Byron's Rhyming Clime

WILL BOWERS

As he adapted to a southern climate, Byron's verse underwent a formal transformation. In 1820, when he had been out of England for four years, he jotted Horace's line 'Caelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt' ('They change their clime, not their mind, who rush across the sea') into a copy of Ugo Foscolo's novel *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1798-1802).[1] The European setting of this marginalia contradicts its meaning: Horace is explaining to his friend Bullatius the recalcitrance of national habits. The awkward relationship between text and context bespeaks a tension in Byron's work from 1816 to 1820, in which the poet tests the degree to which a change in the weather can lead to a change in the self.

Johnson's observation that 'when two Englishmen meet, their first talk is of the weather' proves that small talk was then as now, but the weather's popularity in chat should not belie the centrality of climate to Enlightenment philosophy. [2] In Byron's lifetime 'climate' was a polyvalent term: it could simply refer to weather, but it also explained the presence of flora and fauna, and extended to characterising various regions' cultures and morals beliefs. Argument centred on whether climate was the cause of national character and habits—as Montesquieu, Arbuthnot, and Espiard de la Borde thought—or whether populations were shaped by more abstract elements such as religion and government, as Hume believed. Especially in *Beppo* (1818) and the early cantos of *Don Juan*, a change of climate prompts a change of mind, voice, and poetic form, which brings to mind Swinburne's claim that '[r]ather from things without than from things within him did the spirit of Byron assume colour and shape'.[3] There is ample evidence of climate's ability to inflect Byron's poetry, but his recollection of Horace's is one of the rare moments when he considers the influence of an abstract Englishness upon his identity.

Byron considered from an early age the effect climate might have upon the imagination. A letter sent to R. C. Dallas during his first trip abroad ends as follows:

> I will trouble you no more at present, except to state that all climates and nations are equally interesting to me; that mankind are every where despicable in different absurdities; that the farther I proceed from your country the less I

> regret leaving it and the only advantage you have over the rest of mankind is the sea, that divides you from your foes; your other superiorities are merely imaginary. I would be a citizen of the world, but I fear some indispensable affairs will soon call me back; and as I left the land without regret, I shall return without pleasure.[4]

In the terse logic of the list Byron observes that all climates are interesting; that none is perfect; that different climates produce different kinds of man (as is suggested by the second use of the plural 'are'); and that Britain has so little pull that he can disassociate himself from it by calling it 'your country'. His anger is qualified in a regret which at one moment is lessening and, the next, is gone; in the final sentence, a desire to be a 'citizen of the world' combines with acceptance of a perhaps inevitable *nostos*. The Turkish tales Byron wrote on his return to England take place in the eastern climes that he missed. The tales are exotic in that they are foreign, but also because they take place somewhere warm: the Levant is exotic while Norway is only abroad. The warm subject of these poems warms the style of *Beppo* and ultimately *Don Juan* – about which Byron admitted 'To the kind reader of our sober clime / This way of writing will appear Exotic'.[5] The Turkish tales are often understood to be in literary dialogue with the libidinous morality of the *Arabian Nights* and *Vathek*, but the tales are also concerned with a separate intellectual tradition that saw the temperatures of the Levant as the cause of its loose sexual mores. (One theorist suggested that it was for this reason that 'the laws relative to adultery, in hot climates, are excessively severe and harsh'.)[6] The tales usually begin with a discussion of climate, as in the apostrophe 'Fair clime! where every season smiles' in *The Giaour*, or in the first lines of the *Bride of Abydos*:

> Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle
> Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime
> (ll. 1–2)

Byron's exposition of the fertility of warmer climes grows lush in often irregular iambic hexameters. These longer lines linger and fall into decadence, as in the description of a land 'where the virgins are as soft as the roses they twine' (l. 14) – which drags a conventional comparison of softness into the eroticism of thorns

pricking virgin skin. ‘Know ye’, which is repeated again in line five (‘Know ye the land of the cedar and vine’) and answered ten lines later by ‘’Tis the clime of the East – ’tis the land of the Sun’ (l. 16), sees Byron playing the part of questioner and respondent, a mediator between climates and cultures, an interlocutor who was aware that the science of his day thought that the ‘clime of the East’ was the reason for the ‘deeds’ done within it.[7] The reader is implicated too, as the narrator suggests that ‘you know’ what to expect from these exotic tales. Byron felt the cold on his return from the Levant. He asked his half-sister Augusta in September 1811, ‘what you call the present Season, it would be Winter in every other Country which I have seen’ (*BLJ*, vol. ii, p. 88). He was also worried about the effect that ‘this preposterous climate’ would have on his poetic vocation: ‘[y]our climate kills me;’ he wrote to Francis Hodgson: ‘I can neither read, write, nor amuse myself, or any one else’ (*BLJ*, vol. ii, p. 111). The idea that a cold climate is to blame for writer’s block is an old one in English letters. In the proem to Book ix of *Paradise Lost*, when reflecting on the martial feats of previous southern epics, Milton concedes:

> Me of these
> Nor skilled nor studious, higher argument
> Remains, sufficient of it self to raise
> That name, unless an age too late, or cold
> Climate, or years damp my intended wing[8]

The lines are poised between false modesty, in which ‘higher argument’ trumps military subjects, and a worry that northern climes and old age may halt the poet’s work. The ‘Climate’ is offered as the more serious concern both by its position as enjambed *incipit* and owing to the trochaic ‘damp my’, which appears to disregard ‘years’ and return to the language of weather. ‘Damp’ is deft: the obvious meaning is ‘to wet’, but beneath that is the suggestion of quelling flames and stopping the vibrations of a stringed instrument, which throws into question the compatibility of English climate and ‘heroic song’ (*PL*, book ix, line 25). Milton entertains the possibility that certain climates suit certain cultures, so touching on what would become a crucial contention of eighteenth century philosophy: that the physical impact of weather shaped the character of a nation. As François Ignace Espiard de la Borde summarises: ‘[o]f a Nation’s Genius, the fundamental Cause is the Climate’.[9]

Some Britons proffered a different idea of the 'fundamental Cause' of a nation's genius, one that helped explain the growing commercial and cultural dominance of their rainy wind-blasted isles. Addison's 'Letter from Italy' (1704) presents this alternative:

> On foreign mountains may the sun refine
> The grape's soft juice, and mellow it to wine,
> With citron groves adorn a distant soil,
> And the fat olive swell with floods of oil:
> We envy not the warmer clime, that lies
> In ten degrees of more indulgent skies,
> Nor at the coarseness of our heaven repine,
> Tho' o'er our heads the frozen Pleiads shine:
> 'Tis Liberty that crowns Britannia's Isle,
> And makes her barren rocks and her bleak mountains smile.[10]

The opening couplets offer an ordered idea of plenty, but their neatness cannot hide something disconcerting. The languid verbs – 'refine', 'mellow', 'adorn', and 'swell' – are matched by their louche objects, in the wine that brings about drunkenness, the ornate and alien citron, and the cloying final image of olives about to burst with oil. The line beginning 'Tho'' admits but brushes past a position under the chilly Pleiades: Addison's view of England rejects earthly spoils and the compelling [OK?] power of climate. He instead looks to higher virtues in the stars and the 'Liberty' that is England's boast and prize. Harvest looks trivial beside the triple abstraction of the personified 'Liberty' metaphorically crowning 'Britannia'. This turn against sunburnt mirth culminates in a balanced alexandrine, which reminds us of the earlier 'foreign mountains' and rejects the external, refined, and climactic indulgences of Italy. Addison's crowned isle has close behind it Gaunt's dying words on the 'sceptred isle', a speech set against the corruption of young Richard by 'Lascivious metres' and 'fashions in proud Italy'.[11] The 'barren rocks' match the 'rocky shore' (II. i. 62) that is seen as a 'moat defensive' (II. i. 48) in Gaunt's Eden, and is part of a projection of an ideal Britain that intensified during the eighteenth century.[12]

Addison's projection of an ideal polity, continued by Lyttleton and Goldsmith, has the English poet compare Italy and England. Although they praise the southern

clime, these writers always orientate themselves northwards. This type of patriotism prefers a Humean view of national characteristics that denies the role of climate; it is 'our heads'—and specifically our brains, what Hume calls 'those finer organs, on which the operations of the mind and understanding depend'—that govern behaviour.[13] In Byron's poetry this turn back home doesn't, or at least doesn't appear, to happen. As well as rejecting the elegant couplets that had been a mainstay of his English verse, Byron disorientates his readers by preferring the external advantages of the Italian climate. The period from his departure in 1816 to his reflection on Horace in 1820 is one of transition, when his use of form and rhyme were shifting while his climate was changing too. As the meditative stanzas of the 'Epistle to Augusta' show, Byron was capable of using the ottava rima in an austere fashion, without the play and generosity of his later style; it was not simply writing in Italian forms that created the characteristic abundance, but rather that this new poetry combined form and a material change in what Swinburne calls 'things without'. The major poem that straddles Byron's time in and out of England, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-18), shows the transition. Harold, 'the cold stranger pass'd to other climes' (*CHP*, canto ii, l. 141), resumes his travels through Belgium and Switzerland in 1816. The narrator reflects:

> Since my young days of passion – joy, or pain
> Perchance my heart and harp have lost a string,
> And both may jar: it may be, that in vain
> I would essay as I have sung to sing.
> Yet, though a dreary strain, to this I cling
>
> (*CHP*, canto iii, lines 28–32)

Byron's continuation of *Childe Harold* shows the 'beleaguered elegance' that Matthew Bevis finds in the poem at its most strained: the unremarkable triplet of the first line ('passion – joy, or pain') is made odd by that 'or' in place of an expected 'and', and the Popean zeugma of 'heart and harp' is sullied by the leaden emphasis of 'both may jar'.[14] The 'dreary strain' of the Spenserian stanza is the one that Byron has sung, and will stick with for the rest of *Childe Harold*, but the shifting tense of 'sung to sing', and a few lines later of 'I think less wildly:— I *have* thought / Too long and darkly' (lines 55–6), suggest that English forms may no longer suit the poetry that

Byron *will* sing in future. As Shelley illustrated in *Laon and Cythna* (1817) Spenserian stanzas need not be bleak: it was something beyond the strictures of form that created melancholy Harold.

Upon crossing the Alps a different poet emerges. In December 1816, on the eve of his first Christmas in Italy, Byron wrote a gossipy letter to Moore that breaks into comic verse on the subject of King Ludd. He remarks that 'There's an amiable *chanson* for you — all impromptu', before bursting into another song on the Venetian carnival which ends **'**Masking and humming, / Fifing and drumming, / Guitarring and strumming, / Oh Thomas Moore' (*BLJ*, vol. v, p. 148). The move from English politics to a rhyming quip about Venetian nightlife shows a reckless dynamism that is flaunted with the playful link of 'for you' and 'impromptu' as a boast about easy rhyming. The insistent gerunds hint at the fecundity [? liveliness ? energy] of Venice and point towards the opening of Byron's first long work written entirely in Italy, *Beppo*.[15] Byron claimed that he 'came into Italy to feel the climate' (*BLJ*, vol. vi, p. 15), and he gives over the middle section of *Beppo* to explain how his new climate made him feel:

> For all these sinful doings, I must say
> That Italy's a pleasant place to me,
> Who love to see the Sun shine every day,
> And Vines (not nail'd to walls) from tree to tree
> Festooned,
>
> (lines 321–5)

Weighty talk of catholic sin makes way for a humble love of sunny days. The parenthesis after 'Vines' checks the line and creates an aside in which Byron deplores how English horticulturalists train grapes up walls to protect them from harsh winds.[16] Thanks to the Italian clime, these vines are free to form a pergola that hangs over the line break in the rounded middle vowels of 'Festooned'.

In earlier patriotic writing, the actual climate of a country was often a passing concern, as when Goldsmith talks of an England 'happy in thy climate, fertility, situation and commerce; but still happier in the peculiar nature of thy laws and government'.[17] Like Addison, Goldsmith rushes through his list to dwell on the imagined virtues of English 'laws and government'. Byron's focus, by contrast, is the

‘climate, fertility, [and] situation’ of Italy, and from these measureable and tangible characteristics he forms his opinion on national character. He guides us through foreign climes, and by placing weather at the centre of *Beppo* takes the side in the climate debate of those who adduce natural causes in their accounts of human behaviour. The use of native fruits as symbols of his wider praise for Italian morals follows Adam Ferguson’s influential *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). Ferguson divides cities into those in the north, where ‘the feelings of the heart, are suffered to perish’, and those in the south, about which he states, ‘the ingenious pleasantry, the piercing ridicule, the tender, pathetic, or the elevated strain of elocution, have been confined … to the same latitudes with the fig and the vine’.[18] The ‘fig and the vine’ (meet emblems of the warm south) are part of a relationship between the vegetable and human, and of a climate in the widest sense, which controls horticulture, morals, and literature. Byron’s comparisons continue:

> I like on Autumn Evenings to ride out,
> Without being forc’d to bid my groom be sure
> My cloak is round his middle strapp’d about,
> Because the skies are not the most secure;
> I know too that, if stopp’d upon my route
> Where the green Alleys windingly allure,
> Reeling with *grapes* red waggons choke the way –
> In England ’twould be dung, dust, or a dray.
>
> (lines 329–36)

The praise for not needing a coat, and the diction used to give it, are remarkably everyday. An Italian autumn evening is set against those ‘superiorities [that] are merely imaginary’, for which Byron had chided the English in his letter to Dallas six years earlier. Addison offered reserved praise to Italy’s ‘more indulgent skies’ before turning to the abstract wonders of home, but here only the tangible is the subject of comparison. Byron’s view is no less an idealisation than Addison’s -- it takes something from Claude and Poussin -- but it claims the reality of landscape rather than moral abstraction as its source. The green alleys that ‘windingly allure’ and the red waggons ‘Reeling with *grapes*’ offer an attractive tableau, contrasting with the bleak Anglo-Saxon consonants of ‘dung, dust, or a dray’ on England’s roads. The

play Byron makes with the aural differences of Italian and English also makes a point about what creates national character. He is in agreement with Arbuthnot, who claimed that northern voices were a product of 'reluctance to open their Mouths in cold Air which must make their language abound in Consonants; whereas from a contrary Cause, the Inhabitants of warmer Climates opening their mouths, must form a softer Language, abounding in vowels'.[19] Hume cited Arabic and Muscovite dialect as a retort to all this, but Byron, whether from deeply held philosophical convictions or because he sensed an opportunity to riff on these differences, prefers the physical diagnosis in *Beppo*, with the street names of Italy called 'prettier names in softer accents spoke' when compared to 'Monmouth-street' and 'Rag Fair' (lines 35–40), and in the famous lines on Italian as 'that soft bastard Latin … With syllables which breathe of the sweet South' (lines 345–48).[20]

The anaphoric 'I love' and 'I like' at the centre of *Beppo*, which favourably compare Italy to England, are arrested in stanza 47:

> 'England! with all thy faults I love thee still!,'
> I said at Calais, and have not forgot it;
> I like to speak and lucubrate my fill;
> I like the Government (but that is not it)
>
> (lines 368–71)

Byron now turns to give the same attention to England that he has to Italy, to orientate himself homeward in the manner of Addison or Goldsmith. But his praise is a feint – he has not forgotten the line, but he may well have forgone his belief in it – and it is deflated by parenthesis, '(but that is not it)', and by the line break, as it will be again in the next stanza: 'I like the weather, when it is not rainy, / That is, I like two months of every Year' (lines 381–2). The quotation marks and brackets are examples of what Jane Stabler has called **'**typographically marked disruptions'..[21] The first of Byron's vows is originally Cowper's rather than his own. It comes from the second part of *The Task* (1785):

> England, with all thy faults, I love thee still
> My country! and while yet a nook is left
> Where English minds and manners may be found

> Shall be constrain'd to love thee. Though thy clime
> Be fickle, and thy year, most part, deform'd
> With dripping rains, or wither'd by a frost,
> I would not yet exchange thy sullen skies
> And fields without a flower, for warmer France
> With all her vines; nor for Ausonia's groves
> Of golden fruitage and her myrtle bow'rs.[22]

Byron quotes from verse that exemplifies the convention he is sending up, catching Cowper at the start of his turn to 'English minds and manners', in spite of his country's fickle clime and the material advantages of Ausonia. Cowper's serious lines are not quoted fairly, altered by misquotation with the addition of exclamation marks after 'England' and 'still'—thereby changing a considered meter into the bombast of a patriot's boast—and maimed by cutting the enjambed invocation to 'My country!'. Claiming ownership is a habit of patriotic verse (compare Wordsworth's lines on landing at Dover in 1802), and just as Byron called England 'your country', so here he acknowledges, and then refuses to bow to, the rhetoric of national ownership.[23] The bravado of Byron's appropriation of *The Task* is at its strongest when setting Cowper's solemn blank verse among the fatuous rhymes of 'forgot it' and 'not it'. Elsewhere, Byron claimed that Cowper was 'no poet' (*BLJ*, vol. iii, p. 179) but one of the 'Blank pretenders'. By placing his blank verse line in a southern stanza in which English struggles to supply sufficient rhymes, Byron emphasises that a warmer climate is the cause of his formal and moral separation from the 'minds and manners' of home. But among these confident statements on the superiority of foreign climes there are hints, both in the way Byron expresses himself and in what is being expressed, that his mind has in fact not been changed entirely by crossing the sea. His letters from Switzerland in 1816 contain little verbal ticks – slipping into Nottinghamshire dialect when asking for '"a few paouands"' (*BLJ*, vol. v, p. 77), the Scots 'The *Lard* help us!', and the easy colloquialism of worrying that some gunpowder 'might have broke our noddles' (*BLJ*, vol. v, p. 103) – which, when put beside his concurrent reflections on displacement, form something of a pattern.[24] After seeing the graves of English Civil War exiles at Vevay, Byron turns to Edmund Ludlow's house and writes down the motto 'Omne Solum forte patria', a common *sententia* he would have known from his schoolboy Ovid and which would hardly be

worth recording were it not for its sudden power to convey his own dislocation through memories of youth.[25] It is to another remembered work that Byron reverts at the close of his journal, as his painful separation from England comes to the surface and he chides his inability to 'lose my own wretched identity in the majesty – and the power and the Glory – around – above – and beneath me' (*BLJ*, vol. v, p. 105). This surprisingly forthright moment confesses a failure to change despite leaving England to do so. Less surprising is Byron's reversion to a touchstone like the Lord's Prayer. The instinctive use of these phrases, and the idioms of home, are part of a reckoning with Horace's maxim some years before he wrote it down. Byron is trying to defy the idea that 'Caelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt', but this very phrase, like his recollections of Ovid and the Lord's Prayer, is bound up with his own adolescence. On a mountain north of Rome, Byron pledged to rid himself of Horace and those classical authors that were part of the 'drill'd dull lesson, forced down word by word / In my repugnant youth' (*CHP*, canto iv, lines 674–5). But despite this elaborate gesture, Byron still remembered these lessons, and often resorted to the very *sententiae* they contained when confronting his displacement. While Byron remained in Italy his defiant attitude towards home intensified, alongside pronounced attempts at acculturation. A dismissive barb against a critic who had questioned his spelling of *cavalier servente* in the *Monthly Review* illustrates this dynamic well: 'I wish Mr. Hodgson (of whoever Griffith's Scribbler may be) would not talk of what *he* don't understand—such fellows are not fit to be intrusted with Italian' (*BLJ*, vol. vi, p. 33). Byron was equally keen to display his knowledge of Italian to those he held in serious regard. Timothy Webb has called this 'an assertion of intimacy based on shared linguistic knowledge', and, when viewed beside Byron's use of an English idiom in his alpine letters, it can be seen as a means of practising his Italian voice in a way that can't be learnt in grammars.[26] He also sought help, through his publisher John Murray, from Italian experts in England. Byron asks in one letter about a problem with a translation of the Tuscan 'Usbergo', and tells Murray to 'Ask Rose, Hobhouse, Merivale, and Foscolo, and vote with the majority' (*BLJ*, vol. vii, p. 54).[27] The first person on the list, William Stewart Rose, was a translator of Italian poetry and a travel writer Byron admired. The two spent time together at Venice in early 1818. Byron's interaction with Rose helps us to understand his attitude towards acculturation, and the trouble he had in adopting the poetic habits of his new home. Rose wrote a brilliant epistle to Byron in 1818, in which he mocked his own situation fifty miles

west of Venice, '(Fenc'd to the North, expos'd to the Scirocco) / Add the congenial climate of Morocco'.[28] The epistle begins with a strained compliment:

> Byron, while you make gay what circle fits ye,
> Bandy Venetian slang with the Benzòn,
> Or play at company with the Albrizzi,
> The self-pleas'd peasant, and patrician crone,
> Grinanis, Mocenijas, Baltis, Rizzi,
> Compassionate our cruel case,—alone—
> Our pleasure an academy of frogs,
> Who nightly serenade us from the bogs.
>
> (lines 1–8)

Rose is jealous that Byron has taken his opportunity to fit into prominent salons and casually 'Bandy' Venetian dialect. But Rose shows his own suitability for the Italian climate with his adept use of the stanza: in the feminine rhyme of 'fits ye' and 'Alibrizzi', in the seemingly sociable list that is deflated by the bathetic '—alone—', and in the couplet that recalls Aristophanes' eponymous frogs. Byron's judgment of these lines is revealing: 'They are good and true – and Rose is a fine fellow – and one of the few English who understand Italy – without which Italian is nothing' (*BLJ*, vol. vi, p. 38).

It is praise of valid acculturation, an understanding that simply knowing a language is not enough. Appreciating the customs, culture, and climate of Italy is required for a 'good and true' Italian style. The admiration for Rose suggests that Byron's idea of what it takes to 'understand Italy' is a complicated one, and that taking it to be a matter of simply knowing the mechanics of new forms and a new language is inadequate. It is, rather, an accretive development that comes not simply from reading books but from hearing, seeing, and feeling a foreign clime. It is the rich ubiquity of this immersion that brings about what has been called the 'Italian Byron' – as he will say to Murray, of *Don Juan*, 'is it not life, and is it not the thing' – something richer than the schematic accounts of national cultures such as might be found in the work of De Staël or Schlegel. Byron's familiar antagonistic mode comes to the fore when he challenges those who fail to see the importance of adapting and

acculturating across climates. He had (apparently) this to say about the most important translation of his age:

> Lord Byron found a copy of Dante's *Inferno* on the Countess's table, and they read the episode of Francesca da Rimini together, whereupon she asked him if it had already been translated into English. 'Yes,' he answered, '*tradotto—ma tradito.*' 'Very well,' she said, 'avenge it, then.'[29]

As in the earlier play on 'for you' and 'impromptu', Byron carries his jest through the half-rhyme of '*tradotto*' (translated) and '*tradito*' (traduced). The betrayal to which Byron refers is Henry Francis Cary's *The Vision of Dante Aligheri* (1814). Both the joke and the criticism hinge on rhyme, or lack thereof: Byron objects to Cary's use of Miltonic blank verse. Byron later notes that his own rendering of the Francesca episode is accurate 'line for line, rhyme for rhyme' (*BLJ*, vol. vii, p. 58), in order to reinforce the claim that adaptation across climates is necessary for true translation. Byron's remark about Cary needs to be seen in the context of two well-known appraisals of *The Vision*: Wordsworth's opinion that it is 'a great national work' and Lamb's claim that it is a 'polar-star translation'.[30] Wordsworth's appreciation of a translation that relies on appropriating Dante via Milton, a stylistic movement from south to north, as a 'national work', would have particularly irked Byron, whereas Lamb's opinion, usually read as a compliment, is given a new inflection if the blank verse of *Vision* is seen as a 'polar-star', a fixed point in cold northern skies.

In the cold Geneva of 1816, 'the year without a summer', Byron wrote two of his best known poems in blank verse: the apocalyptic 'Darkness', in which 'all hearts / Were chill'd' (lines 8–9), and the majority of *Manfred*, which he called 'a kind of poem … [...] of a very wild – metaphysical – and inexplicable kind' (*BLJ*, vol. v, p. 170). But despite that, he was suspicious of blank verse, as the preface to *The Corsair* (1814) makes clear: 'In Blank verse – Milton, Thomson, and our Dramatists are the beacons that shine along the deep but warn us from the rough and barren rock on which they are kindled'. This is the 'barren rock' that for Addison symbolised the English climate, and that Gaunt thought created a 'demi-paradise'; Byron, using the same terms, says that English blank verse is liable to wreck his poetic bark. As he grew more comfortable in his new rhyming clime, his attitude towards blank verse crystallised. He commented of Southey, who would later edit Cowper, that 'He'd

written much blank-verse, and blanker prose / – And more of both than any body knows' (*Vision of Judgement* (1822), lines 783–4), and offered a similar sting on *The Excursion* (1814): Wordsworth had 'just spawned a quarto of metaphysical blank verse', Byron thought, 'which is nevertheless only a part of a poem' (*BLJ*, vol. iv, p. 157)

Writing in blank verse equates to a kind of verbosity, though a complaint about verbosity might seem strange coming from a poet who between 1818 to 1824 wrote sixteen cantos of a long poem, about which he boasted 'You ask me for the plan of Donny Johnny – I *have* no plan – I *had* no plan' (*BLJ*, vol. vi, p. 207). For Byron, the difference between *Don Juan* and *The Excursion* 'spawned' by Wordsworth is specifically one of rhyme, and more generally one of temperament. In *Don Juan*, Adeline is described as having 'vivacious versatility … called mobility / A thing of temperament and not of art', with Byron noting that this mobility is 'a quality which rather belongs to other climates' (*DJ*, canto xvi, lines 818–21). The description of Adeline seizes on the idea of a quality that cannot be gained by art, that temperament partly has to do with the intangible effect that climate has on the individual. Part of the dominant English view of the Italian temperament was as a rhyming one: the ease and frequency of rhyme was an element of the Italian national character, which was mocked in the xenophobic songs aimed at immigrants in London, cheered at the opera at the Haymarket, and admired by English visitors to Italy. Mary Shelley provides a wonderful example of English admiration of the musicality of Italian life when she explains the 'singularly poetic' game of the Tuscan *contadini* during the grape harvest, who compose extempore rhyming poetry while picking the grapes: '[i]t is this exhaustless fertility that makes Italy a paradise, and affords never-ending variety of object to the residents. With us nature is parsimonious, if not frugal … In Italy she superabounds'.[31] Exhaustless rhyme and fertile grape vines are embodiments of, not metaphors for, the southern climate; they represent the Italian temperament as set against the parsimonious and frugal English character. Byron develops, alongside his very public love for Italy, a conception of English poetry, and of Laker poetry specifically, as being *too* English. The reaction of one of Byron's victims makes the point. Less than a year after its publication Southey commented disparagingly on some lines at the end of *Don Juan*, canto i, 'wherein my own name is coupled with a rhyme which I thought would never be used by any person but myself when kissing one of my own children in infancy'.[32] It is no surprise that Southey disliked a stanza

in which he is the joke, but the personal *animus* between the two authors should not obscure a clear difference in poetic temperament. Southey views the abundant triple rhymes of *Don Juan* (in this case, 'Southey' / 'Mouthey' / 'Drouthey') as infantile, as a type of play for private silliness. But these rhymes are part of what identified *Don Juan* as a southern European poem – Southey himself called it 'of Italian growth' – and as coming from a climate in which 'superabundant' rhyming was seen as part of everyday life.[33] Byron had flitted through forms before coming to Italy – couplets, Spenserian stanzas, blank verse, and the ottava rima – but a greater certainty regarding the form suited to his new climate, as well as a stronger dislike for the forms he left behind, produces a more daring stunt than his earlier misquotation of Cowper. Byron closes the first canto of *Don Juan* thus:

> 'Go, little book, from this my solitude!
> 'I cast thee on the waters, go thy ways!
> 'And if, as I believe, thy vein be good,
> 'The world will find thee after many days.'
> When Southey's read, and Wordsworth understood,
> I can't help putting in my claim to praise –
> The four first rhymes are Southey's every line:
> For Godsake, reader! take them not for mine.
>
> (*DJ*, canto i, lines 1769–76)

The envoy is taken from the last verse of Southey's *The Lay of the Laureate, or Carmen Nuptiale* (1816), with the stanza split between a four-line extract and Byron's gloss upon it. Southey, the man Byron would claim 'Had turned his coat – and would have turned his skin' (*Vision of Judgement*, line 776), has his own verse turned inside out for satiric purpose. Byron exposes the cant of Southey's lines by singing them in Italian, and seamlessly provides the C rhymes of 'understood' and 'praise'. Despite his desperate address, we are forced phonically by the rhyme, and visually by having read more than two-hundred ottava rima stanzas in this canto, to accept these lines as Byron's own, and to see Southey's verse grafted onto an Italian form. As there was in the recollection of Cowper, Byron's misuse of Southey also contains a suppressed allusion. He chooses to use Southey's play on the envoy of *Troilus and Criseyde*: Chaucer a fit subject for the Poet Laureate, but no less suitable

for Byron as the first poetic Anglo-Italian. Byron's use of Southey's verse is reminiscent of Montesquieu's comparison of seeing the Opera in England and in Italy: 'the same music produces such different effects on the two nations, one is so cold and indifferent, and the other so transported, that it seems almost inconceivable'.[34] Byron changes Southey's pompous allusion to Chaucer to provide his own transportation from England to Italy. Just as the 'exhaustless fertility' of Italy is represented in the envoy, so too is it a direct subject at the opening of *Don Juan*. Lines in which the 'moral North' is compared to a land of passion and adultery 'where the climate's sultry' (canto i, line 504) work alongside outlandish rhymes and polysyllabic juxtapositions to create an abundance that many readers think characteristic of the poem. Triple rhymes and contradictory couplets allow Byron to display the 'never-ending variety' that his climate demands. But, as Drummond Bone points out, *Don Juan* is 'not merely ludic', and the apparent spontaneity and polyphony of the poem is a careful construction.[35] These vaunting rhymes are the exception in the early cantos, since the vast majority are the clipped rhymes common to English verse. Byron is parsimonious, if not frugal, with his most ostensibly southern elements: the manuscript of the first two cantos show that he worked extremely hard to get these grand rhymes right.[36] (T. G. Steffan has called these revisions to rhyme words Byron's 'stammering'.)[37] The manuscript lets us see the toiling mind behind confident rhyme. At the end of the first of many lists in *Don Juan* Byron stops narrating the military heroes of Waterloo because they are 'not at all adapted to my rhyme' (canto i, line 24). Up to this point he has paraded the successful adaptation of his northern language into his southern rhyme, as in *Beppo* when the name Laura is chosen 'Because it slips into my verse with ease' (line 178). But there are traces in the early cantos of *Don Juan* of the labour that adaptation requires. Moving rhyme across climates produces awkward moments, and these moments capture the more comprehensive tension Byron felt at his own displacement. In well-known cases Byron gives brazenly superficial rhymes such as 'river' and 'Gudalquivir', or rhymes that rely on anglicised pronunciations of Cadiz and Seville (canto i, lines, 1520, 1623). He accepts the hybridity of his own position, but manages to pull it off: the lines still rhyme. When English is squeezed into the ottava rima in this way it reads as the ultimate expression of cosmopolitanism, but there are moments in which Byron exposes the struggle between his language (shaped by birth), and his style (shaped by climate). Vestiges of an English mind are apparent:

'This sort of Adoration of the real / Is but a heightening of the 'beau ideal' (canto ii, line 1687–8). There is a stumble here, not to get around a difficult word, or change the pronunciation of it, but because 'beau' is part of a borrowed French phrase and advertises its audible foreignness. The eye wants the French pronunciation. But the ear will not accept the jarring tone of real and 'ideal' (I-da-yal), and prefers the 'real' / 'i-deal' rhyme used in *Beppo*.[38] The uneasiness is intensified if we anglicise the meaning rather than the sound of 'beau', to have those fops of the Regency beau monde who were mocked for their allegiance to Gallic fashions mispronounce a simple French word. A more pronounced example of compromised rhyme occurs in these lines on Donna Julia:

> And if in the mean time her husband died,
> But heaven forbid that such a thought should cross
> Her brain, though in a dream! (and then she sigh'd)
> Never could she survive that common loss;
> But just suppose that moment should betide,
> I only say suppose it – *inter nos* –
> (This should be *entre nous*, for Julia thought
> In French, but then the rhyme would go for nought.)
>
> (*DJ*, canto i, lines 665–72)

For five lines Julia's woofed fantasies about her husband's death develop in easy rhymes. Her jolt back to reality comes not from a break in the actual narrative, but from Byron's bathetic struggle to rhyme. There is already a hint that this stanza may not meet expectations in the refusal of a predictable cliché ('should cross / Her brain'), but the final three lines retain the power to shock. Byron admits to losing control of the relationship between plot and rhyme: his touted ability to make an undercutting or comic third rhyme is not always neat or elegant. These lines that don't quite work, or that put on show the struggle that makes them work, are an example of what Bevis has called Byron's fondness for 'rhymes that don't quite portend order'.[39] This disorder occurs when language has not adapted to the verse that binds it, and when the mind has not entirely changed when changing climate. Lady Blessington called Byron 'a perfect chameleon, possessing the fabulous qualities attributed to that animal'. But while that might have been true in conversation, Byron is an imperfect

chameleon in verse.[40] The admission of guilt provided by the parenthesis, and the flirtation with the rhyme potentially going 'for nought', acknowledges such imperfection: a whisper that says 'I know this movement from clime to clime doesn't always work'. In this stammering, the occasional poetic tic of England, you see Byron's persistent, if reluctant, orientation homeward to the north.

Merton College, Oxford

NOTES

[1] Horace, *Epistles*, I xi. 27: 'they change their clime, not their mind, who rush across the sea' (trans. Fairclough). The note is on p. 2 of Teresa Guiccioli's copy of *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*, kept in the Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, New York Public Library.
[2] Samuel Johnson, *The Idler*, no. 15, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, vol. ii, ed. Bate, Bullitt, and Powell (New Haven,,1963), p. 36.
[3] Algernon Charles Swinburne, Preface to *Selections from the Works of Lord Byron* (1866), vii.
[4] Leslie Marchand (ed.), *Byron's Letters and Journals* (1973–94), 13 vols, vol. i, pp. 248–9. Hereafter given in the text as *BLJ*.
[5] *Don Juan*, canto iv, lines 41–2, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford, 1980–93), 7 vols, vol. v, p. 204. Further references to Byron's poetry are from this edition unless stated; line numbers are given in the text.
[6] William Falconer, *Remarks on the Influence of Climate* (1781), p. 76.
[7] As McGann has pointed out in *The Complete Poetical Works*, vol. iv, p. 436, the questioning structure recalls Mignon's song 'Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn' ('Know you the land where lemon blossoms grow') from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795–96).
[8] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Longman, 1971), book ix, lines 41–5.
[9] François-Ignace Espiard de la Borde, *The Spirit of Nations* (1753) p. 4.
[10] Joseph Addison, *A Letter from Italy* (1709), ll. 131–40. First published in Jacob Tonson's *Poetical Miscellanies: The Fifth Part* (1704).
[11] *Richard II*, ed. Charles R. Forker (1997), II. i. 40; II. i. 19–21.
[12] The best general study of this intensification is given in Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992).
[13] David Hume, 'Of National Characters', *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (1777), 2 vols., vol. i, p. 215.
[14] Matthew Bevis, *The Art of Eloquence: Byron, Dickens, Joyce* (Oxford, 2007), p. 45.
[15] See *Beppo*, ll. 6–7.
[16] See e.g. William Forsyth, *A Treatise on the Culture and Management of Fruit-trees* (1802), pp. 123–36.
[17] Oliver Goldsmith, 'A comparative view of races and nations', in *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Arthur Friedman, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1966), vol. iii, p. 67.
[18] Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1768), p. 190.
[19] John Arbuthnot, *An Essay Concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* (1733), pp. 153–4.
[20] 'On National Characters', p. 209.
[21] Jane Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 111.
[22] William Cowper, *The Task*, ed. James Sambrook (London, 1994), book ii, lines 206–15.
[23] See William Wordsworth, 'Composed in the Valley, near Dover, on the day of landing', in *Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford, 2000), p. 284.
[24] This reading of '*Lard*' is not given by Marchand, but is clear in the ms and is given in *The Works of Lord Byron, The Letters and Journals*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero, 6 vols. rev. ed. (1922), III. 361. Hereafter *Prothero*.
[25] *BLJ*, vol. v, p. 97. Ovid, *Fasti*, I.494: 'Every land is to the brave his country' (trans. J. G. Frazer). The phrase is the basis for the opening of Gaunt's speech in *Richard II*, I. iii. 274–5.
[26] Timothy Webb, '"Soft Bastard Latin": Byron and the Attractions of Italian', *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies*, 10 (2009), 73–100.

[27] 'Usbergo' is a suit of armour.
[28] The epistle is given in full in *Prothero*, vol. iv, pp. 212–13.
[29] Teresa Guiccioli, *Lord Byron's Life in Italy*, ed. Peter Cochran, trans. Michael Rees (Newark, Del., 2005), p. 152.
[30] Samuel Rogers, *Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers*, ed. A Dyce (1856), pp. 282–3; *The Complete Correspondence and Works of Charles Lamb* (1870), 4 vols., vol. ii, p. 31.
[31] Mary Shelley, 'The English in Italy', *Westminster Review*, October 1826, p. 335.
[32] *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, ed. Cuthbert Southey, 6 vols. (1849–50), vol. iv, p. 353.
[33] *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, vol. v, p. 21.
[34] Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, 2 vols., 3rd edn (Edinburgh, 1762), vol. i, p. 242.
[35] Drummond Bone, *Byron* (Tavistock, 2000), p. 60.
[36] See T. G. Steffan and Willis Pratt (ed.), *Byron's Don Juan* (Austin,1957) 4 vols, vol. i, pp. 106–113.
[37] *Byron's Don Juan*, vol. i, p. 106.
[38] A cue to mispronunciation is often given by the italics or inverted commas placed around the phrase in many editions.
[39] Matthew Bevis, *Life Lessons from Byron* (2013), p. 74
[40] Lady Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest J. Lovell (Princeton, 1969), p. 71.