

THE SECOND GENERATION OF ROMANTIC POETS: BYRON, SHELLEY, KEATS

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- Romantic poets born after the French Revolution, **while maintaining many ‘Romantic’ beliefs** such as **the importance of passion, the celebration of sublime nature, and spontaneity in poetry**, reacted abasing the elder poets in a number of ways.

- Second generation were associated with **liberal or radical ideas** in opposition to the alleged 'apostasy' of their predecessors.

- **Byron and Byronism**

- Most popular poet of the Romantic age was George Gordon, Lord Byron
- His romances were extremely successful in commercial terms and his comic epic masterpiece *Don Juan* was read by many.
- His celebrity and notoriety was encapsulated in the personality cult of Byronism, which swept Europe before and after his death, made him one of the century's most significant writers.

Characteristics of the Byronic Hero

A Byronic hero exhibits several characteristic traits, and in many ways he can be considered a rebel is a rebel

has a distaste for society and social institutions

is isolated from society (a wanderer, an exile)

is not impressed by rank and privilege (though he may possess it)

is larger-than-life in his ability--and his pride

has a hidden curse or crime

suffers from titanic passions

tends to be self-destructive

One of the key connections to understanding the Byronic Hero is that he is, in some ways, like the Romantic conception of Satan in *Paradise Lost*--the rebel who fights against a tyrannical establishment but is destroyed by his own overwhelming pride. This figure is an unconventional hero--dangerous and destructive, but admirable because he is larger than life.

He created his own cult of personality, the concept of the 'Byronic hero' - a defiant, melancholy young man, brooding on some mysterious, unforgivable in his past.

Byron's influence on European poetry, music, novel, opera, and painting was immense, although the poet was widely condemned on moral grounds by his contemporaries.

Example: *The Giaour* (1813) *The Corsair* (1814) *Manfred* (1816)

- It was his verse romance *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the first two cantos of which appeared in 1812, which made him famous and secured his massive readership.
- The cynical, alienated and solitary Harold wandering around Europe and the Levant, musing moodily on the wastes of time and the laity of human aspirations, was irresistibly attractive to his post- revolutionary generation.

- Byron subsequently abandoned the romantic persona of his earlier works in a series of extremely accomplished and often biting satires, **Beppo (1818)**, **The Vision of Judgement (1822)** and the gentler narrative romance, **The Island (1823)** based on the story of the **Bounty mutiny**.

- His greatest work, however, was his unfinished masterpiece **Don Juan**, the first two Cantos of which appeared in 1819
- The poem tell the story of the adventures of the young Spanish nobleman Don Juan, involving shipwreck, cannibalism, the carnage of the siege of Ismail, the court of Catherine the Great and follies and fashions of Regency society.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Percy Bysshe Shelley (August 4, 1792 – July 8, 1822) was one of the major English Romantic poets and is widely considered to be among the finest lyrical poets of the English language.

Lyrical poems are a form of poetry that does not attempt to tell a story but is of a more personal nature instead.

He is perhaps most famous for such anthology pieces as *Ozymandias*, *Ode to the West Wind*, *To a Skylark*, and *The Masque of Anarchy*.

Shelley's unconventional life and uncompromising idealism, combined with his strong skeptical voice, made him a notorious and much denigrated figure during his life.

- **Byron and Shelley** were very different kinds of poet but they shared an Enlightenment scepticism and a liberal oppositional stance to the Tory government of their day, as well as a strong predilection for movements for optimism about **humanity's capacity for improvement than the more pessimistic Byron** and this shows in the visionary nature of much of his writing.

- He was expelled from Oxford as a consequence of his pamphlet. *The Necessity of Atheism* and his first wife, Harriet Westbrook, committed suicide after he sensationally eloped with Mary Godwin.
- His first major publication was his radical philosophical poem *Queen Mab* (1813) with its extensive footnotes from Enlightenment thinkers.

- His bitter and satirical *The Masque of Anarchy* was written in anguished protest at the **‘Peterloo Massacre’ in 1819.**

