmetry" of Pope.

The new English Bards was never written, but in the winter of 1822–23 Byron composed "in my early English Bards style" two long poems in which the sequence of apparently satisfactory

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1 See Byron's dissection of passages from Keats and his scorn of Wordsworth's Preface.
2 L & J, IV, 489.
3 L & J, IV, 304.
4 L & J, IV, 161.
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technical adjustment followed by rampant extremism is reenacted of a more advanced level, reflecting even more clearly than the Bards-Waltz and the Corsair-Lara sequences a psychological conflict less accountable to the superficial difficulties of style than to the social roots of aristocratic rebellion.

In the first of these poems, The Age of Bronze, Byron's technical conflict appears resolved. He seems to be facing squarely the technical problem of adjusting his wanton rhetorical tendencies to the frame of the couplet. He preserves the main features of the traditional couplet of Pope, while successfully adapting those features to his own more furious pace. He incorporates the two technical modifications which he found most congenial in his earlier "deviations" — the apostrophic, refrain-like anaphora of The Waltz and the high rate of enjambement of Lara I. At the same time he keeps enjambed couplets down to a mere 3.3% — a ratio slightly higher than would have pleased Pope, perhaps, but not to be compared to Keats' 50%. Indeed, in this poem the old technical conflict provides the dynamics of a not unsuccessful style, although E. H. Coleridge has gone a bit far in calling it "striking and imperishable verse."

The conflict between long paragraphic cadences and the imperative closure of the couplet produces loose but controlled masses of verse, moving more freely than the monotonous line by line gallop of the paragraphs of Bards and Hints, but with more discipline than the blank verse of Byron's dramas or the spurts of enjambement in Lara. In the conflict between the traditional symmetry of the individual line and the climatic onrush of the paragraph, a new type of balanced line is developed which tends to supplant the older type, although the two together make about as high a percentage of balanced lines as we found in The Corsair and Lara.

1 Enjambement: Lara I, 21.8%; Age, 22%
2 103 of the 202 couplets in Sleep and Poetry are enjambed.
3 Poetry, III, 54on.
4 9.1%—about that of Pope's Dunciad I & III, 9.3%. Compare Criticism, 17.2%; Bards, 16.9%.
Writing hundreds of Spenserian and octave stanzas, Byron had learned to weave strong rhetorical cadences within rime-schemes that prohibited the monotonous pairing of lines. In the new Byronic couplet, although two halves of one line may balance, the "sense" of which they are a part is no longer "contained within the distich." The stanzaic ring of portions of *The Age of Bronze* is unmistakable. And even when the structure of a paragraph is of curt series, which would in Byron's earlier style have formed balancing half-lines or lines, the members are often unequal, and they *alternately observe and ignore* the ends of lines. Strong punctuation plays against the force of a mounting tide of rhetoric and succeeds only after a fierce struggle in pulling it firmly to a cadence.

This loosening of the internal structure of the verse paragraph, combined with the extensive use of opening refrain and apostrophe, leads to the most striking architectural development in *Age of Bronze*. Not restrained by any formal division into stanzas, Byron's cadences, having reached past the couplet and past the quatrain, now roll out beyond the eight-line or twelve-line paragraph into long compound cadences of twenty and thirty lines. In section 3 the opening *But where is he* is picked up six lines later, *Yes! where is he*. Then a cadence opened by the imperative *Sigh* (55), *Smile* (57), *Weep* (59), is suspended for more than twenty lines to *But Smile* (81), leading shortly to the concluding

Smiles—for the fettered Eagle breaks his chain,
And higher Worlds than this are his again. (87–88)

The fifth section, declaiming the pageant of Napoleon's career, is an impressive *tutti*, a glorification of the "Apostrophic hymn," sweeping along for 129 lines, with an open triplet near the cadence. In the use of anaphora to whip on these long chants "like the word

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1 The opening eight lines sound like a stanza of *Don Juan*; their last couplet has the decisive flourish and pivot learned in the writing of hundreds of clinched octaves.

2 E.g., lines 340–353.
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in a catch,\textsuperscript{1} as Byron would say, he has once more as in \textit{The Waltz} reversed the proportion of multiple and simple anaphora,\textsuperscript{2} not employing anaphora now for shaping couplets but for pushing on paragraphs.

In \textit{The Waltz} Byron cloaked his heresy as burlesque; in \textit{Age of Bronze} he stands up as a modern coupleteer in his own right. If he still does not greatly depart from the heroic tradition, neither does he force his verse to observe the pace of Pope, for he now uses, in a serious moral poem, technical “deviations” not to be found in Pope nor among “the postscript.”\textsuperscript{3}

B. RELAPSE.

\textit{The Island}, 1425 lines, January-February, 1823.

The strain of mastery, however, was too great. Apparently in a fit of nervous reaction Byron began, possibly even before \textit{Age of Bronze} was finished, to spin forth a tale in distempered heroic couplets over which he had lost all control. His excuses were a

\begin{itemize}
\item\textit{L & J}, V, 580.
\item\textit{Age}: 15.5\% multiple to 10.3\% simple; \textit{Waltz}: 14.9\% to 7.3\%; \textit{Lara}: 8.9\% to 15.9\%.
\item\textit{Age}: 15.5\% multiple to 10.3\% simple; \textit{Waltz}: 14.9\% to 7.3\%; \textit{Lara}: 8.9\% to 15.9\%.
\item Neither the high rate of enjambement, of multiple anaphora, nor of double rimes is in Crabbe, Gifford, Campbell, or Rogers. Churchill, never in Byron's list of Augustans, has about the same enjambement and anaphora (though not in similar proportions); yet in most ways the verse of \textit{Age} is even less Churchillian than was that of \textit{Bards}.
\item RIME.—An index of Byron's emancipation from Pope is his use of double rimes in \textit{Age}—19 pairs, only 4 of the conventionally slurred sort. \textit{Bards} had only the dishonest kind (as \textit{power-hour, given-heaven}) and only 4 of these. Honest double rimes appeared in \textit{Waltz} but were kept out of \textit{Corsair} and \textit{Lara}.
\item The role of rime in the philosophy of Byron's style is very significant. On the one hand it was the hall-mark of good breeding, as we have seen from the Bowles-Pope letters. On the other it served, especially in the \textit{Don Juan} period, as an ironic commentary on the anarchy of the times—a fitting of things in order contrary to the disorder of the real world: “Love rules the grove” according to rime, but in reality “Cash rules the grove, and fells it too besides” (\textit{Don Juan XII}, 13-14); the Holy Alliance is actually an unholy mesalliance; “Reason ne'er was hand in glove with rhyme.”
\end{itemize}
romantic subject and an aim only "a little above the run of period-
ical poesy," but nowhere in all Byron's heroic couplets will we
find side by side such free cadences and such slavish imitations
of eighteenth century see-saw and periphrasis as in The Island.
Relaxation of directive force has permitted all the flotsam of his
poetical heritage and the jetsam of his experimental deviations
to come floating up on the swirl of his indecision. Now a sudden
gust of independence drives his Pegasus soaring on its wrong
revolutionary course; now a qualm of timidity sends him scurrying
back to out-Pope Pope.

The fever of this style is reflected on our statistical chart in a
criss-crossing of contradictory zigzags. In Canto I multiple
anaphora is up to a peak of 24%, an increase of more than a third
over Waltz and Age of Bronze. At the same time balanced lines
increase to almost double the number in Age and enjambment
drops to the level of Lara II, while quatrain sequences remain at
a conservative level.

Suddenly in Canto II, comma sequences (quatrain or over)
more than double, to the extreme of 47.4% or almost half the total
lines, and enjambment runs up 4%—while multiple anaphora drops
from 24% to 6%. Simple anaphora goes up slightly to 17%,
or three-fourths of all anaphora, reversing the roles back to Pope's
proportion. But balanced lines also drop—from 16% to 6%.
And the number of enjambed couplets doubles, becoming
significantly higher than Augustan standards, though still lower
than Romantic.

In the last two cantos anaphora and balanced lines remain about
the same (at the percentages and proportions of Lara II), but en-
jambement rises to the highest in Byron's career, reaching to

1 L & J, VI, 164.
2 Not printed for saving space. (The Editor).
3 Total multiple and simple anaphora reaches 37%, almost the density of Pope's
Arbuthnot, but with the proportions exactly reversed.
4 Quatrain or longer: Age, 21.6%; Island I, 19.6%.
5 Enjambed couplets: 3 in Canto I, 34 in the rest of the poem, making an average
of 5.7% for the last three cantos, 5.2% for the whole poem.
6 III, 27%; IV, 25.4%. 
four times Pope’s level or two and one-half times that of Bards. Quatrains drop back but are still high at 35% and 32% in these two cantos. The number of enjambed couplets does not further increase; even in this his most abandoned poem Byron adheres pretty closely to the formal couplet closure. Yet now, even when the structure of his verse superficially observes the traditional closure, the tempo is often so rapid that each step is not a half-line or line, but a couplet.

Perhaps the simplest way to characterize The Island is by an analogy: an organist has just finished playing a difficult and impassioned composition (Age of Bronze). The echoes still vibrate as his fingers hover nervously above the keyboard. A fit of improvisation and mockery seizes him. Weaving upon the style he has just used, he distorts it fantastically, drawing out to absurdity tendencies that had been components of the sober music, trying one stop after another until the whole console has been run through. He slides into the saccharine love-song of melodrama:

An olden tale of Love,—for Love is old,
Old as eternity, but no outworn
With each new being born or to be born—

and then breaks into a thunderous cannonade:

The fight was o' er; the flashing through the gloom,
Which robes the cannon as he wings a tomb,
Had ceased; and sulphury vapours upward driven
Had left the Earth, and but polluted Heaven:
The rattling roar which rung in every volley
Had left the echoes to their melancholy;
No more they shrieked their horror, boom for boom,
The strife was done, the vanquished had their doom.¹

Psychologically the same kind of behavior is the essence of the Don Juan style: a love story is developed to the verge of tragedy

¹ I have italicized the salient atrocities.—Note, incidentally that the structure is an octave stanza.
or sentimentality, and then a twist of mockery "turns what was once romantic to burlesque." But in the ottava rima Byron was comfortably luxuriating in a tradition of mockery and modulations. The couplet is another matter. *The Island* has not the air of intentional burlesque: between aberrations the poet earnestly pushes his puppets through their heavy romancing and death-struggling. Yet "boom for boom" *The Island* as an unconscious burlesque of the Byronic heroic style outdoes all the intentional parodies in literary history. It is the death rattle of the heroic couplet tradition in the throat of an exiled British Peer resting between revolutions.

Punctiliously maintaining "the pose which his class-consciousness demanded," Byron had insisted on an aristocracy of poetry that must emulate the Greek Temple of Pope and "toil after" the polish of that highest perfection of versification, Pope's couplet. But as scion of an age of change, he succeeded much better when he let his genius "take its natural direction" on a "wrong revolutionary poetical system."

The battleground of this conflict was the heroic couplet, and most of the poems he produced there were mortally crippled; for as long as Byron evoked the shade of Pope, his hand was unsteadied. What was happening at Cephalonia, in September, 1823, we can only wonder. For there he wrote the first eleven lines of a poem, *Aristomenes*, in rimed couplets that are purely Keatsian in their enjambement and show no trace whatsoever of the little Queen Anne's man.