CHAPTER TWO

Byron's Biographical Background and its Influence on the Conception of the Byronic Hero

Thomas Macaulay in his review of Thomas Moore's *Life of Byron* describes the Byronic Hero as "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."[1] This description also befits Byron himself who can be described as moody and temperamental and prone to melancholy, yet possesses an affectionate, charming, disarming frankness, a sense of humour and high-spirited nature as among his more attractive features. This chapter will examine the influence of events in Byron's own life on the conception of the Byronic Hero as seen in his two major poems *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Canto 1 – 4), his drama *Manfred* as well as his letters and journals. It will also look at how the various elements of the eighteenth-century romantic hero have contributed to the conception of the Byronic Hero in his poems.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

According to Peter Thorslev in *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes,* "Childe Harold is the first important Byronic Hero, and the prototype of all the rest."[2] Childe Harold introduced the concept of the Byronic Hero. Indeed *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was an immediate success in England and sealed Byron's popularity. It was not only popular because it is a picturesque travelogue but also due to the biographical nature of the poem itself. In many essays and criticisms written on Byron, critics commonly

assume that the character of Childe Harold is in reality none other than Lord Byron himself, in spite of Byron's repeated denial and protestations to the contrary. In his letter to R.C. Dallas dated 31 October 1811, he says: "I by no means intend to identify myself with Harold, but to deny any connection with him...I would not be such a fellow as I have made my hero for all the world."[3]

However, as Thorslev points out, Byron himself was largely responsible for this misconception. Cantos 1 and 2 were written in 1809 – 1810, which was a rather difficult or unsettling period in Byron's life. The first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were completed at twenty-two when Byron was still young and restless. Byron's strained relationship with his mother and the financial problems he was facing at the time, not to mention the scandals surrounding his personal life, were affecting him emotionally.

In addition, Byron had to endure the death of a good friend, Lord Falkland, a naval officer whom he had met in London and formed a close friendship with. Lord Falkland's death affected Byron deeply as he was killed in a duel. An example of Byron's sympathetic and benevolent nature is evident in his handling of this tragedy. Byron, notwithstanding his own difficulties at the time, sought to assist Lord Falkland's widow and children financially. This gesture was mentioned by Byron himself in a letter to his mother dated March 6, 1809:

> Dear Mother- My last letter was written under great depression of spirits from poor Falkland's death, who has left without a shilling for children and his wife. I have been endeavouring to assist them...[4]

Byron's restlessness as well as his feelings of insecurity in England prompted him to set off on a grand tour with his friend John Cam Hobhouse and his

servant Fletcher. It was also the tradition among well educated young gentlemen to go travelling abroad as part of their education so this was not an uncommon thing to do. Byron, however, had other reasons to go abroad as he wanted to forget his problems and escape the pressures at home to soothe his troubled mind and heart.

The implications of the idea of pilgrimage, says Ernest Lovell,

> ...may well be that Byron even as early as 1809 was actually going in search of some kind of spiritual cure – a cure for his ennui, discontent, restlessness, and feelings of guilt, whatever their causes may have been or however imperfectly he may have realized the fact at the time.[5]

Byron's melancholy, as with almost all nineteenth-century melancholy, had its roots in energy repressed. Ennui, as bored and languid youth itself discovered, is the product of enforced inaction or curbed desire (Barzun, 24). Byron was indeed no stranger to ennui as suggested by the first collection of poems issued to the public, *Hours of Idleness.* Byron as well as other young aristocrats who were mostly Whigs suffered ennui or feelings of boredom as a result of idleness. Ennui functioned as an index of conspicuous leisure or a histrionic representation of social eminence.[6] In the early cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron expresses a concern with idleness as he tries to explain it. It is clear that Byron's youthful idleness betrays underlying feelings of worthlessness at not having an active role in society yet as well as a lack of an inspiring role for him to fill. It is a kind of premonition of Byron's future destiny of undertaking an important role in society to be a symbol of revolutionary spirit.

Childe Harold's sense of melancholy and ennui led him to indulge in a life of sinful pleasure filled with partying, drinking and sexual liaisons. Harold's wild and womanising ways clearly resemble Byron's own promiscuous lifestyle in London.

Whilome in Albion's isle there dwelt a youth,
Who ne in virtue's ways did take delight;
But spent his days in riot most uncouth,
And vex'd with mirth the drowsy ear of Night.
Ah, me! In sooth he was a shameless wight,
Sore given to revel and ungodly glee;
Few earthly things found favour in his sight
Save concubines and carnal companie,
And flaunting wassailers of high and low degree. (1.2.10-18)

In the above stanza, the portrait of Childe Harold seems to be exaggerated with the description of Harold's passionate desire for the company of women which is not unlike Byron's own addiction towards the fairer sex. However, readers can sense an underlying mood of sadness and melancholy amidst Harold's gaiety. This mixture of moods was of course characteristic of Byron's own unpredictable temperament.

Thorslev distinguishes the Byronic heroes' characteristics "by his capacities for feeling, mostly for the tender emotions – gentle and tearful love, nostalgia and a pervasive melancholy."[7] He is also described as something of a solitary and often goes in quest of melancholy adventures. Frequently, this sense of melancholy is brought about by failed romance or broken love affairs. As Edward Bostetter explains: "the loss of passion leaves behind a residue of melancholy and remorse and intensifies the sense of loneliness but, on the other hand, brings a sense of relief. The hero has been set free to seek other pleasures" (165). In other words, it provides Byron with the perfect excuse to indulge in his womanising and drinking habits. Byron himself later linked the mood of melancholy and ennui, which was especially strong during the months before he left England, in the summer of 1809, with the premature indulgence of his passions:

> My passions were developed very early – so early, that few would believe me, if I were to state the period, and the facts which accompanied it. Perhaps this was one of the reasons which caused the anticipated

> melancholy of my thoughts - having anticipated life. My earlier poems are the thoughts of one at least ten years older than the age at which they were written: I don't mean for their solidity, but their Experience. The first two Cantos of Childe Harold were completed at twenty-two, and they are written as if by a man older than I shall probably ever be.[8]

Byron obviously refers to his sexual passion in this quotation. In his journal entry on November 26, 1813, Byron again mentions his early developed passion with regards to his first childhood infatuation with Mary Duff.

> I have been thinking lately a good deal of Mary Duff. How very odd that I should have been so utterly, devotedly fond of that girl, at an age when I could neither feel passion, nor know the meaning of the word. [9]

Harold's sense of melancholy in the first two cantos can be attributed to Byron's own sense of sadness as a result of unrequited love. His next doomed affair was with Mary Charworth, daughter of an heiress, whom he had been infatuated with since he was a boy, and which was something from which he never fully recovered as seen in this stanza:

> For he through Sin's long labyrinth had run,
> Nor made atonement when he did amiss,
> Had sigh'd to many though he lov'd but one,
> And that lov'd one, alas! Could ne'er be his.
> Ah, happy she! to' scape from him whose kiss
> Had been polluted unto aught so chaste;
> Who soon had left her charms for vulgar bliss,
> And spoil'd her goodly lands to gild his waste,
> Nor calm domestic peace had ever deign'd to taste. (1.5.37-45)

He refers to her again when he says: "I loved her from my boyhood; she to me/ Was a fairy city of the heart" (4. 18. 154 – 155). The fact that Mary Chaworth only regarded him as a mere schoolboy only intensified Byron's suffering. Later, these feelings of unrequited love

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will again be felt by Byron as he struggles to overcome the strong feelings he has developed for his half-sister Augusta of whom he is rumoured to have had an incestuous relationship.

Byron's passionate nature not only refers to his womanising habits but also alludes to his homosexual tendencies which may have been the cause of his psychologically affected behaviour including his sense of loneliness, guilt, remorse, his alienation from, hatred of and rebellion against conventional society. Byron had passionate romantic friendships with other boys at school at Harrow. He also fell in love with John Edelston, a boy chorister in the church at Cambridge. When in Greece, he wrote letters of his sexual conquests to friends in England and his last, unrequited passion was for a Greek boy aged fifteen (Moore, 324). Homosexuality was severely persecuted during the Romantic period.[10] In fact, the romantic ideal was generally a protest of lonely, unrealised desire against the increasing cultural restrictiveness during that period. It was a time when the newly dominant, puritanical middle-class had asserted its power in England and there was a publicly sanctioned aversion to sexual transgressiveness of such extremity. It was ironic then that the Romantic period was in reality a contrast to the Romantic ideal which upheld individualism and unrestrained lyrical expression usually centred in love as an ultimate human value.[11]

The first two cantos of *Child Harold's Pilgrimage* convey Byron's underlying melancholy, reflecting his sense of pessimism and fatalism over his own sexual weaknesses and promiscuity. In the lines 'felt the fullness of Satiety' and 'through Sin's long labyrinth had run,' he faced the reality of the imperfection of human nature (Moore, 400). Byron's dejection and disillusionment can be sensed in the following stanza:

> Yet oft-times in his maddest mirthful mood
> Strange pangs would flash along Childe Harold's brow,
> As if the memory of some deadly feud
> Or disappointed passion lurk'd below:
> But his was not that open, artless soul
> That feels relief by bidding sorrow flow,
> Nor sought he friend to counsel or condole,
> Whate'er his grief mote be, which he could not control. (1.8.64-72)

In this stanza, there is a sense of fatalism of one who fears that through sexual excess he has destroyed his ability and right to enjoy anything else. However, Byron's paradoxical nature surfaces once again as seen in one of his statements to his wife, Anabella, to whom he wrote:

> The great object of life is sensation – to feel that we exist, even though in pain. It is this "craving void" which drives us to gaming – to battle- to travel, to intemperate, but keenly felt pursuits of every description, whose principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from their accomplishment. [12]

Bostetter stresses that "although Byron hated and feared his sexual passions, he cultivated them."[13] By indulging in his sexual cravings, Byron felt he was truly living and not merely existing, and his tendency to explore and experience different kinds of sexual experience intensified this feeling in him. The fact that some of his sexual trysts were with prominent and wealthy married women notably Lady Caroline Lamb and Lady Oxford made it all the more fascinating for Byron as these exploits were both scandalous and forbidden. Byron's feelings of loneliness have been commented upon by Thomas Moore in his writings. Moore mentions among other things, Byron's lonely aristocratic position in the world when they first met. He attributes Byron's subsequent disdain for mankind to his loneliness:

Mr.Dallas and his solicitor seemed to be the only persons whom even in their very questionable degree, he could boast of as friends. Though too proud to complain of this loneliness, it was evident that he felt it; and that the state of cheerless isolation, "unguided and unfriended," to which, on entering manhood, he had found himself abandoned, was one of the chief sources of that resentful disdain of mankind, which even their subsequent worship of him came too late to remove.[14]

Byron's feelings of loneliness, rejection and self-pity is evident in the following stanza from Canto 1 in which Harold contemplates on his fate:

And now I'm in the world alone,
Upon the wide, wide sea:
But why should I for others groan,
When none will sigh for me?
Perchance my dog will whine in vain,
Till fed by stranger hands;
But long ere I come back again,
He'd tear me where he stands. (1.9.182-189)

This theme of rejection and loneliness is repeated again in Canto 3:

I have not loved the world, nor the world me:-
But let us part fair foes; I do believe,
Though I have found them not, that there may be
Words which are things,-
Hopes which will not deceive,
And virtues which are merciful, nor weave
Snares for the failing; I would also deem
O'er others' griefs that some sincerely grieve;
That two, or one, are almost what they seem,
That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream. (3.114.1058-1066)

Like most Romantic poetic personalities, Byron has been "fated" to be set apart from other men, alienated from the social world of which he would otherwise gladly have been a part of:

Still, he beheld, nor mingled with the throng;
But viewed them not with misanthropic hate;
Fain would he now have joined the dance, the song;
But who may smile that sinks beneath his fate? (1.84.828-831)

Byron felt alienated from his native land, and regarded himself as an outcast – which he was. His revolutionary politics and unconventional behaviour led him to be described as "Mad, bad and dangerous to know."[15] It is not surprising that Byron felt ashamed to be English and abandoned the country as soon as he could. In a typical Romantic gesture, he sought refuge in the most lonely and inaccessible places in the Alps. Solitude indeed featured strongly in Byron's life. While he detested his isolation and feelings of loneliness, at most times, Byron valued his solitude as it gave him the chance to reflect and dwell upon his life.

Byron's love of solitude was developed very early in his life. As a schoolboy in Harrow, Byron would sit in the churchyard while other children played. This tendency for solitude was carried on during his foreign travel as Byron preferred his own company than the society of his fellow travellers. Moore commented that Byron's instinct towards a life of solitude and independence are in fact the true elements of his strength. Byron worked his contemplative mind in his lone wanderings in Greece where he had sufficient leisure and seclusion to look within himself and catch the first "glimpses of his glorious mind" (Moore, 221).

In his journal entry dated November 27, 1813 Byron writes: "To withdraw myself from myself (oh that cursed selfishness!) has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all."[16] He attempted to lose himself in the world of nature around him. As he states in Canto 3, stanza 72 in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* "I live not in myself, but I become / Portion of that around me; and to me / High mountains are a feeling." In the next stanza, Harold flies to solitude among the mountains, where he

sometimes looks on his surroundings simply as a refuge from the crowd and the turmoil of life:

> Is it not better, then, to be alone,
> And love Earth only for its earthly sake?
> By the blue rushing of the arrowy Rhone,
> Or the pure bosom of its nursing Lake,
> Which feeds it as a mother who doth make
> A fair but forward infant her own care,
> Kissing its cries away as these awake;-
> Is it not better thus our lives to wear,
> Than join the crushing crowd, doomed to inflict or bear? (3.71.671-679)

In spite of this poetic credo, however, Byron wrote in his journal of the tour which inspired the third canto that none of the sublime effects of the Alpine scenery "enabled [him] to lose [his] own wretched identity in the majesty and the power, and the Glory – around – above - & beneath me." Cantos 3 and 4 which were written about four years later around 1814 - 1817 shows an important transition whereby the hero becomes more assimilated to Byron's own persona. A lot of events had happened since Byron composed the first two cantos. A major incident was the death of his mother in 1811. The subsequent deaths of a number of his friends and relatives about two or three months after that further traumatised him. As Moore pointed out, "Besides the loss of his mother, he had to mourn over, in quick succession, the untimely fatalities that carried off, within a few weeks of each other, two or three of his most loved and valued friends"(132). The impact of these deaths is expressed by Byron himself in a note on *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto 2, "In the space of one month, I have lost *her* who gave me being, and most of those that made that being tolerable."[17] That Byron was deeply affected by her death was also evident in his letter to John Pigot dated August 2, 1811.

> My dear doctor – My poor mother died yesterday! and I am on my way from town to attend her to the family vault. I heard one day of her illness, the next of her death. Thank God her last moments were most tranquil. I am told she was in little pain, and not aware of her situation. I now feel the truth of Mr. Gray's observation,'that we can only have one mother.' Peace be with her. (Moore, 127)

It was Byron's misfortune to be well-born but ill-bred. Detached from his mother ever since childhood due her violent and temperamental nature, Byron was also disgusted with her vulgar behaviour and kept his distance from her throughout his life. However, upon learning of her death, Byron felt a certain sadness and pined for a mother for whom he never really understood and desperately craved love from. Byron's volatile relationship with his mother clearly affected him deeply for he could not help loving and hating her and resented the ambiguity of his feelings. He tried to conquer his affection and fell into gloom, despair, and savagery at the inevitable promptings of guilt. The loss of his mother followed by the subsequent death of two very close friends was devastating for Byron as revealed in his letter to Francis Hodgson dated August 22, 1811:

> You may have heard of the sudden death of my mother, and poor Matthews, which, with that of Wingfield had made a sad chasm in my connections. Indeed, the blows followed each other so rapidly that I am yet stupid from the shock, and though I do not eat, and drink ,and talk, and even laugh, at times, yet I can hardly persuade myself that I am awake, did not every morning convince me mournfully to the contrary. (Moore, 132)

The friends he had lost were young John Wingfield a childhood friend at Harrow who died of a fever and Charles Skinner Matthews, his idol in Cambridge who drowned while bathing in the sea. That Byron was emotionally disturbed while writing Canto 3 is revealed in his letter to Moore dated 28 January, 1817:

> *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, III* is a fine indistinct piece of poetical desolation, and my favourite. I was half mad during the time of its composition, between metaphysics, mountains, lakes, love unextinguishable, thoughts unutterable, and the nightmare of my own delinquencies. I should, many a good day, have blown my brains out, but for the recollection that it would have given pleasure to my mother-in-law.[18]

Byron's fusion with the hero-type he had created is the central feature of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto 3. As Sir Walter Scott wrote in May 1816, "Lord Byron has Childe Harolded himself and Outlawed himself into too great a resemblance with the pictures of his imagination."[19] In the following cantos, Childe Harold reveals a more passive, philosophical and reflective nature. An important example of his philosophical self is found in Canto 3 in which the hero reflects on his purpose in life.

> I live not in myself, but I become
> Portion of that around me; and to me
> High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
> Of human cities torture: I can see
> Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
> A link reluctant in a fleshy chain,
> Class'd among creatures, when the soul can flee,
> And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
> Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain. (3.72.680-688)

This gloomy and melancholic mood continues in the next stanza:

> And thus I am absorb'd, and this is life:
> I look upon the peopled desert past,
> As on a place of agony and strive,
> Where, for some sin, to sorrow I was cast,
> To act and suffer, but remount at last (3.73.689-693)

In stanza 75, Harold's tone of spiritual dejection is sensed as he contemplates in the lines "Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part/ Of me and of my soul, as I of them?" (3.75.707-708) In these stanzas, Byron is more concerned with his

personal salvation as he feels remorseful for his sins but his Calvinistic sense of fatality causes him to believe that he is doomed to suffer eternal damnation. Byron's bitter experience with the Calvinist teachings during his childhood have been acknowledged by many critics as a responsible factor for Byron's sense of sin and fatality, as well as his gloom and defiance. This is due to the fact that Byron himself had written many letters on the subject of religion. In a revealing letter to William Gifford written on June 18, 1813, commenting on the 'immortality" stanzas in Canto 2, Byron associates his scientific as well as Calvinist views.

> I am no Bigot to Infidelity, and did not expect that, because I doubted the immortality of Man, I should be charged with denying the existence of a God. It was the comparative insignificance of ourselves and *our world*, when placed in competition with the mighty whole, of which it is an atom, that first led me to imagine that our pretensions to eternity might be over-rated. This, and being early disgusted with a Calvinistic Scotch school, when I was cudgelled to Church for the first ten years of my life, afflicted me with this malady; for, after all, it is, I believe, a disease of the mind as much as other kinds of hypochondria. (Moore, 147)

In one of his letters to Hodgson, Byron's attack on Christianity is full of anger and hatred as he presents God as a tyrant who demanded vengeance and sacrifice. He accuses Christianity as being a religion founded on "injustice." This accusation of Byron further reflects the extent of his bitter reaction to Calvinism.

> ...the basis of your religion is injustice; the *Son of God*, the *pure*, the *immaculate*, the *innocent*, is sacrificed for the *Guilty*. This proves *His* heroism;...As to your immortality, if people are to live, why die? And our carcasses which are to rise again, are they worth raising? (Moore, 35-36)

Byron's accusations of an unjust and unforgiving God is evident in his despondency and frustration in the following stanza:

> That curse shall be Forgiveness-Have I not-
> Hear me, my mother Earth! behold it, Heaven!-

Have I not had to wrestle with my lot?
Have I suffered things to be forgiven?
Have I not had my brain seared, my heart riven,
Hopes sapped, name blighted, Life's life lied away?
And only not to desperation driven,
Because not altogether of such clay
As rots into the souls of those whom I survey. (4.135.1207-1215)

Byron's wife, Anabella whom he had married in 1814 had tried remorselessly to get Byron interested in the subject of religion but failed. In a letter to Anabella dated March 3, 1814 Byron gives her an honest answer to one of her queries when he says that religion is a source from which "I never did, and I believe never can, derive comfort" (Moore, 262).

The dilemma that the hero of sensibility faces is his inability to commit himself to a religious belief as depicted in Canto 3, stanza 90:

Then stirs the feeling infinite, so felt
In solitude, where we are *least* alone;
A truth, which through our being then doth melt,
And purifies from self: it is a tone, (3.90.840-843)

The phrase "purifies from self" indicates that the hero needs to renounce his personal identity in order to commit himself to a religious "truth."[20] This failure causes the Byronic hero to feel at times frustrated and disappointed, thus contributing to his melancholic and remorseful mood.

Leslie Marchand argues that the significance of the whole of the Byronic melancholy can be traced in Childe Harold. He points out that "the multiple and changing moods all center on the inexorable dilemma of the romantic ego: the compulsive search for an ideal and a perfection that do not exist in the world of reality."[21] Thorslev, too, echoes the great importance of Byron's agonized sensitive hero by stating that it is this hero and

not his satire that was Byron's legacy to the literature of the age which succeeded him (186).

In appearance, Byron's heroes contain characteristics of the Gothic Villain who is often portrayed as striking and handsome. He is described as "of about middle age or somewhat younger, has a tall, manly, stalwart physique, with dark hair and brows frequently set off by a pale and ascetic complexion" (Thorslev,142). Aside from this, the most noticeable of his physical characteristics are his eyes which are usually piercing. By birth the Gothic Villain was always of the aristocracy, partly for the sense of power which his nobility confers, and partly for the air of the fallen angel, the air of Satanic greatness perverted. Frequently, there is some mystery connected with his birth or his upbringing. The sense of mystery which is his dominant trait is apparent not only in the origins and in the general appearance of the Gothic Villain, but in his entire personality. This air of mystery is increased by the hint of some past family or personal secret sins of the hero.[22] Although not as dominant as the Hero of Sensibility, some characteristics of the Gothic Villain can be found in Harold in the poem. Stanza 3 of Canto 1 describes Harold's aristocratic background:

> Childe Harold was he hight: - but whence his name
> And lineage long, it suits me not to say;
> Suffice it, that perchance they were of fame,
> And had been glorious in another day: (1.3.19 - 22)

Harold also possesses the major characteristics of the Gothic Villain including characteristics of pride, remorse and passion as found in Cantos 1 and 2. Harold's secret and sinful past which was one of the main attractions of the Gothic Villain is evident in Canto 1.

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Strange pangs would flash along Childe Harold's brow,
As if the Memory of some deadly feud
Or disappointed passion lurked below:
But this none knew, nor haply cared to know;
For his was not that open, artless soul
That feels relief by bidding sorrow flow,
Nor sought he friend to counsel or condole,
Whate'er this grief more be ... (1.8.65-72)

This "sinful past" of course has reference to Byron's own well known sexual exploits including the rumours of his affair with his half-sister Augusta, his homosexual tendencies as well as his numerous affairs with beautiful aristocratic as well as ordinary women. Byron's grief was also further aggravated by his marital problems with Anabella Milbanke which subsequently led to their separation in 1816. The backdrop of monuments, battles and scenery in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* are interwoven with Harold's personal preoccupations, namely his melancholy and grief, his championing of liberty and freedom and the significance of solitude and nature so that they become infused into the hero's psyche and character.[23]

The appeal of Childe Harold transcended all classes of society. He provided fashionable entertainment for the leisurely aristocrats, a sense of hope for the disillusioned, oppressed post-war middle class as well as an exciting form of escapism for the poverty-stricken, lowly existence of the working class. The poem also provided exciting reading material for the new breed of cultured, reading public of the period. As Bostetter puts it, "Byron became overnight the expression of the English libido, so long repressed by religion, government, and war" (273). Every reader immediately identified the hero with the author and directly or indirectly with himself. In Childe Harold, Byron created the "instrument of his fate because in it he created a hero whose excesses against the conventional mores, whose marble heart, ennui, and melancholy were just enough to

attract rather than repel."[24] It is evident then that Byron's portrayal of Childe Harold, with his combination of sensitivity, passion, melancholy and remorse, not to mention his desirable appearance, succeeded in creating a highly popular hero as well as a cultural icon.

Manfred

Byron's greatest dramatic poem, *Manfred,* serves as an important transitional milestone in his career as a writer and thinker. In the composition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto 3, Byron described himself as being "half mad between metaphysics, mountains, lakes, love unextinguishable, thoughts unutterable, and the nightmare of my own delinquencies."[25]

The story of *Manfred* portrays that same suffering and mental anguish. Edward Bostetter has described *Manfred* as the drama in which "Byron symbolically works his way through to mental sanity, to the psychological perspective that made *Don Juan* possible" (54 – 55). Byron uses his "satanic" hero to romanticize pain, suffering, as well as to create empathy towards characters with accursed souls. John Addington Symonds points out that "Manfred is the incarnation of a defiant, guilty, self-reliant personality, preserved from despair by its disdainful pride, linked to the common joys and sorrows of humanity by the slender but still vital thread of a passion which is also an unforgotten and unforgivable crime"(410-420). Though Manfred is not meant to be seen as a vampire, in the literal sense, Byron nevertheless incorporates vampiric images into his dramatic poem. Like earlier versions of vampires or in Gothic novels, Manfred is not fully human, has an ambiguous past, and is tortured by an eternal pain that implies a form of

immortality.[26] He feels that his suffering places him above the realm of mortals in terms of feeling and power. Manfred believes that this burden is too much to bear, "Yet, I live, and bear / The aspect and the form of breathing men" (1.i. 7 – 8) for he is condemned to a life of suffering instead of a merciful death.

Manfred represents the typical persona of the Byronic hero. He is the dark, handsome man with an ambiguous past that attracts the reader and immediately affirms his place as the hero of the story before anything is known about him. In fact, critics have mostly discussed *Manfred* in terms of its autobiographical content rather than its literary merit. The theme of incest and the agony of remorse are frequently connected to Byron's own scandalous personal life. The theme of incest was common in Gothic novels and drama and in Romantic literature in general. Bertrand Evans concedes that in order to deepen the mystery, heighten the suspense, as well as retain as much sympathy as possible for the hero, it is necessary for the villain hero not to reveal the reasons for his remorse until the very last act.[27]

However, Manfred is not merely a remorseful Gothic Villain. What sets Manfred apart is that he is depicted as more mature, philosophical, and psychologically aware of his inner self compared to the passionate and rebellious Childe Harold, as well as the fearless heroes of The Turkish Tales who, driven by anger and revenge, frequently reacted in a rather mindless, impulsive, and sometimes dangerous manner (Thorslev, 168). Manfred is, on the one hand, a "Gothic Villain," and an idealized "hero" on the other. He is a "villain" because he is like a fallen, aristocratic angel who is haunted by a mystery and has ventured into the realm of the forbidden. But he is also a "hero" since he is portrayed as a sort of titan-like figure who is isolated from the rest of humanity, and shows immense

spiritual fortitude. M. Byron Raizis believes that the character of Manfred is the author's supreme representation of the Byronic hero. The qualities that mark this type of hero represent the antithesis of traditional heroism. This hero is not the leader of his people or a representative of his country. He is instead the "archrebel" and it is this rebellious energy and moody self-isolation that is the source of his attraction (50).

By 1816, Byron left England forever, his reputation ruined by the collapse of his marriage and the rumours of his affair with his half-sister, Augusta. He went to Switzerland where he met the Shelleys and they proceded to pass their time writing ghost stories. In writing *Manfred,* Byron drew his inspiration from the heroic archetype figures of Goethe's Faust as well as Milton's Satan and the hero Prometheus. Byron derived much of his inspiration for *Manfred* from Matthew "Monk" Lewis, who arrived in Switzerland to join Byron's party on Lake Geneva in August, 1816, and who introduced the poet to Goethe's *Faust* by translating sections of it for him.[28] Goethe's poem immediately captured Byron's imagination. Byron was the only poet of the English Romantic Movement who was deeply influenced by Goethe's drama.

Goethe's review provides an important analysis of Byron's drama as his own: "This singular intellectual poet has taken my Faustus to himself, and extracted from it the strangest nourishment for his hypochondriac humour. He has made use of the impelling principles in his own way, for his own purposes, so that not one of them remains the same"(Mac Donald, 26). In other words, *Manfred* as Byron insisted, is not simply taken from *Faust*. It is a powerful and thorough revision of Goethe's work and of the tradition behind it.

The Faustian influence is evident in the diabolic theme in *Manfred.* As a play dealing with the supernatural, elements of the Satanic pact with the devil is dealt with in the stanzas in which Manfred (who has already refused the Chamois Hunter's offer to pray for him) now refuses the Abbot's offer for a reconciliation with heaven:

> Old man! There is no power in holy men,
> Nor charm in prayer – nor purifying form
> Of penitence-nor outward look-nor fast-
> Nor agony-nor, greater than all these,
> The innate tortures of that deep despair,
> Which is remorse without the fear of hell,
> But all in all sufficient to itself
> Would make a hell of heaven – can exorcise
> From out the unbounded spirit, the quick sense
> Of its own sins... (3.1.66 – 75)

His denial of a pact with the devil reflects his refusal to interact with anyone, including the Chamois Hunter, who does not expect obedience or anything else.[29] Manfred is the supreme example of the Byronic hero, proud and independent, living as a perpetual exile, unable to conform to society and considering himself different from other men, living by his own values. However, unlike Faust, Byron's Manfred rejects the offer of a pact with the devil. He does this not because he chooses heaven instead but because he is totally autonomous. The Byronic hero can do without God and the devil.[30]

The play stems from Byron's imagination beginning from the "incantation" or curse that is imposed on Manfred at the end of the first scene. Byron apparently wrote the Incantation before the rest of the play. The hero then goes through a series of trials in which he is tempted at every stage by opportunities to escape or transmute its effects but only in inadequate or demeaning ways. *Manfred,* as a dramatic creation, obviously draws

upon a major part of Byron's character and personal history namely his conflict with his Calvinistic upbringing and his incestuous love for his half-sister, Augusta.

In *Manfred*, the treatment of the hero is different from that in the other poems because Byron moves the story onto a metaphysical and allegorical level, not unlike Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* or the second part of Goethe's *Faust.* Jerome McGann concedes that like Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound,* Manfred exposes and suffers internally as a result of his guilt. The poem is a confession of guilt and an act of atonement but it is an act which carries neither absolution nor reconciliation (18). The tone of melancholy which is reminiscent of the Hero of Sensibility in Canto 1 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is evident in the drama's opening, a Faust-like monologue. Manfred reveals his emotional state of being with a coldness toward good, evil, and life itself:

> Good, or evil, life,
> Powers, passions, all I see in other beings,
> Have been to me as rain unto the sands,
> Since that all- nameless hour. I have no dread,
> And feel the curse to have no natural fear,
> Nor fluttering throb, that beats with hopes or wishes,
> Or lurking love of something on the earth. (1.1.21 – 27)

However, the mood of melancholy that pervades the drama resounds most clearly in those passages that convey Manfred's disillusionment with his new power. Manfred is the poet-magician, who by his science has gained a measure of control over the spirits of the elements he summons before him at the outset of the play:

> But grief should be the instructor of the wise;
> Sorrow is Knowledge: they who know the most
> Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,
> The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life. (1.1.9 – 12)

The hero is representative of human wisdom, which, having explored all earthly things, finds in them no solid joy or lasting treasure. Byron repeats this idea that knowledge does not bring happiness in the second canto when he says:

> And they have only taught him what we know-
> That knowledge is not happiness, and science
> But an exchange of ignorance for that
> Which is another kind of ignorance. (2.4.60 – 63)

Manfred is a sage whose wisdom has given him direct contact with supernatural beings. He is also another typically Byronic hero, haunted by remorse for some dark crime, namely incest, alienated from human society, a rebel against the established order of things. According to Stuart M. Sperry, "Manfred is the imprisoned or self-imprisoned Prometheus, the prey of his own reflections."[31] The figure of Prometheus became symbolic throughout the Romantic Movement of man in his fight for liberty against oppression in all its forms. Byron was an admirer of Prometheus, and he had much of the Promethean spirit and transferred it to many of his characters such as Manfred.

Prometheus as hero and saviour of men owes his character almost entirely to Aeschylus in *Prometheus Bound.* In Aeschylus he becomes completely transformed into a titanic hero and a saviour of man, and it is in this form that he has captured the minds of poets including Byron. Like the Titan, he is uncompromising in his romantic longing for a perfection which he did not find in life while at the same time rationally resigns himself to his fate acknowledging the powerlessness of human limitations, while maintaining his defiance of the gods. Manfred's reply to the spirits is Byron's own:

> The Mind, the Spirit, the Promethean spark,
> The Lightning of my being, is as bright,
> Pervading, and far darting as your own,
> And shall not yield to yours, though cooped in clay! (1.1.154-157)

In the letter Byron sent to John Murray about *Manfred* dated October 1817, he readily acknowledged the Aeschylean influence on his drama.

> Of the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus I was passionately fond as a boy (it was one of the Greek plays we read thrice a year at Harrow)...The Prometheus, if not exactly in my plan, has always been so much in my head, that I can easily conceive its influence over all or any thing that I have written.[32]

The significance of Prometheus was also emphasized recently by Martyn Corbett, who stated: "The figure of Prometheus has been the presiding genius of the Swiss summer of 1816."[33] Prometheus was the very type of the Romantic rebel who had an independent streak. For both Shelley and Byron, Satan and Prometheus had come to stand for the ultimate in rebellion: a rebellion which asserted the independence of the individual and his values not only in the face of society, but even in the face of God. We can conclude then that Prometheus, influenced Byron's conception of the hero in *Manfred* (Thorslev, 168).

Critics have consistently seen Manfred as both a hero and an autobiographical projection of the poet. Throughout the play, we encounter Manfred overcoming a series of temptations. He rejects allegiance to any of the deities, whether they be pantheistic, Manichean, or Christian.[34] In all this, Manfred bears some similarity to Byron himself who rejected all religious teaching as a retaliation against his strict Calvinist upbringing. In addition, his destructive and apparently incestuous love for the beautiful Astarte suggests the poet's liason with Augusta Leigh. Manfred's infatuation with Astarte is contained in the following lines which highlight the idea of forbidden love:

> Manfred. I say 'tis blood-my blood! the pure warm stream
> Which ran in the veins of my fathers, and in ours
> When we were in our youth, and had one heart,
> And loved each other as we should not love; (2.1.24 – 27)

Byron expresses the intense love between Manfred and Astarte which hints at Byron's own intense feelings for his half-sister.

> Manfred...Thou lovedst me
> Too much, as I loved thee: we were not made
> To torture thus each other – though it were
> The deadliest sin to love as we have loved. (2.4.120 – 123)

The deep feelings that Byron felt for Augusta are clearly evident in his letters to her. Byron regarded her as his closest confidante and frequently poured out his frustrations and anger that he felt towards his mother by writing about them to Augusta, such as in a letter dated April 23, 1805 which underscores Byron's tumultuous relationship with his mother:

> I assure you upon my *honour*, jesting apart, I have never been so *scurrilously* and *violently* abused by any person, as by that woman, whom I think I am to call mother, by that being who gave me birth, to whom I ought to look up with veneration and respect, but whom I am sorry I cannot love or admire. Within one little hour, I have not only heard myself, but have heard my *whole family* by the father's side, *stigmatised* in terms that the *blackest malevolence* would perhaps shrink from, and that too in words you would be shocked to hear. Such, Augusta, such is my mother, my *mother*![35]

Later, when he married Anabella Milbanke, Byron confided to Augusta his unhappiness and his animosity towards his wife. In a letter dated September 17, 1816 Byron expressed regret for having married the wrong woman and professed that he could never love anyone the way he loved her:

> What a fool I was too marry – and you are not very wise – we might have lived so single and so happy – as old maids and bachelors, I shall never find anyone like you – nor you (vain as it may seem) like me. We are just formed to pass our lives together, and therefore – we – at least – I – am by a crowd of circumstances removed from the only being who could ever have loved me of whom I can unmixedly feel attached to.[36]

This sentiment is also found in another intimate letter to Augusta dated May 17, 1819 in which one can sense the inner turmoil Byron must have been going through as he pours out his passionate feelings and sense of hopelessness to Augusta:

> But I have never ceased nor can cease to feel for a moment that perfect and boundless attachment which bound and binds me to you – which renders me utterly incapable of *real* love for any other human being – for what could they be to me after *you*?...They say absence destroys weak passions – and confirms strong ones – Alas! *mine* for you is the union of all passions and of all affections – Has strengthened itself but will destroy me – I do not speak of *physical* destruction – for I have endured and can endure much – but of the annihilation of all thoughts, feelings or hopes – which have not more or less reference to you and to *our recollections* .[37]

That Augusta also shared deep feelings and affection for Byron is confirmed in Annabella's revelation of Augusta's constant wearing of one of "the two gold brooches containing his hair and hers, with three crosses on them," while the other brooch was worn by Byron (Marchand, 653). According to Anabella, Augusta later confessed to her that Byron had tried to renew their incestuous relation.

Byron's own admission of their affair seems evident according to his wife Anabella who records the conversation Byron had with her in the presence of Augusta.

> "You know," he said another night, before both women, "you know that is my child" – pointing to Medora (Augusta's daughter, born April 15, 1814) and going on to calculate the year of her birth, so as to prove she could not possibly be the husband's child.[38]

Although Byron later refutes this claim by calculating Colonel Leigh's absence and proving that Medora could not be his child, this observation strongly hints at the possibility that Byron did indeed have sexual relations with his sister. Byron himself hinted to Moore of his liason with Augusta in his letter to Moore dated August 22, 1813:

> ...I have said nothing, either, of the brilliant sex; but the fact is, I am at this moment in a far more serious, and entirely new, scrape than any of the last twelve months, - and that is saying a good deal. It is unlucky we can neither live with nor without these women.[39]

In another letter to Moore dated August 28, 1813 Byron again hints at this affair: "Seriously, I would incorporate with any woman of decent demeanour tomorrow – that is, I would a month ago, but at present,***".[40] That he told Moore more about this liason is suggested by the asterisks.

Manfred's infatuation with Astarte is, however, more than just a reflection of Byron's relationship with Augusta. It signifies Byron's tumultuous relationship with women on the whole. As Sperry puts it, "It is the expression of his disastrous love-life as a whole – the compulsive self-destructiveness that characterized all his affairs and even his marriage."[41] In dealing with Astarte, we are exploring the deeper levels of Byron's psyche. It was, as stated earlier easier for him to reject the various religious creeds or dogma than ignoring the voice of his own conscience especially in dealing with his sexual and emotional transgressions. It is a psychologically acknowledged fact that the most dangerous and inhibiting guilt is that which is self-inflicted. "The gods that are the most inexorable and difficult to exorcise are those we set up within ourselves. *Manfred* is above all an object lesson in these truths" (Sperry, 197). The consequences of Manfred's curse resemble closely to Byron's guilt and symptoms of depression in 1816 as a result of his failed marriage and rumoured affair with Augusta. Manfred's torment is therefore partly a representation of Byron's misery during his own journey through the alps.[42]

Manfred's confrontation with the fiend is indeed the climax of the drama. It is really an aspect of Byron's confrontation with himself. Sperry likens the confrontation with the fiend somewhat like Frankenstein's monster, who turns upon his master (199). Interestingly enough, it was when Byron began *Manfred* during the summer of 1816 that Mary Shelley discovered her idea for her novel. The menacing figure symbolizes Manfred's curse or the rationalization that the curse exists in any sense outside of himself. Manfred finally takes onto himself full responsibility for his guilt:

> Back to thy hell!
> Thou hast no power upon me, that I feel;
> Thou never shalt possess me, that I know;
> What I have done; I bear within
> A torture which could nothing gain from thine;
> The mind which is immortal makes itself
> Requital for its good or evil thoughts-
> Is its own origin of ill and end-
> And its own place and time. (3.4.124 – 32)

Manfred conquers his curse, paradoxically, only by internalising and accepting it. Manfred's death is self-redemptive.[43] Daniel McVeigh concedes that Manfred's death "is thus the ultimate Pyrrhic victory, an embracing of his 'proper Hell'. Whatever his moral status, his courage gives him a heroic stature above that of the characters surrounding him" (610).

Manfred, often referred to as the quintessential Byronic hero, is popular with readers for the conventional anti-heroic qualities often found in Byronic heroes. He is a rebel to the very end, a dark and brooding loner who is isolated and set apart from society: 'In my heart/ There is a vigil, and these eyes but close/ To look within and yet I live, and bear/ The aspect and the form of breathing men" (1.1.5-8). Manfred is also passionate, intellectual and highly emotional. He shows defiance and pride and rejects the

values and morality of society. As with all Byronic heroes, he is haunted by a traumatic experience in his past causing him to suffer conflict or inner turmoil. All these characteristics coupled with his brooding good looks appealed to the reading public who were fascinated with this hero who dabbles in the supernatural but is still very human.

Manfred's triumph which is both dramatic and tragic is a reflection of Byron's own tragic life story. Having to face personal trials and tribulations caused by his personal scandals, Byron nevertheless gained fame and success through his writings.[44] More importantly, *Manfred* signals the end of Byron's active role in Parliamentary English politics and his subsequent political involvement in Greece. His passion in his role as liberator in Greece's fight for independence and his subsequent sudden death in the very country that he had grown to love and had dedicated his life to were both dramatic as well as tragic – just like Manfred's.

Notes

[1]T.B Macaulay, ed., *Critical & Historical Essays* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1905) 613.

[2]Peter L. Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Types & Prototypes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962) 128.

[3]R.E Prothero, ed., *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters & Journals* (London: John Murray, 1973) 66.

[4]Prothero, 77.

[5]Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. ed., *His Very Self and Voice – Collected Conversations of Lord Byron* (New York : Macmillan Co., 1954) 112.

[6] For conspicuous leisure, see Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Boston: Dover Publications Inc., 1973). For dandyism see Ellen Moers, *The Dandy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978).

[7] Thorslev, 35.

[8]Thomas Moore ed., *The Life, Letters & Journals of Lord Byron* (London: John Murray, 1860) 86.

[9] Moore, 262.

[10] Stuart Curran, "English Literature: Romanticism,"*GLBTQ Magazine* 20 August 2002. May 2003 <http://www.glbtq.com/literature/eng_Lit5_romanticism.html>.

[11]Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron: A Biography* (New York, University of Washington Press, 1957) 219.

[12] Moore, 400.

[13] Edward Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists* (New York: University of 'ashington Press, 1963) 269.

[14]In a letter to Mr. William Bankes dated March 6, 1807 Byron expresses disdain over his lonely and solitary state; "For my own part, I have suffered severely in the decease of my *two greatest friends, the only beings I ever loved (females excepted); I am therefore a solitary animal, miserable enough, and so perfectly a citizen of the world that whether I pass my days in Great Britain or kamschatka, is to me a matter of perfect indifference. The two friends here refer to either Lord Falkland or Hon. John Wingfield and Charles Skinner Matthews. *BLJ*, 42.

[15] A phrase coined by Lady Caroline Lamb in her journal on the evening she first saw Byron. Lady Caroline Lamb, wife of William Lamb was a little wild and literally threw herself at Byron. Byron and Lady Caroline Lamb went on to have a passionate love affair that rocked London society.

[16]Moore, 132.

[17]Moore, 262.

[18] Moore, 338.

[19] Moore, 221.

[20] Moore, 147.

[21]Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron's Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (Boston: Boston Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1965) 38.

[22]Thorslev, 142.

[23]Andrew Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study* (London: Oliver & Boyd Ltd., 1961) 184.

[24] Bostetter, 273.

[25]Prothero, 54-55.

[26] Philip S. Martin, *Byron - A Poet Before his Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 126.

[27] The possible influence of Chateaubriand's works, especially *Rene*, on the Byronic Hero has often been debated. The agonized remorse for secret sins and the likely incest theme make it possible that *Rene* did influence *Manfred*, although both of these themes were already flourishing in England even before *Rene* was published in France. See Thorslev, 216.

[28] Matthew G. Lewis was a good friend of Byron's who derived his nickname "Monk" Lewis from his violent and sadistic tale *The Monk*. See D.L. MacDonald, "Incest, Narcissism and Demonality in Byron's *Manfred*," *Mosaic* 25.2 (1992) : 26.

[29]There is a similarity here to Milton's Satan who believes that the mind can make a heaven of hell as well as a hell of heaven (see *Paradise Lost* 1. 254 – 55).

[30] Martin, 127.

[31]Stuart M. Sperry, "Byron and the meaning of *Manfred*," *Criticism* 16 (1974): 193.

[32]Leslie A. Marchand, ed., *Byron's Letters & Journals* vol. 4 (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1975) 174 – 5.

[33]Martin Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy* (London: MacMillan Press, 1988) 27.

[34]Daniel M. McVeigh, "Manfred's Curse," *Studies in English Literature* 22 (1982): 609.

[35] Marchand, *Byron: A Biography*, 652.

[36] Peter Quenell, ed., *Byron – A Self Portrait* vol.1 (London: John Murray, 1950) 346.

[37]Quenell, vol.2, 451.

[38]Lovell, 112.

[39]Moore, 192.

[40] Moore, 193.

[41] Sperry, 193.

[42] In a letter dated 17th September 1813, Byron described his mood to Augusta: "I may thank the strength of my constitution that has enabled me to bear all this, but those who bear the longest and the most do not suffer the least. I do not think that a human being could being could endure more mental torture than that woman has directly & indirectly inflicted upon me – within the present year." *BLJ* V, 95.

[43] McVeigh, 610.

[44] In his biography of Byron, Moore says, "...it is invariably to be borne in mind, that his very defects were among the elements of his greatness, and that it was out of the struggle between the good and evil principles of his nature that his mighty genius drew his strength. A more genial and fostering introduction into life, while it would doubtless have softened and disciplined his mind, might have impaired its vigour; and the same influences that would have diffused smoothness and happiness over his life might have been fatal to its glory." *BLJ*, 244.