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Lord Byron's—"The Tear"

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Prefatory Remarks

Byron wrote some magnificent poems (Don Juan), some very beautiful and touching poems (She Walks in Beauty), yet somehow I feel his work is overrated. For those of whom are devoted followers, there is no need to get upset over my statement. I too enjoy some of Byron's poems, especially his later work. His work was definitely more coherent than Shelly, far more interesting than Wordsworth (or was that Turdsworth), and more dynamic than Keats (that little dirty blackguard). His poetry reflected the legend, or perhaps the legend reflected the poetry.

All this matters not, because I am not discussing Byronic Canon as a whole. Only one poem **The Tear**, and this is **not** a detailed analysis, merely important facts regarding the presentation and style of the poem.

The Tear is one of those poems that editors insist on ruining with the presentation of the poem, both in texts and websites. There is no accounting for ignorant editors.

What We Generally Find

For reasons not fully understood, more often than not we find the poem written in *sestets* according to the rime-scheme of **aabccB** which on the surface comes as quite pleasant. Clearly **b** rimes with **B**, and in this case **B** is a repeated word. In the case of **The Tear**, the final word in each stanza is *Tear*. No mean feat.

Now what do we see in the sestet form? Not a great deal of note, although it still comes across as an emotional and touching poem. It still ambles along quite smoothly, but the shorter lines seem out of place considering the called-for emotion of the poem. It is somewhat *start-stop* and then idlingly coming to a conclusion.

Let's consider the third stanza as an example:

Mild Charity's glow,
To us mortals below,
Shows the soul from barbarity clear;
Compassion will melt
Where this virtue is felt,
And its dew is diffused in a *Tear*.

Seems quite harmless with the rime-scheme **aabccB**. There is still that beauty and flow albeit stilted.

What We Do Not Generally Find

We do not see the craftsmanship in the construction with **sestets**, but we do find something very different when the poem is rendered as **quatrains**.

Mild Charity's glow, to us mortals below,
Shows the soul from barbarity clear;
Compassion will melt where this virtue is felt,
And its dew is diffused in a *Tear*.

The obvious improvement here is the use of punctuation comparing verses 4 and 5 in sestet form to verse 3 in quatrain form. There is a more natural continuance. The rime-scheme **abcB** is also more natural and becoming, and the original longer verses from the sestet form, verses 3 and 6 are much more appealing in the quatrain form with verses 2 and 4. We also have the amazing mid-rime in verses 1 and 3 which sets it apart from the sestet form.

What Else Do We Find?

What we **do** notice in both forms, as we would expect, the presence of the **anapest**, accounting for the pleasant and distinctive rhythm. However, it is the quatrain form which is far superior in its construction.

Whereas we may be tempted to pause too long with the verses of the sestets, we acquire a natural medial caesura pause with the quatrains that gives a more appropriate rhythm to the verses.

Metrical Description of the "The Tear"

I have read many reviews and interpretations of this poem, all much the same regarding the emotive aspect, but one reviewer in particular stated that the closest description of the poem is *iambic tetrameter*. Pfft!

Although I can, in a way, see where they are coming from, the poem is not iambic since the anapest reigns supreme. The tetrameter only applies to two of the verses in quatrain form, **yet** their review was for the sestet form.

The sestet form satisfies neither iambic nor tetrameter. In the quatrain form, if you were to accept the anapest substitutions for the iamb—perhaps, but the anapest appears too often. Added to this, there are only two iambs in each stanza. The best description here is **anapestic meter**.

Correct Formatting of “The Tear”

Here is a link to the correct layout for the poem. It really is a beautiful and touching poem, and it is always a pleasure to find people who can render this poem correctly.

[Ambleside Online](#)

[Lord Byron's—"The Tear" formatted correctly.](#)