The poem, *Hudibras*,¹ was written by Samuel Butler, a satirist of the 17th century, and not by his namesake, the novelist of the 19th century who wrote *Erewhon*. The poem consists of three books, with each book having three cantos. Part I was published in 1663, Part II, in 1664 and Part III, in 1678. It is written in octo-syllabics and is over 11,000 lines long—11,438 plus the arguments, to be precise. Butler uses the heroic couplet throughout. It is a satire upon the Puritans during the English Civil War. The title, *Hudibras*, is taken from a character of that name in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, where he is described as “not so good of deeds, as great of name,” and “More huge in strength, then wise in works” (II, ii, 17).² This characterization is reflected in Butler’s Hudibras, who is supposedly a knight errant accompanied by Ralrho, as Don Quixote is followed by Sancho Panza. But the resemblance ends there. Hudibras is a Presbyterian, and Ralrho, an Independent, and although they help each other from time to time, they often become involved in fierce polemics.

I am afraid very few people in the audience will be familiar with the poem. Earl
Miner writes, “Hudibras is not so well known that readers may be counted on to remember the events in their order.” I hope, therefore, I will be forgiven for offering a very brief summary. Hudibras and Ralpho encounter a group of bearbaiters with whom they fight, and they win. But the bearbaiters rally and return, and put Hudibras and Ralpho into the stocks. Hearing this news, a widow comes to them. Actually Hudibras has made advances to her for some years in vain. They exchange arguments and finally she agrees to free him on the condition that he whip himself afterwards. When they are released, Hudibras is understandably reluctant to keep the vow of whipping himself, but uses many excuses to evade his obligation. In fact, this poem mainly consists of conversations supported by pseudo-logic which he and Ralpho employ to rationalize their position.

After the bearbaiting they encounter a skimmington, and again become involved in a fight with those in the procession, but escape. Perhaps nowadays few people know anything about the tradition of holding a ‘skimmington’. So I quote a definition given by OED: “A ludicrous procession, formerly common in villages and country districts, usually intended to bring ridicule or odium upon a woman or her husband in cases where the one was unfaithful to, or ill-treated, the other.” It seems that this seemingly exciting custom is gone from the present England. The most famous one in literature
occurs in Thomas Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

The bearbaiting and the skimmington are the two main actions of the poem, though there are other minor ones. Next, Hudibras goes to seek the astrologer Sidrophel to learn what will be the result of his wooing of the lady. They end up fighting, and Hudibras strikes him hard and escapes. Sidrophel is supposed to represent the Royal Society as well, the notion of which Butler rejects much as Swift does in the 18th century. Hudibras visits the widow’s mansion. The lady knows that it is with her money and not her person that Hudibras has fallen in love. Then there is a long digression in the narrator’s voice, which treats the Puritans’ rule and the Restoration. The last part of the poem consists of two epistles exchanged between Hudibras and the Lady. His chop-logic is utterly ridiculed by her, who declares that women should have hegemony over men. This, roughly speaking, is the gist of the poem. On the whole, as Dr. Johnson says, “there is more said than done,” in this poem.

The reason why I have taken up *Hudibras* is that Byron had a high regard for Butler. He quotes from, or refers to, *Hudibras*, in at least seven of his letters from 1811 to 1822. In his letter of November 3, 1811 addressed to Hobhouse, he calls his “An Adieu to La Valette”, the equivalent of “Farewell to Malta”, as ‘a copy of Hudibrastics’. True enough, a glance at this poem of 56 lines shows Byron was really under Butler’s
influence as early as 1811. He not only uses the octosyllabic and the heroic couplet following Butler, but employs irregular and ludicrous rhyming scheme, imitating a strongly-marked feature of *Hudibras*. Let me quote a few of these irregular and funny rhymes:

Adieu to Peter—whom no fault’s in,

But could not teach a colonel waltzing ...

Adieu the supercilious air

Of all that strut ‘en militaire!’...

Pardon my Muse, who apt to prate is,

And take my rhyme—because ‘tis ‘gratis’.

(“Farewell to Malta”, 15-16, 19-20, 31-32)

Notice these three rhymes: ‘fault’s in / waltzing, ‘air / militaire’, and ‘prate is / gratis’.

Here Byron, instead of following his master Pope’s regular heroic couplet, resorts to Hudibrastic comic couplets. These examples reflect not only the style Butler employed throughout *Hudibras*, but become the forerunner of the style of which we find examples galore in *Don Juan*. 
In some letters he either quotes or imitates Butler’s lines. For example, in a letter to Lady Melbourne of January 13, 1814, he calls Lady Francis the ‘wife of Snow’, and sure enough, Butler makes Hudibras refer to Saint Francis who grew “Inamourd of a wife of Snow” (*Hudibras*, II, i, 374). Byron also writes in *Don Juan* about “St. Francis’ paramour ... /his Monastic Concubine of Snow” (VI, 17).

A more thorough appreciation of Butler by Byron was written as early as 1809 in *Hints from Horace*. He contrasts Swift with Butler:

Peace to Swift’s faults, his Wit hath made them pass,

Unmatched by all save matchless Hudibras,

Whose Author is perhaps the first we meet

Who from our couplet lopped two final feet:

No less in merit than the longer line,

This measure moves a favourite of the Nine.

(*Hints from Horace*, 397-402)

Isn’t it something that Byron regarded Butler as even superior to Swift as a wit? As has been shown so far, Byron was familiar enough with Butler’s practice to imitate or quote
his lines, and evidently loved Butler’s way of rhyming.

Before the paper proceeds, I just want to mention some general literary characteristics shared by Byron’s *Don Juan* and Butler’s *Hudibras*. Both poems are very conscious of Greek and Roman mythologies and the epic tradition, hence constantly referring to mythological figures, and to Homeric episodes and characters. Cataloguing is one technique the epic uses, and these two poems are full of catalogues. This trait reminds the reader of such writers as Robert Burton and François Rabelais, to whom Byron was much attracted. Again like Burton and Rabelais, both poets bring into their poems many stories and episodes; that is, anything under the sun can be incorporated into their poems. Dr. Johnson is patriotic enough to say that “If the French boast of the learning of Rabelais, we need not be afraid of confronting them with Butler.” In other words both *Hudibras* and *Don Juan* treat ‘human things and acts’ (*Don Juan*, XIV, 13), from the low to the high, from the ridiculous to the sublime.

Naturally they treat politics too. Butler wrote about the time of the Civil War and the Restoration. Byron of course was keenly aware of the political situations during and after the Napoleonic era. Stylistically they often use colloquial language. Ian Jack imagines Butler “spending an evening with Robert Burton listening to the swearing of the bargees at Folly Bridge.” In Byron’s poem the narrator dominates the narration,
while in the case of *Hudibras*, the main characters often express their opinions, but the narrator does speak up, and Book III, Canto II is completely devoted to the narrator so that he can express his opinions about the Puritan Revolution. Lastly, both poets are immensely interested in comic rhymes. In fact, one of the joys of reading their poems is to see how they tackle their rhymes in their own characteristic way.

Professor Anne Barton says in her book on *Don Juan*, “Byron’s comic rhymes are amusing, occasionally outrageous, and usually purposeful.”\(^{10}\) She cites as examples of ‘improper juxtapositions’ such rhymes as ‘gunnery / nunnery’ and ‘intellectual / henpeck’d you all’. She also points out Byron’s weapon of “pairing serious words with trivial ones such as ‘adultery / sultry, and ‘bottle / Aristotle’”.\(^{11}\) Furthermore she comments, though briefly, about the first six lines of the stanza, which make up two rhymes, with each rhyme consisting of three words such as ‘rattles’ / ‘battles’ / ‘what else’ and so forth.\(^{12}\) As for Samuel Butler’s style, Dr. Johnson says, “The diction of this poem is grossly familiar, and the numbers purposely neglected …”\(^{13}\) Professor John Wilders regards Butler’s greatest satirical weapon as “his style, with its earthy, colloquial language, intentionally clumsy rhymes, and comic rhymes, which debase everything they describe.”.\(^{14}\) One almost gets the feeling that Wilders is talking about Byron’s style.

In the following paper, I shall be talking about comic rhymes used by both poets, not much forgetting the topic of this conference, politics. As I proceed to cite examples
from *Hudibras*, I also refer to *Don Juan* where appropriate. Religion and politics are much entwined in Butler’s poem since it deals with the Civil War. I would like to introduce to you Butler’s style by quoting the very first 14 lines of the poem, because it not only sets out the argument of the poem, but shows how Butler tackles his rhymes:

> When civil Fury first grew high,
> And men fell out they knew not why;
> When hard words, *Jealousies* and *Fears*,
> Set Folks together by the ears,
> And made them fight, like mad or drunk,
> For Dame *Religion* as for Punk,
> Whose honesty they all durst swear for,
> Though not a man of them knew wherefore:
> When *Gospel-trumpeter*, surrounded
> With long-ear’d rout, to Battel sounded.
> And Pulpit, Drum Ecclesastick,
> Was beat with fist, instead of a stick:
> Then did Sir *Knight* abandon dwelling,
And out he rode a Colonelling.

(Hudibras, I, I, 1-14)

‘civil Fury’ refers to the Puritan revolution, and ‘hard words’, apposite to ‘Jealousies and Fears’, means ‘cant’, the word often used by Byron derogatorily. ‘Religion’ is daringly paired with ‘Punk’, meaning ‘prostitute’, which in turn rhymes with ‘drunk’. Just as devastating a rhyme as this is “And Pulpit, Drum Ecclesiastick,/Was beat with fist, instead of a stick,” a double rhyme with one word forming a rhyme with two words, thus producing a comic effect and debasing the pulpit and the ecclesiastical profession. William Hazlitt says that Butler

startles you sometimes by an empty sound like a blow upon a drum-head, by a pun upon a word, and by splitting another in two at the end of a verse, with the same alertness and power over the odd and unaccountable in the combinations of sounds as of images. 15

‘swear for’/wherefore’ and ‘dwelling/ Colonelling’ are feminine and double rhymes as is a plainer ‘surrounded /sounded’. So by just reading the first fourteen lines one can get a fairly good idea of what Butler does with his rhymes, and is reminded of our poet
Byron’s practice in rhyming. Generally speaking, a great number of Butler’s rhyme words are irregular, and irregularity is not the exception but the rule. His rhyming is often loose and forced, and he just keeps rattling on like Byron, to borrow his own expression—“I rattle on exactly as I’d talk” (XV, 19). His attitude to rhyming is cavalier, though he is not in fact a Cavalier poet despite his sympathy with the Cavaliers. Please forgive my attempts at punning. It’s an occupational hazard of those who love Byron, and Butler has only made the disease worse!

Let me pick a few rhyme words that have something to do with politics and religion. Firstly, Butler’s use of the word ‘Cabal’ is interesting. His position is clear: he wants to make fun of the Cabal as in this couplet: “And all the Grandees o’th’ Cabal / Adjorn to Tubs, at spring and fall” (II, i, 365-66). John Wilders annotates ‘Tubs’ as “sweating-tubs used in the treatment of venereal disease.” Another example is seen in this couplet: ‘Till in th’ Effigie of Rumps, the Rabble/Burns all their Grandees of the Cabal’ (III, 2, Argument). The rhyme is irregular as are the following two couplets: “Set up Committees of Cabals./To pack designs without the Walls”(III, ii, 945-46), and “Tell stories, Scandalous, and False,/I’th’ proper Language of Cabals” (III, ii, 1488). Butler makes ‘Rabble’ rhyme with ‘able’, ‘formidable’ (III, ii, 527), ‘bauble’ (III, ii, 1067) and ‘practicable’ (III, iii, 1573). ‘Tales’ and ‘False’ (III, i, 237-38) make a pair too. In none
of these cases Butler feels any qualms about the irregularity of his rhyming. Having said this, though, I have to admit that I feel a bit uneasy, because I am yet to hear these words actually pronounced by people of the seventeenth century.

Butler is also bold enough to make ‘Religion’ rhyme with ‘widgeon’ (I, i, 229), the word meaning a type of duck and a fool. As for ‘church’, it often rhymes with ‘lurch’ (I, ii, 543) and ‘purge’ (II, iii, 159), and irregularly with ‘Porch’ (II, ii, 16). The word, ‘saint’, which refers to a Puritan, gets its unpleasing partners such as ‘ignorant’ (I, iii, 1235), and ‘Against’ (II, i, 385), and ‘saints’ rhyming with ‘Miscreants’ (III, ii, 218, 655), and ‘Termegants’ (III, ii, 1255). Thus the word, ‘saint’, is coupled with derogatory words, almost irrespective of how they are pronounced.

As for ‘bishop’, there is this couplet: “The Oyster—women lock’d their fish up,/And trudg’d away, to cry No Bishop” (I, ii, 539-40). The rhyme ‘fish up/Bishop’ is irregular, double and somewhat comic. ‘Minister’ rhymes with ‘sinister’ (583), a triple rhyme. ‘Divine’ is paired with ‘Swine’, and what is worse, ‘carnal swine’ (II, ii, 257). Butler can be coarse, as when he says, “Cardinals, they say, do grope/At th’other end the new-made Pope” (I, iii, 1249-50), a trait, I believe, Byron does not share. All these examples show how Butler wanted to debase the Reformation and the parties involved in it. The word, ‘Reformation’, rhymes with such words as ‘fashion’ (I, ii, 430), ‘Inclination’ (I, ii, 554),
‘Dispensation’ (I, ii, 627), ‘Desolation’ (I, I, 199), ‘Protestation’ (I, i, 758; I, ii, 521), and strangely with ‘carry on’ in “For when we swore to carry on/The present Reformation” (I, ii, 641-2). One gets the feeling that anything goes.

As I said earlier, Hudibras is a Presbyterian. The word, ‘Presbyter’, rhymes with ‘fur’ and ‘shaggie fur’, and ‘Presbyters’, with ‘Curs’. No wonder Hudibras is addressed as ‘Curship’ (I, ii, 959), which is sardonically followed by ‘Worship’. By the way, ‘Philosopher’ is also rhymed with ‘Curr’ (II, iii, 637), besides rhyming with ‘gloss over’ (I, I, 127), a triple rhyme. For that matter, ‘Philosophers’ aptly rhymes with ‘Sorcerers’ (II, iii, 651). Furthermore, Butler makes ‘Presbyter’ appear in these two lines: “Where ev’ry Presbyter and Deacon /Commands the keis for Cheese and Bacon” (I, iii, 1207-8). Both ‘Presbyter’ and ‘Independent’ appear in the following four lines:

‘Tis true! The cause is in the lurch
Between a right, and mongrel-church
The Presbyter, and Independent,
That stickle, which shall make an end on’t.

(III, ii, 517)
Notice the ‘Independent /end on’t’ couplet. With some difficulty we accept this rhyme as feminine and double.

Sometimes Butler makes ‘king’ rhyme with ‘thing’. Dryden, Swift, Pope and Frere all used this ‘king/thing’ rhyme. Byron’s ‘king’ very often rhymes with ‘thing’, at least twelve times in *Don Juan*. In a stanza which shows a court poet, an opportunist at Lambro’s island, Byron uses a rhyme of ‘sing/king/thing’. He shows the poet singing “God save the king,” and being ready to sing ‘any thing’ as befits the occasion. Elsewhere Byron talks about poets on good terms with a king, George III. This stanza combines his view of glory too with a rhyme of “glory’s a great thing/your good king/for bards to sing” (VIII, 14). It aptly ends with this couplet: ‘enjoying/destroying’.

Byron uses the word, ‘glory’ and its derivatives quite often in *Don Juan*. Out of forty-six instances, ten are used as rhyme words. On the whole, his use of glory as a rhyme word is fairly simple. It often rhymes with ‘story’, which is understandable, since ‘glory’ is a story, and not a real thing. He also makes ‘glory’ rhyme with ‘story’ and ‘gory’, and ironically with ‘hoary’ too.

As for the word, ‘God’, Byron uses it eight times as a rhyme word. He employs the word itself over fifty times. Sometimes he talks about Greco-Roman gods and goddesses, but fairly often refers to the Christian God. He rhymes God with ‘odd’ three times at
least. I quote one instance: the rhyme is ‘God I/body/noddy’ (VII-21). How does Byron want us to pronounce ‘God I’? First we do it in the usual way, and then with ‘body’ in the third line and ‘noddy’ in the fifth line, we feel perhaps we have to go back to the first line, and try to pronounce it as ‘Goddy’. Thus he plays a trick on us. In this stanza there is another rhyme of ‘bulletin/no sin/thought in’, another comic rhyme with the last rhyme word running on to the next line. He is talking about a certain Smith, a country lad who is killed in battle and becomes immortal in a ‘bulletin’, which deftly rhymes internally with ‘bullet in’ in the third line. But then, this is a time-honoured Falstaffian idea.

Now I treat briefly some other comic rhymes used by these two poets. Often they use foreign words and expressions as rhyme words. Butler uses Latin words and expressions in the following lines:

Caesar himself could never say

He got two victories in a day.

As I have done, that can say, Twice I

In one day, Veni, vidi, vici.

The foe’s so numerous, that we
Cannot so often vincere

As they perire, and yet enough

Be left to strike an after-blow.

(I, iii, 733-40)

Besides the Caesarean expression, he uses two Latin words, ‘pereo’ and ‘vinco’. We are supposed to pronounce a Latin word ‘vici’ as [vai’sai] to rhyme “Twice I”, a nice double rhyme, and another Latin word, ‘vincere’ as [vinsi’ri:] perhaps, to go with ‘we’.

What about these lines, “Thou say’st th’ are really all one. If so, not worst for if th’ are idem. Why then, Tantundem dat tandidem”? ‘Idem’ rhymes with ‘tandidem’, so supposedly we should pronounce these words as [’aidɛm] and [tan’daidɛm]. Here is another one: “How will dissenting Brethren relish it? What will Malignants say? Videlicet That each man swore to doe the best, / To damn and perjure all the rest” (I, ii, 629-32). How are we to pronounce ‘Videlicet’? [vi’dɛlɪset] meaning ‘that is to say’? perhaps [vi’dɛlɪʃt] to rhyme with ‘relish it’. Once Butler uses a Greek word ‘Dialectiŵs’ and rhymes it with ‘close’. Byron has these lines: “I’ll prove that such the opinion of the critic is/From Aristotle passim.—See λ ο η τ κ η o.” He uses Latin (‘passim’) and Greek (‘Poietikes’) and the rhyme is barely double. Let me just quote one more example.
Butler talks about those who “Recover’d many a desp’rate Campain [kæmˈpɛn] /With Burdeaux, Burgandy, and Champaign” [ʃæmpˈɛin] (III, iii, 295-96), a perfect double rhyme. He also uses Champain with ‘incamp on’ (I, ii, 63-4), an irregular double rhyme. Byron would rather rhyme ‘champaigne’ with ‘immortal rain’ and ‘remain’ (XIII, 37).

I add a few more cases of Byron resorting to foreign languages to make comic rhymes. ‘Ulysses’ is put together with ‘kisses’ and ‘misses’ (III, 23), and Madame de Staël is made to rhyme with ‘tale’ and ‘Portugal’ (III, 86), which makes her name sound as ‘Stale’, and in the same stanza ‘Trecentisti’ forms a couplet with ‘this t’ye’, a combination of an Italian word and three English words. Byron uses another Italian word, ‘speranza’ to go with ‘stanza’ and ‘entrance a’ /Hero ... (XVI, 116), the last word running on to the next line. There are more instances of this kind, but this is enough for now.

Lastly, I would like to point out a few more comic couplets—just a selection from the innumerable ones available. This widow with whom Hudibras is supposedly madly in love, “Us’d him so like a base Rascallion /That old Pyg-(what d’y’ call him?) malion /That cut his Mistress out of stone, /Had not so hard-a’hearted one.” Is the parenthesis added for the sake of providing enough syllables? Or Butler perhaps also wanted to use the sound ‘Pig’ for Hudibras too? Incidentally, Byron calls ‘Cavalier Servente’ also as ‘a Pygmalion’ and makes it rhyme with ‘Italian’ and ‘a value on’ (IX, 51), a feminine double
rhyme, which is mildly comic. The widow sees him in the stocks and says,

Yet this ueasie Loop·hold Jail

In which Y’ are hamperd by the fet·lock,

Cannot but put y’ in mind of Wedlock:

Wedlock, that’s worse then any hole here

If that may serve you for a Cooler ...

(II, I, 648·52)

Byron has a similar attitude to ‘wedlock’, because he makes it rhyme with ‘dead lock’ (XV, 35) understandably. Talking about ‘wedlock’, Butler uses a couplet of ‘matrimony/money’ at least three times (III, i, 1177·78: III, “An Heroical epistle of Hudibras to his Lady”, 249·50: III, “The Ladies Answer to the Knight”, 143·4), and ‘money’ goes in handy with ‘alimony’ (III, I, 1187·88) too. Byron rhymes ‘Matrimony’ with ‘honey’(XII, 14), but does not forget to make ‘money’ go with ‘honey’(XII, 31) too. ‘Both poets use ‘women’ and ‘wife’ as rhyme words, but for better or for worse, the pressure of time makes me stop here, except just to say Hudibras thinks ‘marriage’ is ‘Forrage’ (III,i,853·4). I hope I have shown to some extent at least how Byron and
Butler share some similar features in their respective rhyming schemes

Notes


5. BLJ II 126.

6. BLJ IV 28.


16. See the note in Wilders, *op. cit.*, p. 373.