

Byronic Hero in English Romanticism

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Abstract - The archetype, or character type, of the Byronic hero was first developed by the famous 19th-century English Romantic poet Lord Byron. Most literary scholars and historians consider the first literary Byronic hero to be Byron's Childe Harold, the protagonist of Byron's epic poem Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. However, many literary scholars and historians also point to Lord Byron himself as the first truly Byronic hero, for he exemplified throughout his life the characteristics of the sort of literary hero he would make famous in his writing. A Byronic hero can be conceptualized as an extreme variation of the Romantic hero archetype. Traditional Romantic heroes tend to be defined by their rejection or questioning of standard social conventions and norms of behavior, their alienation from larger society, their focus on the self as the center of existence, and their ability to inspire others to commit acts of good and kindness. Romantic heroes are not idealized heroes, but imperfect and often flawed individuals who, despite their sometimes less than savory personalities, often behave in a heroic manner.

According to many literary critics and biographers, Lord Byron developed the archetype of the Byronic hero in response to his boredom with traditional and Romantic heroic literary characters. Byron, according to critics and biographers, wanted to introduce a heroic archetype that would be not only more appealing to readers but also more psychologically realistic. The archetype of the Byronic hero is similar in many respects to the figure of the traditional Romantic hero. Both Romantic and Byronic heroes tend to rebel against conventional modes of behavior and thought and possess personalities that are not traditionally heroic. However, Byronic heroes usually have a greater degree of psychological and emotional complexity than traditional Romantic heroes. Byronic heroes are marked not only by their outright rejection of traditional heroic virtues and values but also their remarkable intelligence and cunning, strong feelings of affection and hatred, impulsiveness, strong sensual desires, moodiness, cynicism, dark humor, and morbid sensibilities. Byronic heroes also tend to appear larger than life and dress and style themselves in elaborate costumes for the purpose of making themselves as different from others as possible. The Byronic Hero created in the works of Byron has dual attributes which reflect the Byron's inner contradictions.

On the one hand he who was influenced by classical Greek heroes could not get rid of restriction of the traditional Pan Heroism, on the other hand, in his poems using monologues or dialogues as subtle clues, Byron created heroic figures to some extent opposed to the Pan Heroism. The Byronic hero has similar attributes of later Nietzsche's "Superman". This paper deals with the Byronic hero and the comparison with other heroes.

Index Terms - Byron; Byronic hero; Classical Greek hero; Nietzschean superman; Pan heroism.

INTRODUCTION

Although the definition of the so-called "hero" varies with different times and cultural backgrounds, the common thing in its definition is that it is difficult to get rid of the influence of our values. Although humans are limited in the frameworks of the different languages, geographical locations, cultures, all walks of life tend to believe in the universal values out of human conscience and ration. Universal values of human give birth to remarkably similar versions of the Pan Heroism. Pan Heroism means common definition of a hero generally given by the society. And the hero who has superpower acting as the people's model icon is often described as a spiritual totem in specific times. Based on the Pan Heroism, the ancient, ritualized worship of the hero almost became an indispensable practice in the daily life, people drew figures on the wall of cave, built temples and sacrificed animals to worship and show respect to the hero. Especially after the birth of written language ancient rituals were gradually transformed into a variety of literary descriptions of heroes (such as Achilles and Agamemnon in Iliad). These writings are classified as Heroic Literature which can be read in works of Neo-Heroic literary trend emerging at the beginning of the contemporary Chinese literature. In the literature of China these people who were ordinary people at first, grew up to respectful hero after undergoing the various natural disasters, conflicts, fatal adversities even wars

(Fang, 2003). In the literature of the world Byronic hero stands out. The Byronic hero finds his way in various forms of dramas, fictions, poetry.

BYRONIC HERO IN ENGLISH ROMANTICISM

The term “Byronic hero” now takes place in colloquial English, as an epithet to define a type of people that shows resemblances to Lord Byron’s well-known type of literary character. That type of literary character has its name from the surname of its creator, George Gordon Byron, or generally known as Lord Byron, and becomes a literary term, called “Byronic hero. Peter Thorslev, defined “Byronic hero” as one of the most prominent literary character types of Romantic Period: “The Byronic Hero is the one protagonist, who is in stature and temperament best represents the [heroic] tradition in England”. (Byron (1788- 1824) has contributed to the English romantic literature, during his lifetime full of travels, literature and relationships. He gave a new popular type of literary character, “Byronic hero”, and notable works, such as Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Manfred, Cain and Don Juan. In this essay, those first three texts are referred, to support the hypostases of the Byronic hero. The purpose of this study is to give hypostases by mentioning the features of Byronic hero with the help of mentioned texts.

Lord Byron, one of the luminary artists of the English Romanticism, was born in January 22, 1788, in London, England. His mother took him away to Scotland during his infancy. He lost his father when he was just 3 years old. However, his tenth age gave him a huge status. In 18th and 19th centuries, one would inherit the place in Chamber of Lords due to his birthright, not by election nor choice. After the death of his uncle, William, the 5th Baron Byron, he got his late uncle’s title and estates. That is the reason why he is called “Lord Byron” Then, he continued his education back in England. While he started to gain reputation with his early poems, in 1809, he took his seat in the House of Lords, and then embarked on a grand tour (Britannica, para.5). In Greece, he started writing Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage and it went on during the visits to another countries. And after finishing his grand tour and returning to London, in 1812, he published Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage. His most famous works are Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage and Don Juan. Upon various rumors about an amorous relationship with his stepsister and an unsuccessful

marriage, Lord Byron left England and settled in Geneva, Switzerland. He became friends with Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Shelley there, had an illegitimate child, and lived in different cities of Italy from 1817, the year that Manfred was first published. Cain was published during his time in Italy, in 1821, with many other works of him. In 19 April 1824, he died in Greece in his young age, 36. In spite of his death at a young age, he became one of the most prominent artists of the English Romanticism.

Two generations of Romantic writers appeared in Romantic period in England, and Byron belongs to the younger generation of English Romanticism, along with P.B. Shelley (1792-1822) and John Keats (1795-1821). The remarkable feature of the second generation is that the writers in that generation are considered as more radical, rebellious and mischievous. Sometimes they rejected the early generation, for example, William Wordsworth (1770-1850). However, the columns of English Romanticism has already been set by the first generation, writers in the first generation gave the base of their Romanticism, set the rules and features of it by their literary works and critics, prefaces.

Escapism in Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage is also desired, it is an important wish. It is implied in part XII - “Proud though in desolation; which could find / A life within itself, to breathe without mankind.”-as “desolation” refers to isolation and detachment, another concepts that we see in Byronic hero. In part XIV, escapism is seemingly achieved. Byronic hero looks at the sky and imagines people living there. He manages to escape and he forgot the human world. Human world and frailties (Earth), and stars suggest dualism. That act of escapism is seemingly achieved, but it is impossible to achieve fully. Human body (clay) and conditions are the enemy of the “spiritual flight”. He cannot keep his spirit there because this clay destroys that bond. Part XV has the quite famous metaphor for Romantic persona, as a falcon. Here, falcon is a cage, and this implies that Harold is imprisoned in a cage, his clay / human body.

Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage is the first work that Byron created his type of romantic persona, later named “Byronic hero”.

Among the other features of the romantic persona, “the character Byron created is a handsome young person, of impressive aristocratic origin, rejecting and being rejected by his own class; proud and egocentric; a

misfit and outcast in relation to any social environment, and a Solitary concerned with separating from humanity and seeking solitude, knowledge and worlds of escapism created or re-created by his own imaginative resources; or a rebel and radical by the English standards of his day (Petru Golban, 8).

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage consists of four cantos; cantos have been released from 1812 to 1818, the full body of work was available in 1818 with the release of fourth canto. "Childe" is the first-born male child in Aristocratic family, suggests a personal noble status. It does not necessarily mean "child". Harold is the name of Byron's protagonist in this poem, our first Byronic hero. "Pilgrimage" does not indicate a sacred meaning; it refers to Harold's adventure. Critics claim that this work is based on Byron's own travel experiences, since this work is written during Byron's adventurous voyage, and it describes Byron's travels. Therefore, this poem is considered as "autobiographical poem". "Disillusioned with his aimless life devoted to pursuing pleasure, Childe Harold seeks distraction by going on a solitary pilgrimage to foreign lands" (Britannica). Many critics point that the first Byronic hero we encounter is Lord Byron himself; he expressed himself in his protagonists.

CONCLUSION

Lord Byron gave a new fresh type of character to the literature, especially English and European literature. Now, there are many various examples of Byronic hero all around the world, not just in poems, also in novels, or in movies and TV series. If we are not unfamiliar to this type of hero today, it is because the greatness of Lord Byron, penning his imagination and expressive power. The term "Byronic hero" in colloquial English is used to describe someone, who shows much resemblance to Byron's protagonists. Byronic hero did not emerge out of nowhere and grow on its own; it takes its roots from the Romanticism, as the popular product of the second generation of English Romanticism. It does not differ in so many perspectives from the Romantic persona in general, however the differences are extremely remarkable and. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Manfred and Cain are magnificent texts to observe the hypostases of Byronic hero.

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