

George Gordon (Lord Byron), “We’ll Go No More a Roving”

So, we’ll go no more a roving
So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself have rest.

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.

1817

The poem resembles a *troubadour* love-song but, instead of wooing the beloved, it expresses a spirit of resignation, faced with the toll of advancing years. Living in Italy in February 1817, Byron sent it in a letter to his friend Thomas Moore who later printed it in the *Letters and Journals of Byron* (1830). Sadly, Moore destroyed most of the letters to protect the other poet’s reputation but he preserved this one in a footnote to the poem:

"At present, I am on the invalid regimen myself. The Carnival—that is, the latter part of it, and sitting up late o’ nights—had knocked me up a little. But it is over—and it is now Lent, with all its abstinence and sacred music ... Though I did not dissipate much upon the whole, yet I find “the sword wearing out the scabbard,” though I have but just turned the corner of twenty nine."
(*The Works of Lord Byron*, 1842, p.569n.)

Again, Byron’s poem takes obvious inspiration from a Scottish ballad called “The Jolly Beggar” which includes the lines: “And we’ll go no more a roving / Sae late into the night, / And we’ll gang nae mair a roving, boys, / Let the moon shine ne’er sae bright”—a debt close to outright plagiarism. What gives his version its permanent appeal is the musicality and simplicity of its form as well as its combination of the original motif with very different ideas that speak (perhaps) of maturing domestic love.