

Byronic Hero - A Morose and Guilt- Ridden Figure

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Byron's reputation as a poet largely derives from the autobiographical character of Byronic Hero. His heroes Childe Harold, Corsair, Lara, Manfred, and Conrad etc. are a symbol of revolt against contemporary religious and moral practice. The Byronic hero is portrayed as an outsider with contradictory nature; cruel and kind; devoted but unfaithful; never contended but always seeking out new sensations and above all remorseful and guilty over a past nameless sin. They diffuse all round them the curse which weighs upon their destiny; they destroy themselves, and destroy the unlucky women who come within their orbit. The satanic pride and anger for the divine order is an inherent trait of the Byronic hero. He seems to be always at war with the divine law. He brings about the tragedy by his own tragic deeds resulting in death and destruction. There was a close association between Byron and his hero. This Byronic hero fascinated him.

After the great success of "*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*", Byron wrote and published his famous romantic tales, "*The Giaour*", "*The Corsair*", "*The Bride of Abydos*", "*Lara*", "*The Siege of Corinth*", and "*Parisina*" which were very popular with the public. These tales are famous for autobiographical contents. These tales also gave birth to the famous Byronic hero, who is still popular with the readers. The Byronic hero is portrayed as an outsider with contradictory nature; cruel and kind; devoted but unfaithful; never contended but always seeking out new sensations and above all remorseful and guilty over a past nameless sin. There was a close association between Byron and his hero. This Byronic hero fascinated him. He liked to think of himself as just this kind of man. He clarifies in the preface to "*Werner*" that how from childhood days he was moved and attracted by some themes and characters in the sub-literature of the day: the idea of a nobleman hiding guilt for a past crime or sin, for example Selim in "*The Bride of Abydos*". All his heroes Childe Harold, Conrad, Lara, Manfred and the rest show these qualities in abundance. The Byronic hero is a gloomy remorseful figure brooding over some untold past sin, posing as a horrible figure. Lara, in the following lines is posed as a horrible figure,

"-His bristling locks of sable, brow of gloom,

And the wide waving of his shaken plume,

Glanced like a spectre's attributes, and gave

His aspect all that terror gives the grave." (Lara, Canto I, XI, l. 197-200, 305).

The guilt and remorse of the Giaour is elaborated. He is tormented by solitude and loneliness. He rejects the religious comfort and dies a haunted man. His sole virtue is his

fidelity to a single love. We see a hero - proud, solitary, faithful to a guilty love, defiant of divine and moral law, bearing traces of nobility now seared and corrupted.

“Yes, Love indeed is light from heaven;

A spark of that immortal fire

With angels shared, by Alla given

To lift from earth our low desire.” (l. 1131-1134, 262).

Manfred is a man whose feelings are poisoned by a nameless guilt: And calls upon

“... a star condemned,

The burning wreck of a demolished world,

A wandering hell in the eternal Space...” (I, I, l. 44-46, 390)

We have ample proof to show that the hidden sins had a great and everlasting impression on Byron's psychology. And this strain we see him to give vent in his creative works- his heroes become a vehicle to express his choked up emotions of guilt. He himself accepts this,

“Your opinion of ye Giaour, or rather ye additions, honours me highly; you, who know how my thoughts were occupied when these last were written, will perhaps perceive in parts a coincidence in my own state of mind with that of my hero...” (183). Again

“He told me an odd report, - that I am the actual Conrad, the veritable Corsair, and that part of my travels are supposed to have passed in privacy. Um! - People sometimes hit near the truth; but never the whole truth. H. (Hobhouse) don't know what I was about the year after he left the Levant; nor does anyone - nor - nor - nor - however, it is a lie - but, I doubt the equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth”. (399)

Thus the Byronic hero became a medium for Byron's own beliefs and ideas. Many men exploit their fantasies, but those who carry the process as far as Byron did are apt to find that the fantasies exact their revenge, and either enforce a growing isolation from the real world, or, as in Byron's case, force their way into the world and begin to enact themselves in reality.

Byron sought in incest a spice for love, and that he required the feeling of guilt to arouse in him the phenomena of the moral sense, and the feeling of fatality in order to appreciate the flow of life. Byron's conduct towards his wife seems to have been of a moral cruelty. He puts forward heroic arguments in order to extract sensations from marriage: The great object of life is sensation, to feel that we exist even though in pain. (82)

He had written to his future wife, who, though she might have been forewarned by it, was impelled by love and protective instincts towards her ambitious attempt to reform the poet. The first thing Byron said to her after the wedding ceremony was that it was now too

late, that Annabella could have saved him if she had accepted him the first time he had asked for her hand, but that now there was no remedy: something irreparable had happened, Annabella would realize that she had married a devil, because he could only hate her: they were a damned and accursed pair. Even this was not enough. Annabella was made to believe that the marriage was the result of a pique, of a bet, in which the woman had been treated as a mere object. Annabella had refused Byron's hand the first time. And Byron had plotted with Lady Melbourne to punish her stubbornness. Now he held her in his power, and he would make her feel it. At the moment of going to bed, Byron asked his wife if she intended to sleep in the same bed with him: "I hate sleeping with any woman, but you may if you choose." (44)

Profiting by his youthful reading of Zeluco, Byron entertained his wife on the means employed by that monster to get rid of his own child. And he concluded: "I shall strangle ours." (106)

Later, when Annabella was suffering the pains of childbirth, Byron told her that he hoped she would perish together with her baby, and when the child was born, the first thing he asked on coming into the room was, "The child was born dead, wasn't it?" (138)

But the most subtle torture, the torture which was to wring the most exquisite cry of anguish from its victim, was this: Byron, by every kind of allusion and insinuation, sought to instill into Annabella the suspicion of his incest with Augusta (Byron's half-sister from his father's first wife), his 'terrible' secret.

"He talked a great deal of Augusta- with sorrowful tenderness, saying that no one would ever possess so much of his love as she did. He told her that Guss always treated him like a child and spoiled him" (94)

When Augusta was living under the same roof, Annabella must be given to understand that Medora (Augusta's daughter) was Byron's daughter, and was convinced that Augusta was still having intercourse with him (which was not true). Byron felt a perverse joy at the simultaneous presence of the two women, with all the amusement and double meanings, which it offered him, and the continual sensation of hanging over the edge of an abyss.

Compared with these moral tortures his ostentation of physical ferocity seems a mere childish game, but Byron used to pace through the house with ruthless steps, armed with daggers and pistols, in imitation of the fifth Lord Byron, the "Wicked Lord". Like Satan, Byron wished to experience the feeling of being struck with full force by the vengeance of Heaven. He sought to measure the depth of his own guilt in Annabella's anguish, in Augusta's remorse. Byron alternated brutality with blandishment and made his torture more agonizing by contrast; but Annabella never rose to the pitch of despair, which he desired and did not lend herself to the melodrama of fatality. She was unaware how deeply her fate was sealed with a demon when she wrote in her diary the same night; "I continued my acquaintance with Lord Byron, and was additionally convinced that he is sincerely repentant for the evil he has done, though he has not resolution [without aid] to adapt a new course of conduct and feelings." (52)

Byron's moral sense functioned only in the exceptional conditions of a crisis, and it was only in the painful functioning of that moral sense that he found the gratification of his particular form of pleasure. To destroy oneself and to destroy others;

"My embrace was fatal.....

I loved her, and destroy'd her." (II, I, l. 87, II, l. 117, 395,397).

What Manfred said of Astarte (above), what Byron wished to say of Augusta and of Annabella, was to become the motto of the fatal heroes of Romantic Literature. They diffuse all round them the curse which weighs upon their destiny; they destroy themselves, and destroy the unlucky women who come within their orbit. Their mistresses are a victim on which they prey devilishly. They are shorn of every opportunity of redemption.

Byron wanted to justify his incest and wished Annabella should approve it unopposed, he said, "A woman cannot love a man for himself who does not love him in his crimes." (106)

He put before her the oriental idea of the liberty of marriage in which the married were allowed by one another to pursue their own separate individual tastes. But Byron could seldom succeed in his motifs. By his dark thoughts he enmeshed himself in the pool of dilemma which left him restless. The Good within him did not spare him. And Byron, like Satan and Cain, being defiant and wayward rose in revolt against all advocacy of goodness. He concluded that he was damned,

"... - Whate'er my fate,

I am no changeling-'tis too late:" (XXI, 667-668, 326).

The result of this defiance was a ceaseless suffering and torture, intensified with the fact that the sin remains undisclosed. Manfred sternly rejects the suggestion of the chamois hunter to seek spiritual assistance for his 'half-maddening sin', Manfred says,

"Patience and patience! Hence – that word was made

For brutes of burthen, not for birds of prey;

Preach it to mortals of a dust like thine, -

I am not of thine order." (II, I, l. 35-38, 395).

The satanic pride and anger for the divine order is an inherent trait of the Byronic hero. He seems to be always at war with the divine law. He brings about the tragedy by his own tragic deeds resulting in death and destruction. Childe Harold, Corsair, Lara, Manfred, etc. are a symbol of revolt against contemporary religious and moral practice. These heroes are a token of endless struggle and suffering. Byron's reputation as a poet largely derives from this autobiographical character of Byronic Hero.

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