Byron's Movements
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[A version of the talk given to the Annual Dinner of the Newstead Abbey Byron Society, January 1999.]

Byron's lameness is one of the first things that comes to mind when we think of him. In this essay, I want to reverse the emphasis and concentrate on Byron's movements of various kinds. The most obvious of these are walking, scrambling, swimming, sailing, and riding in a coach or on horse-back. I'll take each in turn.

How often and in what circumstances do we imagine Byron walking? Certainly he walked round the grounds at Newstead, round the lake and into the Devil's Wood with Augusta, and he walked regularly with Edleston at Cambridge. He walked along the cliffs at Seaham with Annabella (her 'favourite walk'). He walked with Teresa in the garden at Genoa. We don't read descriptions of these private walks, but we do know what pains he customarily took to prevent himself from being seen whilst walking. His most public walk must have been when he left England in 1816 and walked from his inn in Dover out to the quay. He took Hobhouse's arm both for the support of friendship and to assist as near a performance of normal walking as he could manage whilst they traversed the line of spectators. Some of the nervous tensions attaching to his presentation in the House of Lords and his public audience with the Sultan must have been caused by his extreme self-consciousness about walking in public. He commented on Pope (in whose deformity he saw an expression of his own) that 'It is not probable indeed that a woman would have fallen in love with him as he walked along the Mall'.[1] Drink and night-time, correspondingly, must have given him public confidence. He describes a night of drinking in London 'without once quitting the table, except to ambulate home, which I did alone, and in utter contempt of a hackney coach and my own'.[2] We note the word 'ambulate' which in its portentousness seems to imitate the way someone who is tipsy tries to articulate long words clearly and, in a similar way, tries to walk with dignity. In another way it is something of a boast ('utter contempt of a hackney coach') by a lame man. Here Byron, alone and at night, manages to 'ambulate' the public streets of London without self-consciousness. Elsewhere he uses the word 'hobbled': 'I have drunk two bottles of claret — and have hobbled two miles up hill — and stumbled as many down hill — and here I am again upon even ground'.[3] This is at Hastings in 1814. The phrasing and cadence is instructive and typical. Byron owns up to his difficulty in walking — even though here he partly blames it on alcohol — but at the same time there is a zest in the sequence of verbs here which suggests rapidity in the movements described. The cadence comes to a halt with 'and here I am again upon even ground'. This sequence reminds us of how Conrad descends the cliffs when he leaves Medora:

> From crag to crag descending, swiftly sped
> Stern Conrad down, nor once he turned his head;[4]
> …
> He bounds—he flies—until his footsteps reach
> The verge where ends the cliff, begins the beach,
> There checks his speed;[5]

Conrad is presented as controlling his pace, renewing 'his wonted statelier step', in order to impress his men. They are not to witness his jaunty and nimble descent of the cliff. Exactly the opposite is true of Byron. He loved climbing up or down cliffs and did not mind who saw

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1: CMP 166. We should note, however, that in a letter to Murray (ibid. p. 155) Byron went out of his way to insist that though 'Pope was infirm and deformed — but he could walk — and he could ride — (he rode to Oxford from London at a stretch)'.
2: BLJ IV 92.
3: BLJ IV 144.
4: *The Corsair* I, 505-6.
5: Ibid. I, 533-5.

him but he was naturally even more awkward than most in walking on the sand and thus had a different reason for checking his speed. We recall Haidee's 'quick light footsteps' as she comes down the cliff to Juan in the cave, then their walk together along the sand, and then the later travesty of that walk turned into horrific awkwardness when the dreaming Haidee 'stray'd / O'er the sharp shingles with her bleeding feet'. [6] Byron must have had quick footsteps on cliffs. Again at Hastings, he says:

> I have been swimming and eating turbot, and smuggling neat brandies and silk handkerchiefs, — and listening to my friend Hobhouse's raptures about a pretty wife-elect of his, — and walking on cliffs, and tumbling down hills.[7]

He challenged Annabella to a competition as to who could climb up a rock the quicker and scrambled up ahead of her, for, as Marchand comments, 'when he could run, he was never self-conscious about his lameness'.[8] Byron's private walks arm in arm with Augusta or Annabella or Teresa must have been slow. This would be acceptable to him in these intimate circumstances perhaps but not so when processing into the House of Lords or in the Sultan's palace. Normally he preferred to move with rapidity: thus when Trelawny first saw him at Pisa he commented that his 'halting gait was apparent, but he moved with quickness'.[9] Clearly he could be much quicker when climbing or scrambling since he could use all four of his limbs. There is a delightful vignette of him at Lady Oxford's 'scrambling and splashing along with the children'.[10] I find it hard to square this picture with Benita Eisler's and Lady Byron's suggestion, or insinuation, of paedophilia. One of Byron's favourite quotations from Lucretius was 'Medio de fonte leporum / Surgit amari aliquid in ipsis floribus angat' which he translates in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* as:

> Full from the fount of Joy's delicious springs
> Some bitter o'er the flowers its bubbling venom flings.[11]

The lines seem to fit the malicious biographical suggestion exactly.

The most striking testimony to Byron's ability to move that I have come across is contained in Lady Blessington's conversations with Byron where she records that he received a letter from a clergyman called Sheppard whose wife had just died. Going though her papers he discovered that she had written a prayer in 1814 for the conversion of a famous poet. The poet is obviously Byron, but this is the argument that her husband adduces for this identification: 'a passage from these papers, which there is no doubt refers to yourself, as I have more than once heard the writer mention your agility on the rocks at Hastings.'[12] It is remarkable surely that the thing that should identify Byron after a gap of seven years is a memory of his 'agility'. Perhaps we should not be too surprised at this if we recall Byron's early poems where he 'rov'd, a young Highlander, o'er the dark heath, / And climb'd thy steep summit, oh! Morven of Snow'. Later in the same poem he uses the same word that he used for Conrad's agility: 'From mountain to mountain I bounded along'.

Of course we should not underestimate Byron's sense of his own impediment. In 1811, he makes two references to his own deformed body and his hopes for a better resurrected one:

6: *Don Juan*, IV, 249-50.
7: BLJ IV 151.
8: Marchand, *A Portrait*, 195.
9: Ibid 364.
10: BLJ III 146.
11: CHP I, 817-18.
12: *Lady Blessington's Conversations with Lord Byron*, ed. by Ernest J. Lovell Jr., (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 66.

> And our carcasses, which are to rise again, are they worth raising? I hope, if mine is, that I shall have a better pair of legs than I have moved on these two-and-twenty years, or I shall be sadly behind in the squeeze into Paradise.[13]

This characteristically bitter-sweet comment discloses an anxiety that Byron must have felt since childhood, that he would be left behind in the movements of any purposive group such as his friends at Harrow.[14] He wishes to be rapid, to keep up or outstrip. The reference to resurrection is taken up again (and is of course later worked out dramatically in *The Deformed Transformed*):

> A man who is lame of one leg is in a state of bodily inferiority which increases with years and must render his old age more peevish & intolerable. Besides in another existence I expect to have two if not four legs by way of compensation.[15]

Byron's jokes are always instructive. When he was climbing or scrambling or swimming, then he did have 'four legs'. The other way that he could achieve this was by riding. Still, there is bitterness in both these quotations.

I suspect that this bitterness at impediment helps to explain one of the most striking features of Byron's verse. I was converted to Byron when I first read *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* long ago. I found in it qualities of voice which moved me deeply and which I had not encountered hitherto. For many years I puzzled as to what produced this voice. Here is an instance of it:

> The very sepulchres lie tenantless
> Of their heroic dwellers: dost thou flow,
> Old Tiber through a marble wilderness?
> Rise, with thy yellow waves, and mantle her distress![16]

Metrically we are put under strain here. Byron preserves the standard iambic pentameter but the clauses are grouped in longer units ('The very … dwellers'; 'dost thou flow … wilderness'; and then the alexandrine, 'Rise … distress'). We need a breath to say each sense unit, and if we say the poem aloud and in a loud voice (as we should), we will experience difficulty towards the end of these units. This difficulty is intensified by the difficulty of saying certain sounds together and distinctly ('tenantless'; 'flow Old Tiber'; … ness. Rise'; 'mantle her'). Byron often asks us to say the last syllables in an utterance with considerable force but has ensured that we have very little breath left to utter them with so we gasp and force them out. Thus we have to stress the 'stress' in 'distress'. The effect therefore is of strongly willed speech maintained to the last in difficult circumstances. We soon recognise a special quality of voice in this, a 'vitality of poison', and associate it with the meanings it pronounces. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Manfred*'s blank verse are especially rich in these effects. Here, the content of the passage centres in the impossibility or difficulty (the voice is incredulous — 'dost thou flow?') of the Tiber maintaining its course 'through a marble wilderness'. The difficulty lies in the impeding heap which occupies space, but is generated by the ruins of time. Against this impediment and created by it, is an astonishing energy of voice and will — 'Rise, with thy yellow waves'. We can hear that energy in the strange voice produced by the encumbering mechanics of the lines and phrases. The Tiber effortlessly achieves the impossible task (and we hear the impossibility in the voice), floods the impeding heap, disguises the shame of ruin whilst at the same time suggesting a colossal image of tears. The stanza begins after all with an address to Rome as 'Niobe of nations!'

13: Marchand 106.

14: The business of being squeezed in a group had all kinds of connotations for Byron. Thus he writes in an early letter; 'However I decrease instead of enlarging, which is extraordinary as violent exercise in London is impracticable, but I attribute the phenomenon to our evening squeezes, at public and private parties'. BLJ I 127 (cf. A similar reference to dieting and being squeezed in BLJ III 50).

15: BLJ II 47.

16: CHP IV, 708-11.

Niobe was turned into stone for hubris in being too proud of her children. The stone drips with water, representing her lachrymose petrifaction at their loss. Present Rome, bereft of her imperial children, is a huge heap of stone, but the giant energies of the Tiber add the gift of tears. It's an excellent example of the way Byron thinks deftly through huge associated images. But the secret is that it is impediment itself that creates energy. That is the rule of this verse and it is one learned, surely, by the impeded Byron since his childhood. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is a progress through the great impediments left by time in European history. We register both what impedes us and the energies that counter such impediment and flow, like thunderstorm and freedom's banner, 'against the wind'. Byron's voice is the record of an enabling but painful dialectic between impediment and energy. A surreal image in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* makes this explicit: 'the heat of his [Harold's] impeded soul' eating through 'his bosom' is compared to a 'barr'd up bird' which, eagerly, 'will beat / His breast and beak' against the cage 'Till the blood tinge his plumage' (III, 132-5). We should recall that 'impeded' is derived from the Latin word *impedire* which means 'to shackle the feet'.

It is perhaps because of this set of balances that Byron rarely praises a man for walking well on a level surface. Juan, it is true, can dance well and, unlike his author but 'Like swift Camilla, he scarce skimm'd the ground' (*Don Juan* XIV, 307). Yet when Byron notes that Lord Henry had 'A figure fit to walk before the king' (*Don Juan*, XIV, 556) we sense a criticism which is made explicit in the couplet that he 'in each circumstance of love or war / Had still preserved his perpendicular' (*Don Juan*, XIV, 567-8). The joke reminds us that love-making was another activity, naturally more akin to scrambling or swimming than to walking, in which Byron was clearly accomplished but Lord Henry was not. Women walking, on the other hand, he often praises. He says that English women do not 'step as does an Arab barb / Or Andalusian girl from mass returning' (*Don Juan* XII, 594) but we know from his praise of Mrs Wilmot descending a staircase ('She walks in Beauty, like the night') that this was not a permanent opinion. There is concealed pathos behind this frank admiration. Byron may have negotiated cliffs with ease but stairs must have been dreadful for him. Murray's son records how he saw 'the two greatest poets of the age [Scott and Byron] — both lame — stumping downstairs side by side'.[17]

In water, on the other hand, Byron was in his element and revelled in his unrestricted movements. We all know Jacopo's description of swimming in the opening scene of *The Two Foscari* and the almost equally compelling account of Neuha and Torquil's dive under the water in *The Island*. We may hazard that Byron loved Venice because the public roads were waterways and, for once, he could make his way along them with ease and grace. Sailing, similarly, represented unrestriction for him ("O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea / Our thoughts as boundless, and our souls as free': *The Corsair* 1-2) or a peculiarly invigorating version of that dynamic made up of impediment and energy that we have earlier descried. When he sailed across the Mediterranean in a naval convoy, he rises into magnificent apostrophe: 'Blow! swiftly blow, thou keel-compelling gale' (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* II, 172) but then upbraids the 'sluggish hulks' and 'lagging barks' that cannot find acceleration in the wind. The splendid phrase 'keel-compelling' must be a reworking of the standard epithet for Jupiter — 'cloud-compelling' — as used by Dryden in his translation of the first book of the *Iliad* (Waller used it before him in a lyric) and transferred humorously to Dullness in Pope's *The Dunciad.* Cowper's blank-verse translation of the *Iliad*, which Byron disliked, rather lamely revived Chapman's coinage — 'cloud-assembler'. The phrase suggests Jupiter's Olympic elevation and power but clouds, by themselves, are not difficult to move. Byron transfers the phrase, not to the sails of a ship as we might expect, but to the hidden keel forcing its way through the impeding waters. We thus have both the sense of irresistible energy and of resistance to speed and motion. The word 'compelling' is used for all its worth. The whole line, with its difficult long vowels, massed alliterating and clashing sounds, and forced final stress on 'gale', again produces the peculiar Byron voice, theatrical but wholly authentic, for the voice forced out by the lines necessarily vouches for what is being said.

17: Marchand 20.

Sailing, swimming, and riding have a certain interchangeability for Byron. Thus the band in the opening lines of *The Siege of Corinth* 'were a gallant company, / Riding oe'r land, and sailing o'er sea' (3-4). More striking still is the well-known metaphor of riding the sea which begins Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

> Once more upon the waters! Yet once more!
> And the waves bound beneath me as a steed
> That knows his rider. Welcome to their roar.[18]

In *Mazeppa*, this metaphor is rendered literal and reversed. Mazeppa, strapped to the back of a horse and one with it, finds himself and the horse swimming across a river so that the horse 'dashes off the ascending waves / And onward we advance' (591-2). There is something eerie about that 'we' there. When Byron said that he would like to be resurrected with four legs, he speaks as one who has entered into four-legged experience rather more than most of us. I suspect that it was the long ride from Lisbon to Seville, covering seventy miles a day on good horses, that for the first time gave Byron an alternative and sustainable model to walking. He boasts about it as much as he boasts about his swim across the Hellespont with which he associates it. Byron always had an unusual empathy for animals. When he was riding, he was always conscious of his horse's consciousness.[19] At the same time, he is exhilarated by the rapidity of movement now available to him, as it were by an extended nature, as though it is his own. Without this experience, he could not have written *Mazeppa* and it is hard to think of anyone else who could. When he was at Athens for the first time, he instituted his practice of daily rides as though he was trying to incorporate ritually the memory of his ride across Spain. When he came back to England he was forced to sell his horses, usually used a carriage, and it is likely that his regular sparring bouts with Gentleman Jackson for 'an hour daily' or fencing sessions were some sort of equivalent to his rides. He said in 1814 that his life was 'frittered away — there [in the East] I was always in action or at least in motion — and except during Night — always on or in the sea — & on horseback'.[20] As soon as he was in Italy, he revived his practice of daily riding towards sunset and continued it, even in the most difficult of circumstances, in Cephalonia and Missolonghi. His horses were carefully shipped over with him to Greece.

We should think of Byron as a riding poet. Wordsworth walked, and composed poems such as *Tintern Abbey* whilst he did so. Partly as a result, his poetry is a poetry of encounter with other walkers (old soldiers) or about walkers (the Old Cumberland Beggar and the Leech-Gatherer). The pace of walking is in his blank verse or, as Byron picks up from the title of *The Waggoner*, the pace of a cart moving slowly like the 'sluggish hulks' of the convoy (see *Don Juan* III, stanzas 98-9). Byron's poetry is not normally a poetry of encounter (Juan bumps into footpads when he 'Walked on behind his carriage' – XI, 66) and he never walked long distances.[21] There is a poignant remark in one of his letters from Athens where he says that he sometimes thinks of not coming back home at all 'till I have worn out my shoes which are all as good as new'.[22] If Wordsworth had travelled across Spain and gone to Athens and

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18: CHP III, 10-13.

19: This is the explanation of Lady Blessington's comment that Byron was not a good rider. 'He did not ride well, which surprised us, as, from the frequent allusions to horsemanship in his works, we expected to find him a Nimrod … when his horse made a false step … he seemed discomposed, and when we came to any bad part of the road, he immediately checked his course and walked his horse very slowly'. Lady B p.41 could be his very self. G. Wilson Knight, with his wonderful nose for hidden elements in Byron's personality, was the first to advance the suggestion that the story reveals Byron's excessive entering into the feelings of his horse rather than inability as a rider which is not vouched for by any other commentator.

20: BLJ IV 21-2.

21: The longest walk that we hear of is at the end of his life in this half-reminiscence, half boast, when he was at Genoa: 'My carriage broke down – I walked home 3 miles – no very great feat of pedestriansim'. (BLJ X 128).

22: BLJ II 32.

Albania, he would have worn out several pairs of shoes. Easy to replace them in his case but Byron would presumably have needed to take several pairs of his specially made shoes with him. Yet Byron, who mocks Wordsworth's slow pace in verse, boasts of his four-legged effortlessness:

> I thought, at setting off, about two dozen
> Cantos would do; but at Apollo's pleading,
> If that my Pegasus should not be foundered,
> I think to canter gently through a hundred.[23]

The word' canter' is helpful. Byron rode at a canter but always finished off his daily rides with a gallop. He described his ride through Spain as 'a gentle Gallop'.[24] He writes poems at a canter and at a gallop.

The most obvious galloping poems are the Tales written in octosyllabic couplets. Byron boasted, of course, of the rapidity with which he wrote these, especially *The Bride of Abydos*, even though his boast is in the form of an apology ('I can have no esteem for lines that can be strung as fast as minutes').[25] This is often used in evidence against him but I think that Byron is trying to produce an aesthetic of rapidity in this kind of verse. The Giaour gallops on to the set of the poem, Parisina and Hugo rush breakneck to their assignment, Mazeppa gallops helplessly across the plain. Rapidity is a sign of energy and will but also of submission to what impels the will and forces rapid changes of consciousness. The reader of the tales is caught up in this hectic, determined quality by the extraordinary pace of the verse. It is no good criticising it in comparison with the different aesthetic and hushed steady pace of Keats's lines ('Foster-child of silence and slow time') which have no interest in galloping or indeed in energy as such. The naturalness of the riding metaphor to Byron's understanding of literary activity is shown in a letter where he casually asks: 'Has your friend Wright galloped on the highway of letters?'[26]

All kinds of rapidity appeal to Byron. Correspondingly an inability to sustain effortless motion is normally satirised. Southey is criticised because he overstrained himself and hence 'tumbled downward like the flying fish / Gasping on deck' (*Don Juan* Dedication 22-3).[27] The body of George III arrives at the gates of Heaven in 'A rushing noise of wind, and stream, and flame' (*The Vision of Judgement* 124). The cloud of witnesses similarly arrive at speed like 'an aerial ship' (454). Byron, like Dante, is particularly adept at rendering a sense of rapid motion over huge spaces. He loved turnpike roads and fast coaches and often refers to different kinds of carriages in his letters and in his verse ('barouche', 'kibitka', etc). Juan is rushed from Russia to England and from London to Norman Abbey. Byron conveys the exhilaration of pure speed. He has a wonderful account of travelling up a steep hill in a chaise — 'ascending the perpendicular like a skater'. Byron, we must recall, unlike Wordsworth, could not skate. Of course his great Napoleonic carriage moved anything but swiftly. He used it mainly as a state coach when he travelled from one city to another. Sometimes he would write in it but it was there for display and transportation, not as a model of the experience of moving or of writing as such.

Cantering is his other model for verse and for conversation: 'I rattle on exactly as I'd talk / With any body in a ride or walk' (*Don Juan*, XV, 151-2). He loves to invoke the instrumentality of Pegasus, usually in a joking way but, in the context that we have established, we should take the reference seriously. There is a lovely passage deftly

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23: *Don Juan*, XII, 437-40.

24: BLJ II 3.

25: … 'the whole of the Bride cost me four nights'. (BLJ III 168). Byron indeed boasted of his rapidity in writing stanzas as well — 'and latterly [1812] I can weave a nine line stanza faster than a couplet'. BLJ II 210.

26: BLJ I 248.

27: The idea here seems to be based on Dryden's *Prologue* to *An Evening's Love* (line 26) 'But, overstraining, soon fell flat before ye' which, like Byron's lines is full of sexual innuendo. Byron knew his Dryden as well as he knew Pope.

concluding Canto IX of *Don Juan* where he says that his Pegasus has been flying high, so that consequently all his fancies are 'whirling like a mill' and this, he continues 'is a signal to my nerves and brain / To take a quiet ride in some green lane'. We should remind ourselves that Byron's poetry is as much at home with this sort of quiet ride as it is with that of 'a spurr'd blood-horse in a race' (*Don Juan* VIII, 432). Byron sometimes rode alone but more often in company so he fell naturally in and out of conversation as he rode and the conversation would participate in the temperate energies of his cantering. I suspect too that the larger structural balancings of his major works were pondered in the earlier parts of his rides. The nightfall after his rides was usually the most social part of his day and then he would return to his room alone (except for a jug of gin) and write. There must have been some metabolic equivalence between the two activities.[28]

We can explore this equivalence a little further by reminding ourselves that verse, at least until the advent of free verse, is supposed to scan. What we scan, of course, is 'feet'. Hence if a verse does not scan properly it is often said to 'limp' or be 'lame'. One of the reasons that Byron was always especially careful when riding his horses over difficult ground was his anxiety that they might sprain their foot and thus come to resemble him. He lists as one of our basic sorrows: 'A favourite horse fallen lame just as he's mounted' (*Don Juan* VI, 164). He transfers this anxiety to Pegasus. Just as he uses a riding analogy to close Canto IX, so he invokes Pegasus again in the superb opening stanza of Canto IV:

> NOTHING so difficult as a beginning
> In poesy, unless perhaps the end;
> For oftentimes when Pegasus seems winning
> The race, he sprains a wing, and down we tend,
> Like Lucifer when hurl'd from heaven for sinning;
> Our sin the same, and hard as his to mend,
> Being pride, which leads the mind to soar too far,
> Till our own weakness shows us what we are.

The first thing to say about this stanza is that it scans regularly very well. It is not lame verse. Each line has ten syllables unless it has a feminine ending ('winning' etc). Metrical irregularities are few and sanctioned by Pope and Dryden's usage (initial inversion of stress, occasional lack of strong stress in the middle of a line). At the same time it is both conversational and yet, as it were, picking its way with care. Where Byron reproved Southey's inexpert replication of a flying fish or his silly ambition 'to supersede all warblers here below' now he confesses to the same fault ('leads the mind to soar too far') and makes it a universal condition of mankind which follows helplessly in Lucifer's track. But there is a distinction. Southey's fault is both a moral and a metrical one whereas Byron confesses to the universal moral fault of Pride, confesses to the difficulty of writing good poetry (which can itself be a form of pride) but does so in metrically assured verse which, via deft enjambements and delicate alterations of tone and pace, remains wholly convincing as natural speech. It is interesting that Byron should so readily have transferred anxieties about sprained feet to sprained wings. He does the same thing in *The Vision of Judgement* where Asmodeus complains that he has sprained his wing carrying Southey through the skies (701-2) because his works were so heavy. The identification of literal and metrical impediment is taken furthest in a dazzling collocation when these 'heavy' works are actually read aloud. They are almost impossible to read because of their 'gouty feet', so 'the spavined dactyls' have to 'be spurred into recitative' (720-2). The brilliant phrase 'spavined dactyls' ('spavin = specifically a horse's sprained foot) must surely be based on the last stanza of Burns's *Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet*:

> O, how that *name* inspires my style!
> The words come skelpan, rank and file,

28: This was his normal practice but not a necessary one. He once wrote, before riding, part of *Sardanapalus*. (BLJ VIII 45).

Amaist before I ken!
The ready measure rins as fine,
As *Phœbus* and the famous *Nine*
Were glowran owre my pen.
My spavet *Pegasus* will limp,
Till ance he's fairly het;
And then he'll hilch, and stilt, and jimp,
And run an unco fit:
But least then, the beast then,
Should rue this hasty ride,
I'll light now, and dight now,
His sweaty, wizen'd hide.[29]

Byron must have remembered this stanza, transferred the epithet 'spavin' to Southey's attempt at a new English metre based on Classical metres. Hence we have 'spavined dactyls'. Burns confesses, as Byron does at the beginning of Canto IX of *Don Juan*, to a temporary halting of Pegasus, but Byron accuses Southey of sinning upon system, of trying to write verse that runs on unEnglish feet and thus will never run at all. Byron may not have been able to walk easily but he could run and climb, gallop and canter, in verse.

It is remarkable that Byron, whose whole life was dogged by his difficulties in movement, should move around Europe so continually and set up in his verse so many, and so assured, models of movement. It is not inappropriate that his best known short poem is wholly concerned with the buoyancy, the elegiac limitation, and the beauty of movement. The last stanza is worth hearing again:

Though the night was made for loving,
And the day returns too soon,
Yet we'll go no more a-roving
By the light of the moon.

Poetry is not irrational but it can do things that logic can't. Here the logic of the sentiment is unambiguously that 'roving' is finished. But the last words we hear are 'a-roving / By the light of the moon'. These words are cancelled logically by 'no more' but the cadence of the poem sets up a movement which seems incapable of any closure and we still hear it echoing after the poem has finished. That is one point. The other is the peculiar metre of the last line. How should we say it? Do we group it into two groups of three syllables (By the light | | of the moon). That would be unlike any other line in the poem for each has three groupings. The name for these groupings is 'feet'. Or should we say it in three groupings as usual but with the lightest of beats on the weakest word (By the light | | of | | the moon)? I think the latter. If that is right, the most delicate of footfalls, barely heard, lands on 'of' and we feel, however ghostly, however cancelled by 'no more', some spring in the step. We might ask if anyone other than a lame man and a very great poet could have achieved so sure-footed an effect.

29: Burns: *Poems and Songs*, ed. By James Kinsley (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.53.