

DIGNIFIED DEFIANCE, SELF-PRIDE, AND RADICAL INDIVIDUALISM: THE BYRONIC HERO AND HIS REVOLT AGAINST SOCIETY, NATURE, AND DIVINE AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT

George Gordon Byron is a renowned and a celebrated Romantic poet. He is an influential figure in the Romantic Movement. According to the critic Lord Macaulay a Byronic hero is "a man proud, moody, cynical, with defiance on his brow, and misery in his heart, a scorner of his kind, implacable in revenge, yet capable of deep and strong affection". Byron uses wit, satire and intense passion in his writing. His writing style is infused with biting satire, verse narrative and he satirically mocks the age-old beliefs and conventions. Byron is a wonderful storyteller and engages his readers effortlessly and directly. He has used several traditional poetic forms like heroic couplets, Spenserian stanzas, and ottava rima etc. for his literary works. Byron is famous for creating a unique type of heroes popularly known as the Byronic heroes. His heroes are a distinctive creation in English Literature. They are endowed with multiple distinct characteristics which have provided them a particular place in the literary world. They are the social rebels, with high intellect often melancholic and brooding. They are courageous, egoistic and possess a sense of superiority. Their rebellious attitude makes them a perfect social misfit. They often have committed some serious offensive deed or have hidden and secretive past. English Literature is intensely influenced by such a charismatic character which has given birth to several characters in the modern time modeled on this specific Byronic hero. The Byronic Heroes are very much influenced by Byron's own character. He is a self-righteous, passionate and independent person, his life pervaded with controversy, scandal, having involved in multiple relationships, his defiance of established societal rules and regulations, intense emotional suffering and living in self-chosen exile in free spirit – these exclusive traits and the dramatic features of his life-style is an excellent content to be imitated in artistic form and so therefore emerge the Byronic Heroes with their exclusive exceptionality.

KEY WORDS: *Passionate, Rebel, Arrogant, Defiant, Solitary, Self-Centered, Individuality, Witty, Obsession*

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses qualitative, descriptive and interpretative research methodology for the better understanding of the subject matter and the exclusive characteristic features of the Byronic heroes. It goes through close textual analysis and descriptive- analytical approach which help to comprehend the unique characteristic features of the Byronic heroes, their obsession, passion and their subsequent downfalls. The secondary sources like critical essays and scholarly writings on the Byronic heroes include more enrichment and profundity of this research work

- **Unique features of Byronic Heroes-** Byronic heroes are endowed with certain specific characteristic traits and these are as follows. They are-
 1. Passionate
 2. Moody and brooding
 3. Rebel
 4. Highly intelligent
 5. Have a mysterious past
 6. Defensive
 7. Proud
 8. Melancholic
 9. Self-centered
 10. Isolated and solitary

11. Engaged in multiple relations
12. Attractive
13. Social outcast
14. Pursuit for freedom
15. Confident individual
16. Wanderlust
17. Unrepentant
18. Enjoy hedonism
19. Unpredictable

Lord Byron achieved his overnight fame with the publication of his quasi- autobiographical epic Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812–1818). With the publication of this narrative poem the hero Child Harold gain enormous popularity and acceptance among the readers extensively.

- **Major Byronic Heroes:**

- **Child Harold: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt (1812-1818): Lord Byron-** He is the fundamental character and pioneer of this unique type of hero. Child Harold has a completely disillusioned viewpoint for the worldly affairs. He leads a solitary and reclusive life isolated from the society-"I stood / among them, but not of them". The protagonist finds solace in isolation and amidst the wild nature. He is dealing with personal trauma and suffering and vividly portray the social decay of the time. The poem is an exclusive romantic poem.

And now Childe Harold was sore sick at heart,
And from his fellow bacchanals would flee;
'Tis said, at times the sullen tear would start,
But pride congealed the drop within his e'e:
Apart he stalked in joyless reverie,
And from his native land resolved to go,
And visit scorching climes beyond the sea;
With pleasure drugged, he almost longed for woe,
And e'en for change of scene would seek the shades below.

Harold has a hidden past and some secret sins which have been committed by him. He is escaping the dark past and leaves England. He witnesses the Peninsular war and the destruction it brings to the world. Harold, the 'lonely wanderer' travels to Greece and Albania. In the third Canto there are poignant autobiographical instances of the poet. It resembles his own escape due to some scandalous actions and his pathetic separation from Ada, his daughter. The Battle of Waterloo is mentioned in the poem. The mesmerizing beauty of the Alps is described wonderfully. In the Last section there is a detail elaboration of Italy. The poet focuses on the destruction and creation of human civilization- "the public immediately associated Byron with his gloomy hero", with readers "convinced ... that Byron and Childe were one and the same".

- **Manfred: A Dramatic Poem (1816- 1817) -** Manfred is a typical Byronic hero. He is guilt –ridden, brooding and melancholic noble person. Probably he was involved in an incestuous relationship with Astrate, his sister which cannot be rectified. This gloomy nobleman has tried his utmost to forget the incident but he fails. He summons the spirits but they are unable to rescue him from this desperation. The witch of the Alps comes to help Manfred but he rejects. Ultimately Astrate's spirit predicts his impending doom. Manfred decides for self assassination. The Abbot of St. Maurice comes to save Manfred's soul but the arrogant and defiant spirit of Manfred reject both the Heaven and Hell. Manfred is truly a Byronic hero who has own individual entity. He has certain flaw as in Manfred he is incapable of forgetting his memory. He is a rebel. He rejects all the natural, supernatural and religious assistances and chooses his own path boldly and desperately. The vastness of the nature of Alps symbolizes Manfred's inner unrest.

He disapproves -- and 'twere of no avail --
He changes rapidly.

HERMAN

"Twill soon be over.

MANUEL

Oh! what a death is this! that I should live
 To shake my gray hairs over the last chief
 Of the house of Sigismund. -- And such a death!
 Alone -- we know not how -- unshrived -- untended --
 With strange accompaniments and fearful signs --
 I shudder at the sight -- but must not leave him

MANFRED [*speaking faintly end slowly.*]

Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die.

[*MANFRED, having said this, expires.*]

HERMAN

His eyes are fixed and lifeless. -- He is gone. --

[90]

MANUEL

Close them. -- My old hand quivers. -- He departs --
 Whither? I dread to think -- but he is gone!

- **Don Juan (1819-1824): Lord Byron** - He is another epitome of Byronic Hero. He is a man with his own individual standards. He has wandered extensively. He is charming, charismatic and easily seduced by women. He enjoys the hedonistic pleasure. Don Juan rejects social standards of morality and loyalty. He is often found in scandalous conditions. His charming physique is the main attraction for women. He is chased by women rather than he goes in search of them. This anti-hero has travelled a lot in Europe. Despite his numerous affairs with multiple women he is not deeply involved and has no passionate feelings for anyone. He maintains a cold indifference for the ladies. The detachment is a crucial attribute of his character.

I say, Don Juan, wrapp'd in contemplation,
 Walk'd on behind his carriage, o'er the summit,
 And lost in wonder of so great a nation,
 Gave way to't, since he could not overcome it.
 "And here," he cried, "is Freedom's chosen station;
 Here peals the People's voice nor can entomb it
 Racks, prisons, inquisitions; resurrection
 Awaits it, each new meeting or election.

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"Here are chaste wives, pure lives; her people pay
 But what they please; and if that things be dear,
 'Tis only that they love to throw away
 Their cash, to show how much they have a-year.
 Here laws are all inviolate; none lay
 Traps for the traveller; every highway's clear;
 Here"—he was interrupted by a knife,
 With—"Damn your eyes! your money or your life!"

- **Conrad: The Corsair (1814)** – He is a quintessential Byronic hero. He is a brooding, cynical pirate captain. He has an urge of sovereignty over all his people and the crew. He has tremendous disgust for human beings. He has several flaws but has a unique virtue. He is "Link'd with one virtue, and a thousand crimes". He can only love his wife Medora and remain loyal to her for the rest of his life. He isolates himself from the society and wishes to live in perfect solitude. He is terrible to his enemies. His "stern glance" evokes the sense of

fear among his the rivals. Conrad is very much aware of the darkness of his character. He is the epitome of horror for mankind. "He knew himself a villain—but he deem'd / The rest no better than the thing he seem'd".

Conrad though a fearful evil character but he adheres to certain decorum. He never kills a sleeping person.

"That seeks what cravens shun with more than zeal,

"And where the feebler faint—can only feel—20

"Feel—to the rising bosom's inmost core,

"Its hope awaken and its spirit soar?

"No dread of death—if with us die our foes—

"Save that it seems even duller than repose:

"Come when it will—we snatch the life of life—

"When lost—what reck's it—by disease or strife?

"Let him who crawls enamoured of decay,

"Cling to his couch, and sicken years away;

"Heave his thick breath; and shake his palsied head;

"Ours—the fresh turf, and not the feverish bed.

"While gasp by gasp he falters forth his soul,

"Ours with one pang—one bound—escapes controul.

"His corse may boast it's urn and narrow cave,

"And they who loath'd his life may gild his grave:

- **Some major Literary figures/ Heroes modeled on the Byronic hero:**
- **Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights (1847): Emily Bronte-** is definitely possesses the specific traits of a Byronic hero. He is brooding, menacing, passionate and obsessive. He has terribly vengeful nature. His passion and love for Catherine is genuine and intense. It is destructive in nature. His mysterious, dark appearance is horrific and awful. It is completely in opposition with the refined ambience of Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff is an anti-hero. He is revengeful to the Earnshaw and Linton families. He is a rebel. He is protesting against the social norms of class discrimination. He is an outcast, manipulative man. Even though he is engaged in violent and destructive actions due to his intense trauma and agony, readers can feel his pain. His disturbed childhood, frustrated love, trauma, social hypocrisies and social exclusion have compelled him to become a defiant and violent Byronic hero.
- **Edward Fairfax Rochester: Jane Eyre (1847): Charlotte Bronte -** is an iconic Byronic hero. He is a brooding arrogant man. He is unpredictable and had a deep secret and a hidden past. He is married to Bertha Mason and this fact is kept secret. Even his first wife with severe psychological problem is confined in a room. He is unconventionally dark and handsome and has a rugged appearance. He rebel against the societal rules and regulations and wants to marry Jane despite his first marriage. He is strictly against the class discriminations. Despite his rough appearance, rude and sarcastic behavior, there is magnetism in him which compels Jane to come closer to him. Rochester is a new kind of Byronic hero. He is repentant for his misdeed. He yearns for redemption in the fire he has lost his sight and burnt his hand.
- **Victor Frankenstein: Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus (1818): Mary Shelley-** is also a Byronic hero. He is highly ambitious, arrogant. He lives in isolation and is deeply distressed after the creation of the grotesque creature. He goes against social and natural rules. He has given life to an awkward creature made of dead body parts. His unrestrained ambition is the cause of his downfall and the collapse of his family. He himself and his indecisive activity is the reason of his psychological trauma. He leaves the gigantic creation in the middle of his journey. He does not keep his promise of creating his companion. He is extremely intelligent. In the end of the novel he becomes obsessed to take revenge to his creation.
- **Captain Ahab: Moby Dick (1851): Herman Melville-** Captain Ahab is a typical Byronic hero. He is a menacing man. He stays in solitude focusing on his monomania and revenge for the white whale, Moby Dick. He is obsessed with this one idea to kill Moby Dick and this one obsession becomes the cause of his own tragic down fall. Ahab is extremely proud and has no regards for God and nature. Though tremendously arrogant, obsessive and monomaniac, he possesses a magnetic personality. He is manipulative and his crew use to obey his command.

CONCLUSION

Thus the celebrated and famous Romantic poet Lord Byron has exclusively enriched English Literature with his poetic skill, originality of writing, his passionate and intensely emotional writing. Byron has excelled in his use of conventional forms, symbols and rich metaphors. His works are pervaded with keen observation, sublime imagination, sharp wit and biting satirical tone. His uniqueness lies in creating the archetypal Byronic heroes who are unconventional, menacing, arrogant, and intensely passionate and are endowed with firm individuality and an unflinching focus for something. They are flawed, having a dark past but they do not surrender. With their own firm conviction and freedom of the spirit they often rebel against the social injustices and age old beliefs. Often their own monomaniac attitude brings their fatal doom. They have created a profound impact on the readers across the globe. There emerge many more famous and influential heroes in the pages of English Literature in the modern times modeled on the archetypal Byronic heroes.

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