



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

**Hugvísindasvið**

# **The Byronic hero**

*Origins and legacy*

**Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs**

**Sólrún Helga Guðmundsdóttir**

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## Abstract

In this dissertation the Byronic hero and its origins and legacy are the main focal point. Lord George Gordon Byron was a British poet and a dominant figure in the Romantic movement and until this day he still remains widely read and renowned. As an heir to a title and an estate, the aristocratic Lord Byron went on a Grand Tour, a customary journey for young noblemen to see and explore the world. On that journey the Byronic hero is conceived, a figment of his imagination and an anticipated breath of fresh air for readers looking for something more complex and intriguing than the good hero. The character Byron bases on his autobiographical journey throughout Europe and his many scandalous affairs, he finds his inspiration for his troubled but heroic character in Milton's Satan, the Greek legend of Prometheus and Cain from Exodus. Byron's hero is a complex one, made up of many traits but also of many faults making it easily relatable and charming. The dissertation will use the feminist writings of Gilbert and Gubar to examine the two main sides of the Byronic hero; the guilt ridden, wandering Byronic hero and the Satanic side of the Byronic hero. Also using Byron's own work and other references the dissertation examines the use of the Byronic hero in contemporary culture, in literature, film and television respectively finding it still as popular as it was when it first saw the light of day.

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## 1. Introduction

Lord Byron is a literary figure well known for his part in the Romantic period. Alongside Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake and Keats he reached into people's hearts and woke them up from a slumber of rationalisation brought on by the Enlightenment. Romanticism was a response to the scientific rationalisation of the Enlightenment era and emphasized the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional and the transcendental ("Romanticism"). Byron is known for his scandalous affairs and prolific writing as well as his haunting yet mesmerising main character, the Byronic hero which draws Lord Byron's readers into a unique mindset. Byron's hero or anti-hero is widely renowned and some believe this character to be his true self reflected in fiction. The affect of the Byronic hero is to be found in everything, film or fiction, and the number of works and authors influenced by his character creation are innumerable. The appeal of the Byronic hero is undoubtedly that he is beautiful but damned, the character has taken it upon itself to be a critic of the world, a martyr in a way. Byron's hero is not the ideal knight in shining armour but a dark hero even an anti-hero, someone who does not want to fulfil his predetermined destiny thrust upon him by the expectations of society. The character first appeared in Byron's semi-autobiographical *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* but the character kept evolving and is present in his oriental romances which he was inspired to write during his travels abroad in 1809 and 1811. Most of Byron's work was an instant success causing other authors to draw inspiration from his work and character thus making the Byronic hero a relevant element in literary works from romanticism to modern times. Byron's works that portray this character are essentially *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and his *Oriental Tales*, those include *The Giaour*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, *A tale* and *Manfred*.

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is a narrative poem in four parts, the first two cantos written in 1812 and the latter two added on by Byron several years later. The poem tells the story of a young aristocrat that in spite of his wealth is weary of his homeland and looks for excitement elsewhere while on his Grand Tour (Byron 179-252). *The Giaour* is a narrative poem that tells a story of a love triangle between Leila, Hassan and the giaour, which is Turkish for non-believer or infidel. Leila, a member of Hassan's harem, is in love with the giaour and for that she is punished by Hassan and thrown into the sea

in a sack. The giaour avenges Leila by killing Hassan but then enters a monastery to repent for his sin (Byron 252-264). *The Corsair* is a tale of the pirate Conrad, whom in his youth was rejected by society and his later fight against humanity (Byron 277-303). *Lara* is narrative tragic poem describing Count Lara's return to the British Isles after his Middle East travels. Count Lara returns to manage his estates and does so with great success. His success fuels the envy and greed of his peers and finally the tension between his enemies and his followers escalate into open warfare in which the Count is mortally wounded (Byron, 303-319). *Manfred* is a play written by Lord Byron in 1816-17. Manfred is a Faustian noble tormented with guilt over an unnamed offense that has something to do with his only love, Astarte, whom is said to be "of his own blood" (Thorslev 165). Manfred summons seven spirits to make him forget his past, but they are unable to grant him what he wishes. Manfred tries to escape his guilt by suicide but without luck. He challenges every authority he comes across and eventually chooses death above everything else (Byron 390-406). The Byronic hero is Lord Byron's literary legacy and it has lived on ever since the character was created. This dissertation will focus on the Byronic hero and its origins and legacy. Using various sources on the Byronic hero as well as some feminist writing I will display two sides of the Byronic hero drawing from its origins; first the wandering Byronic hero and then the satanic Byronic hero.

## **2. Lord Byron's background and Early Works.**

Lord George Gordon Byron was born the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 1788 to a loving but overbearing mother and a financially irresponsible father in poor lodgings in London. He descended from two of the most colourful branches of British aristocracy. His mother, Catherine Gordon, was a descendant of James I of Scotland and his father, Captain John Byron, came from a long line of turbulent aristocrats spending more than their means allowed them (Marchand 3-8). Byron had a lame foot that bothered him both physically and mentally for all his life, his sensitivity for his lameness was perhaps because his mother criticized it when she was in one of her moods, something which Byron clearly inherited from her. In his early years Byron was sensitive and had a loyal and affectionate nature even though he was mischievous and sometimes flighty

(Marchand 12-13). Mrs. Byron moved to Aberdeen; Scotland, in 1789 with her son to avoid dealing with her husband's financial misfortunes and debts. Constantly avoiding creditors and living off his wife when he could, Captain John Byron died in 1791 (Marchand 12). Living with his mother in an apartment in Aberdeen the young Byron was proud of his aristocracy but also sympathetic to liberals; his conditions and environment shaped his views to those of Scottish lower-middle-class. Then in 1794 news came that Captain John's nephew was killed in Corsica and thus George Gordon Byron became the presumptive heir to the title and estate, Newstead Abbey, of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lord Byron (Marchand 13). His education was then to be redeemed so he was entered into Aberdeen Grammar School. Later described by his schoolmates as fearless, he had a strong sense of honour and pride but also a need to compensate for his lameness. Byron acquired good social skills during his time at Aberdeen Grammar School and his best asset was his social fluidity, which he prided himself with all his life (Eisler 24-25). After his father passed away and the family's social status was reformed Byron became his mother's escort to various artistic, literary and political events rarely attended by children. His fondness for theatre and literature can be traced back to this time in his childhood and his happiest hours when he could combine his three favourite things: travel, history and literature (Eisler 26). Officially becoming the Lord Byron in 1798 his circumstances changed greatly. In 1801 he went to Harrow School and, during his stay there which lasted some four years, he changed dramatically. Byron went from being an outcast to being a star in his last year at Harrow School, idolised by his juniors, the headmaster's pet and popular with his peers (Eisler 64). His social fluidity, charm and good looks were his ticket to sweeping people off their feet. After his stay at Harrow School, Byron attended Cambridge Trinity College, where he became independent and published his first poetry (Marchand 36-46). Remaining at Cambridge for two years, from 1805-1807, Byron left without anything tangible except for great literary aspirations and unique friendships (Marchand 46). Byron's literary career was unique. He gained notoriety as a writer instantly when his semi-autobiographical work, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* written during his travels from 1809 to 1811, was published in March 1812 and the author woke up to find himself famous (Marchand 116).

Byron was a handsome man with a title. His love life was always interesting and scandalous and is probably one of the main reasons he became a celebrity of his time.

At the time Byron attended Harrow school it is rumoured to have had a homoerotic underworld. Byron's alliances with his fellow schoolmates were intense and romantic, filled with romantic feelings and impassioned language. It is unknown whether these passions were ever acted on but some of Byron's memoirs are sexually overt about this specific period in his life which perhaps point to him being bisexual (Eisler 59-60). His long list of loves and conquests include his distant cousins, Mary Chatworth, Lady Caroline Lamb, Claire Clairmont, a supposedly incestuous relationship his half sister Augusta Leigh and a marriage to Anne Isabella Milbanke (Fraistat and Jones). His conquests were numerous and his reputation exceeded him because of his literary victories and subsequent fame but also because of his scandalous personal life.

The first edition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* containing only two cantos sold quickly from the shelves of Mr. Murray, Byron's publisher. A social whirl took Byron by surprise and threw him into being a celebrity, with the popularity of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and his scandalous affair with the married Lady Caroline Lamb made him an interesting topic for everyone (Marchand 125). *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is where the Byronic hero is being formed and sculpted. Byron was sceptical about publishing the first two cantos because he thought them to reveal too much of himself (Eisler 287). Believed to be autobiographical to some extent, *Childe Harold's* voyages absolutely draw upon Byron's own Grand tour and his own experiences. The definitive attraction readers felt and still feel today to the Byronic hero is the portrayal of a disillusioned personality within a foreign setting with beautiful imagery and passionate narration.

## **2.1. Byronism.**

When the poet passed away at the age of thirty six he became a cult phenomenon. His fame and scandalous life took on a posthumous life of its own where Byron himself became mythologized. Since then people have looked upon the poet as an idol-; he became a martyr and a revolutionary struggling with his aristocracy and admired for his aesthetic nature (Eisler 752). Although the poet himself has fallen in the shadow of his own mythologized literary persona his successors and contemporaries studied his art profusely. *The Literary Encyclopedia* defines Byronism as a lifestyle, a set of traits characterising Byron's texts or his hero. Byronism is believed to have changed the relationship between author, text and reader. Byron's poetic subjectivity is purposely



created to be in effect with his own adversity and obsessions (Schneider). Byronism became popular even when Byron was still living. The best example of this is Polidori's novella *The Vampyre*, where the main character is inspired by Byron himself and some of his works. Polidori was Lord Byron's personal physician and accompanied him on his travels in Europe from 1816 to 1819. At the time the novella was attributed to be Byron's work but the poet denied it profusely and Polidori did so as well. Polidori's *Vampyre* is one of the first books using Byron's hero coined from Byron's influence (Marchand 232-243). Many other authors have listed Lord Byron as their influence and Byron's effect can be seen in many characters in both film and fiction up till today.

### **3. The Byronic hero - origins.**

To explore the Byronic hero is to uncover its origins, context and development. Researching the character can't be done without finding out its predecessors and their effects on Lord Byron and his hero. The romantic hero types include Cain, Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Prometheus, who are categorized by Peter L. Thorslev Jr. as the "Noble Outlaws" (66). These characters are solitaires and rebellious, first they rebel against society and then nature or God himself. Their solitary existence is because of nature or by moral choice. Cain murders his brother out of anger and jealousy, and his punishment is eternal wandering on earth and penance (Thorslev 93). Cain could not confess to his crime and was transformed and romanticised in the Middle-Ages gaining compassion with his famous reply "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Thorslev 107). Prometheus stole fire from Zeus and gave it to mankind, as a Titan he is a hero and a saviour of man. Zeus's wrath condemned him to eternal punishment. Prometheus is an individualist, a rebel and Greek, all three things Byron was fascinated by and undoubtedly influenced his character creation (Thorslev 109-113). Prometheus was the first to defy authority, Zeus himself and is therefore a prototype of the Byronic hero. He also shares Cain's fate, being doomed to eternal punishment. Zeus chained him to a stone and had an eagle eat his liver every day only to have it grow back and eaten again the next day. When Zeus asks Prometheus to tell him how of a prophecy that concerns Zeus being dethroned and in return for his answer Prometheus will be unchained, he refuses. Prometheus defies the paramount god and succeeds; that is the Byronic trait of

the Greek legend. Byron's fascination with Cain and Prometheus is no secret, he wrote poems on each of them that display their appeal to him.

### 3.1 The wandering, guilt ridden Byronic hero.

In Byron's work *Manfred* and *The Giour* the characters feel they have sinned without any hope of redemption. They are cursed with immense regret for their crimes but also because of their lack of a home, a fixed balanced where they feel at ease (Lutz 50). Lutz believes that the travelling side of the Byronic hero is due to his lack of love and home. His travels are provoked by the need of love, and a homestead (Lutz 50). Childe Harold is depicted as a young man who is prematurely satisfied by sin and wanders around as an attempt to escape his own society and memories. Conrad however, of *The Corsair*, has become darker and isolated, his inner conflict and history is more complex. He is a pirate that wanders the seas in exile without a home. They are all wanderers, guilt ridden without a stable place to call their home. They have nowhere to feel at ease so they are constantly travelling, trying to find peace and some release along with freedom from their guilt. Both Manfred and Childe Harold consider themselves cursed. Manfred feels that his unnamed crime concerning Astarte has cursed him to a life without human contact, so he wanders alone in the mountains seeking oblivion by summoning up seven spirits to help him, *Manfred* act 1, scene 1:

The burning wreck of a demolish'd world,  
A wandering hell in the eternal space;  
By the strong curse which is upon my soul,  
The thought which is within me and around me,  
I do compel ye to my will- Appear! (Byron 390)

Childe Harold escapes to Europe because he is sickened by his aristocratic life and he has something to hide as the reader notices in the first canto, verse VIII:

Yet often 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 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 mote be, which he could not control. (Byron 181)

All these three Byronic heroes, Manfred, Childe Harold and Conrad the corsair are wanderers. They are fleeing something that haunts them, whether it be grief or justice. Count Lara, from *Lara*, is also a wanderer. He spends years travelling while leaving his estates in the hands of his servants. Upon his return to his ancestral home the gloomy and haunted Count Lara brings secrets with him the reader never discovers. He returns home with the burden of guilt after years of wandering.

Byron's wandering hero is a popular character and several other authors throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have used Byron's wandering guilt ridden hero as a model for their characters. In Anne Rice's book *The Vampire Chronicles*, the character Louis de Pointe du Lac is a wandering Byronic hero. Louis became a vampire after long period of self-destructive behaviour. His brother died after a terrible argument with Louis and Louis blamed himself for his death. Lestat, a vampire looking for companionship, turns him into a vampire and after the transformation Louis challenges all that he has become (Stein 80-81). "Am I damned? Am I from the devil? Is my very nature that of the devil? What have I become in becoming a vampire? Where am I to go?" (Rice 73). After his transformation Louis has no home, a fixed place to call his home. After a brief period where he formed a family

with Lestat and Claudia, a young girl Lestat bit and transformed, Louis and Claudia rebel against Lestat and try to murder him. They both flee but are captured by other vampires and meant to die for their crime against Lestat. Claudia is killed by them but Louis escapes death with Lestat begging for his life. After avenging Claudia Louis wanders restlessly trying to forget his past and crimes. In Louis's mind it is not only his vampiric life that haunts him but also his human one, the death of Claudia and his brother and his all-consuming guilt over it. Louis is a Byronic hero that is guilt ridden and beautiful but damned. He is over-sensitive, passionate and super-human. His guilt over a past crime consumes him so he wanders around the world looking for distraction and redemption.

Another popular modern day Byronic hero is Edward Cullen from Stephanie Meyer's books: *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse* and *Breaking Dawn*. He is a romanticized character but widely popular in contemporary culture. Edward is a vampire, beautiful and damned in his own opinion. Edward has a lot of traits of the Byronic hero. He is charming, graceful, beautiful and intelligent, also he believes himself to be damned because he thinks he has no soul. Edward feels he is cursed to be a vampire, it is not a life he would have chosen for himself. Edward has superhuman qualities, he can run impossibly fast and is incredibly strong as the reader notes when he saves Bella from a car spun out of control (*Twilight* 48) so he is in fact superior to ordinary people. Edward is a loner and only associates with his family and later on Bella Swan. He keeps people at a distance as is evident when Jessica answers Bella's inquiry about him: "He's gorgeous, of course, but don't waste your time. He doesn't date. Apparently none of the girls here are good-looking enough for him" (*Twilight* 19). Edward meets Isabella Swan as she moves into the small town Forks to live with her father, the chief of police Charlie Swan. From the moment they meet their lives and fate are intertwined. Edward warns Bella that he is dangerous and that she would be better off not knowing him (*Twilight* 72). Edward's appeal lies in his flaws and his moral struggle of his utter devotion to Bella and his desire to consume her. Edward was turned into a vampire as he was dying from the Spanish influenza in 1918 where Carlisle, his father for all intents and purposes, turned him (*Twilight* 298). In *Twilight* Edward himself explains to Bella that he had rebellious teenage years and after being able to curb his appetite for human blood he began only hunting the evil and passing over the innocent (*Twilight*

299). “But as time went on, I began to see the monster in my eyes. I couldn’t escape the debt of so much human life taken, no matter how justified.” (*Twilight* 299) Edward’s past is haunted by his own crimes and he admits that. In Meyer second novel *New Moon* Bella gets a paper cut during her birthday party which causes Edward’s vampire adopted brother, Jasper, to lose control of his bloodthirst and attack Bella (*New Moon* 26). This incident causes Edward to rethink his relationship with Bella and ultimately decides to leave Forks, where they live. His guilt over putting her in danger and the fact that he himself is a danger to her wellbeing overwhelms him so he leaves. Edward then becomes the guilt ridden wandering Byronic hero. He travels alone for months looking for distractions but has a hard time finding anything that takes his mind of Bella. Edward also feels regret and anger for being a vampire. He knows that his animalistic side puts Bella in danger: “My very existence puts you at risk. Sometimes I truly hate myself. I should be stronger” (*Twilight* 366). Edward’s tortured soul makes him very modern but also romanticizes him in a Victorian way making him a perfect gentleman. His century old soul stuck in a body of a seventeen year old makes any romantic swoon (Cochran 7). Edward is a contemporary Byronic hero but he is also born in the early twentieth century and therefore is a gentleman with values that speak of his time.

Edward’s Byronic qualities are numerous. He is tortured by his past crimes as a vampire and because of his moral struggle over his love for Bella and his animalistic craving for her blood. He is smart, handsome, moody, dangerous, charismatic and seductive. He believes himself to be a cursed soulless monster but at the same time challenges his very instincts to be with Bella. Edward is one of the more complicated Byronic heroes because he is made up of so many that came before him. Also it is interesting how Meyer intertwines the nineteenth century Byronic hero with a contemporary one. Edward is modern in so many ways but has still has his origins and so much of his persona in the start of the twentieth century. *The Twilight Saga* is the latest articulation of the Byronic hero, a well constructed character fitting the legacy of the Byronic hero well.

### 3.2 The Satanic side of the Byronic hero.

The Satanic aspect of the Byronic Hero is found in every one of Byron's original heroes. They are those whose titanic ambition and outcast state make them important to individualism, revolution and for the relationship of the author to society. The fallen archangel Satan, as depicted in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Napoleon Bonaparte, the self appointed Emperor of the French and Europe's "greatest man" are the men that inspired Byron's to create his egotistical hero with their flawed grandeur and desire for power. A satanic hero is a villain-hero whose immoral deeds and justifications of them make him a more interesting character than the monotonous good hero. The satanic hero is inherently selfish and only thinks of himself. His actions have little or no consequences for him and he does not concern himself with the effect they have on others.

Outside the laws of society Byron's hero has been cast in a group which includes Lucifer and Cain perhaps making him forever damned. This damnation is an reoccurring theme in modern types of the Byronic hero as well as in the works of Byron himself. The Byronic hero is in most ways the incarnation of worldly male sexuality, fierce, powerful, experienced, simultaneously brutal and seductive, devilish enough to overwhelm the body and yet enough of a fallen angel to charm the soul (Gilbert and Gubar 206). *The Norton Anthology* states that Byron's personal myth making are made up of Milton's Satan with his rebellious nature and pride. Also the *Anthology* states that one of Byron's personal heroes was Napoleon Bonaparte. Napoleon with his inspiring grandeur and power fascinated Lord Byron. He wrote a poem "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte" and in that particular work he contrasts Napoleon's fall with that of Milton's angel- Satan. Milton's Satan is romanticised and transformed in Byron's romantic era, making his sins more forgivable and sympathetic. His defiance, self-reliance and love of individual freedom are clear in the Byronic hero (Thorslev 109-112). Milton's Satan stands up against the tyrannical God, making his rebellion with his followers against the loyal angels. The son of God singlehandedly defeats Satan's legions and banishes them from heaven. Satan stands up the ultimate authority and loses, but still manages to get his revenge by successfully tempting Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge (Milton). Milton's Satan has Byronic qualities as distaste for rank

and privilege and defying authority. His appeal is his restless energy, his unfaltering belief in his abilities and his cunning and brilliant mind.

In Byron's own work, he describes the satanic side of his characters with masterfully. In the *Lara* , stanza XVIII, Count Lara is described:

There was in him a vital scorn of all:

As if the worst had fall'n which could befall,

He stood a stranger in this breathing world,

An erring spirit from another hurl'd;

A thing of dark imaginings, that shaped

By choice the perils he by chance escaped. (Byron 307)

Here Count Lara is described as a satanic figure, a stranger in the human world. All of Byron's heroes have a satanic side to them. The main characters in *The Corsair* and *The Giaour* are actual criminals, committing murder and stealing. The *giaour* is described in lines 912-914 as such:

If ever an angel bore,

the form of any mortal, such he wore;

By all my hope of sins forgiven,

Such looks are not of earth nor heaven. (Byron 260)

Here the *giaour* is described as satanic, not only his nature but also his physical appearance. Byron made a point of making his characters invoke fear and awe in his readers, he wanted them to be mysterious and dangerous. Byron's heroes are immense and god-like, wrestling desperately with a cruel world of man but torn more deeply by an unnamed inner guilt that causes the heroes more resentment than even the world does. The Byronic hero has indeed many dark, satanic qualities. With his intellectual capacity and self-respect the Byronic hero is larger than life. He also has emotional capacities, which are superior to the average man. These heightened abilities force the

Byronic hero to be arrogant, confident, abnormally sensitive, and extremely conscious of himself (Thorslev 187).

Gilbert and Gubar mention in their book *The Madwoman in the Attic* that Satan, as a prototypical Byronic hero is present in the novel *Wuthering Heights*. This conclusion rises from the character of Heathcliff, as a demonic lover and a force of nature (Gilbert and Gubar 253). Heathcliff's story is of a man victimized by society and social rank. He returns to get his revenge using the same institutions that originally failed him (Stein 44). Heathcliff embodies the ferocity, satan- and animalism of the Byronic hero. Heathcliff is brought into the Earnshaw home as an orphan and his past is never made clear, a part of his mystery. Catherine Earnshaw deserts Heathcliff with her choice to marry Edgar Linton after they have fallen in love with each other and therefore toyed with his emotions. Heathcliff is also bullied by Hindley Earnshaw, Catherine's brother as he feels Heathcliff is his competition in the running for their Mr. Earnshaw's affections.

Emily Brontë intentionally makes Heathcliff both attractive and horrifying (Stein 4). As Byron himself did, Brontë makes her character enticing by portraying him as a powerful individual that defies authority and forges his own path but still warns the reader that this character is neither a good role model nor a leader (Stein 13). Independent, egotistical and strong, Heathcliff's personality is as raw as his nature echoing Milton's Satan. When Heathcliff returns to *Wuthering Heights* he is described as satanic and animal like, his thirst for revenge has taken over. He knows that the only way to succeed in his vengeance is to play by the rules of the landed gentry and manipulate people, to conquer the society that defeated him by its own rules. He plays mind games and tricks on people, even innocent descendants of those he feels betrayed him. He hurts them on a personal level as well as taking their belongings. Stein feels that Heathcliff as a satanic Byronic hero has been transformed into an avenging angel who achieves justice by violence (Stein 45)

Heathcliff's rebellion against the aristocratic society and his unique bond with Catherine makes the reader sympathize with him because of his single mindedness in love but his apparent violence, self absorption and ruthlessness towards his victims reminds the audience that he dangerous. His treatment of Isabella, his wife, is horrifying. Isabella



longed for an escape from her sheltered existence and saw an opportunity for a romantic hero in Heathcliff only to have her dream shattered by his masochism. Eventually she flees his satanic cruelty. Upon Heathcliff's return to Wuthering Heights he has transformed himself from the wild boy of nature to a handsome young man with a fortune. When he lures Isabella Linton into marrying him his transformed soulless life begins (Gilbert and Gubar 297). Heathcliff's mysterious origin, vindictive behaviour and dark complexion makes those around him wonder if he is a demon, rather than a human being (Stein 41).

The reader can sympathize with Heathcliff and his heartbreaking loss. An orphan brought into a strange house, he was bullied by a foster brother all through his childhood, then falling in love with Catherine and losing her to another man and then death. Heathcliff represents the cruelty and vengefulness in man and he is brooding, passionate and lonely all at once. These traits make him romantic but his satanic side remind the audience that he is dangerous. Heathcliff is a satanic hero, Gilbert and Gubar refer to him as a ferocious natural force and state that Heathcliff's fall echoes Milton's Satan (Gilbert and Gubar 253). His aim in the latter part of the novel is to wreak the revenge of nature upon culture, Heathcliff being a force of nature ready to destroy the aristocratic society that wronged him. The reader finally sees his Byronic qualities for the first time, he proves himself to be sly, brooding, cunning, manipulative and he adapts quickly to his changed social rank and circumstances. We know that he has a troubled past and that he is jaded from Catherine's betrayal. He is implacable in his revenge yet still capable of deep affection. Brontë deliberately cuts him off before he can fully carry out his revenge, in a way rehumanizing him before he passes away.

*Wuthering Heights* is according to Gilbert and Gubar an elaborate gloss on Byronic Romanticism and is written from a female perspective (258). Heathcliff's invocations of Catherine are clearly echoing Manfred's speech to Astarte as well as we find an echo in Heathcliff's rejection from the landed gentry society and Conrad's rejection from society in Byron's *The Corsair*.

#### 4. The Byronic hero- traits and development in Byron.

The Byronic hero appears in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-18), *The Giaour* (1813), *The Corsair* (1814), *Lara* (1814) and his play *Manfred* (1816). Childe Harold is the prototype of the Byronic hero and the character grew with Byron himself. The Byronic hero is a world weary sophisticated traveller and it is Childe Harold's voyages that make him an expert of and capable to act as a critic of human nature.

He is a self-destructive role-player, whose pale aristocratic features mask a mysterious inner life. His energy is largely internalized, as the external world-excepting perhaps- the female sex-seems to offer little for which he cares, little in fact interests him as much as the theatre of his own ego. (John 171).

The first two cantos appear to be adolescent in nature whereas in the second two, written much later, Lord Byron himself and his persona Childe Harold have grown more mature and in the fourth canto the distinction between Byron himself and his literary persona Childe Harold becomes blurred (Thorslev 130). Introduced as a somewhat satanic hero, Childe Harold is a young nobleman on a voyage of the Middle-East and Europe. He is an arrogant man and believes himself to be superior to everyone, even finding it hard to coexist with other people as it reads in canto 3, verse 12; "Proud though in desolation; which could find/ A life within itself, to breathe without mankind." This declaration makes the reader sympathize with Childe Harold because of his isolation even if it came about because of his pride and arrogance. Childe Harold is world weary. He makes immoral decisions and engages in debauchery and drunkenness on his travels in his search for distraction. In the latter part of the poem, cantos 3 and 4, Childe Harold has grown up, becoming more emotionally and intellectually complex as Lord Byron himself gained more life experience.

The Byronic hero is a complex character and is made up of many traits and flaws. The character is charming, seductive, narcissist, perceptive, mysterious, handsome, adaptive, cunning, intelligent, socially dominant, moody and disrespectful of hierarchy and social institutions, even society. All these traits come from Byron's original characters. Childe Harold, Count Lara, Conrad, the giaour and Manfred all have in common their distaste for society, they are smart, cunning and perceptive. These

characters all have a narcissistic side to them because they have been outlawed or are in self-imposed exile. The Byronic hero as a wanderer has no homeland and searching in passionate torment he longs to be placed within a context that fits (Lutz 49). The Byronic hero is always damned in some way, mostly the voyages the hero takes on means that he has no fixed home, no stable fixed place in the world where he feels at home.

The redemption for the Byronic hero is most commonly a lover. In the *Corsair* there is Medora who is betrothed to Conrad. Conrad is a pirate that is an outlaw that has been rejected by the society he loathes as it reads in *The Corsair*, canto 1, lines XI:

He knew himself a villain- but he deem'd  
The rest no better than the thing he seem'd;  
And scorn'd the best as hypocrites who hid  
Those deeds the bolder spirits plainly did.  
He knew himself detested, but he knew  
The hearts that loath'd him, crouch'd and dreaded too. (Byron 281)

Conrad roams the seas looking for adventure, for he has no home but the sea. Conrad is willing to risk everything, including Medora to save Gulnare from a Turkish harem. Conrad is however love struck by Gulnare yet repelled by her actions. Gulnare kills Pasha Seyd, the harem owner, in order to save Conrad and herself and escape the harem. This is an act the chivalrous Conrad cannot commit. At the end of the poem Conrad returns to Medora, hoping for her forgiveness and redemption only to find her dead and himself alone. In *Manfred* the woman in question is Astarte. Manfred's is guilt ridden because of an unnamed crime which has to do with his beloved Astarte. Manfred has a fixed, stable home, he is not a wanderer although he wanders in his search for redemption. Manfred seeks the help of seven spirits to make forget the past and his crime and in his search for salvation from his own guilt he rejects all authoritative powers, good or evil, supernatural or natural. He finally finds peace in his death and

freedom from his guilt. Manfred's redemption seems to lie in his death and also being reunited with Astarte in death. *The Giaour* tells the story of a vengeful lover. The giaour and Leila, who is a concubine in Hassan's harem, are in love. Hassan after having drowned Leila is killed by the giaour, who in his despair enters a monastery to repent and find salvation. Leila is the catalyst in the poem and the giaour's cause for redemption. Before he passes away in the monastery he sees her in a dream, knowing he will be reunited with her in death (Byron 263). In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* there is an unspecified woman that Childe Harold recalls in the third canto, whom Childe Harold still loves despite his distaste for other people, someone he clearly is fond of even though he grew weary of his aristocratic existence (Lutz 51). This woman for Childe Harold is someone that makes his mind wander home, to his fixed home. This woman might be his only reason to return. In *Lara* there seems to be a continuation of the work Byron did when writing the *Corsair*. Count Lara returns to his homeland after his oriental travels only to be drawn into a war between his followers and his enemies resulting in his own death on the battlefield. Count Lara is the exception when it comes to women being a form of redemption. Count Lara's redemption is not a woman but there seems to be a redemptive figure nonetheless. That is a young male slave that refuses to leave his master, Count Lara, even after his death putting his own life in danger. In *The Giaour* and *The Corsair* the hero is a criminal, an outlaw not only in self exile but whom also actively works against society, Conrad in *The Corsair* as a murderous pirate and the giaour as a vengeful lover committing murder.

The Byronic hero is thought to be beautiful but damned. The mysterious danger of a Byronic hero is his handsomeness and that he has a deep dark secret. The Byronic traits are numerous and can be found in each character. He is passionate as we can see in how the giaour revenges Leila's murder and it reads in *The Giaour* lines 1131-34: "Yes, Love indeed is light from heaven; A spark of that immortal fire with angels shared by Alla give, To lift from earth our low desire" (Byron 262). Also the passion can be seen in Count Lara's fight for his lands and his men. The character is self-destructive and arrogant for he believes that he is superior to mankind as we can see in Conrad's view of society and other men in lines 264-70 in canto 1 in *The Corsair* (Byron 281). All except Count Lara have the trait of lacking respect for rank, class and privilege even though the character possesses both. Childe Harold flees his aristocratic

life because of boredom, Conrad is a pirate leader that has men and gold and Manfred lives in a castle. The giaour has disrespect for rank and privilege because he murdered Hassan, the harem owner. Information about the social status of the giaour is somewhat lacking but reading the poem the reader gets the feeling that he is underprivileged. Byron's heroes are self-critical, they believe themselves to be better than others and tolerate flaws in others but not in themselves. Most of Byron's heroes are in fact privileged but have exiled themselves from the aristocratic society because of a crime or simply their distaste for it, even though it is their background. They are generally sophisticated but emotionally conflicted, most likely because of the past and the burden of their crimes or wrongdoings. The Byronic hero is in self-imposed exile or even an outlaw as Conrad in Byron's *The Corsair* thus making him a loner. With his destructive passion and selfish brooding along with persistent loneliness of a wanderer the Byronic hero makes it easy for everyone to see a part of themselves in the flawed character. An unnamed crime or a haunting past is a burden on the heroes of Byron. This often is a catalyst in their wandering ways and their motivation for redemption/salvation. The Byronic hero sprung out of romanticism but is a very gothic literary figure. Gothic literature was seen as a side genre to Romanticism that Byron himself prominently advocated.

## **5. The Byronic hero lives on.**

The Byronic hero appears again and again in contemporary culture and has been a widely popular subject ever since Byronism became popular in the afterglow of the poet's death. The character has been used so often and diversely that we feel it is familiar. The rebellious nature and defiance of the character is what makes it so interesting. The Byronic hero is an outlaw and an outsider that defines his own moral code and defies authority. His egotistical sense of his own superiority strengthens his independence and self-sufficiency. He lacks the ability to relate to others and a good example of these qualities can be seen in James Cameron's character *The Terminator*. The Byronic hero is a loner and thus he is often moody or even displays angst, this is how Anne Rice's vampire Lestat behaves frequently. These qualities in addition to his self-absorbent behaviour are exactly what make the Byronic hero so popular in his own

time and in contemporary culture. People today are well aware of their helplessness when it comes to institutionalised authority and are aware of the power of money. The Byronic hero defies that authority and succeeds, even if only momentarily, and exactly that is the character's appeal (Stein 10). The defiance in not abiding to society's laws and norms are what makes the reader flip through the pages of Byron's work and the reason why his character, the Byronic hero, has been so abundantly popular. There is however a difference between the Byronic hero in the nineteenth century and the contemporary Byronic hero. The former was prone to spectacular violence to release tension that left the audience satisfied. The latter however is more likely to be a successful leader in battle against oppression (Stein 10). Manfred is a prime example of the nineteenth century version of the Byronic hero, a fully formed version of the character Manfred repeatedly defies authority figures and supernatural beings. He is alone in exile, more powerful than other men yet he is cursed with that power. Manfred has two significant victories against his oppressors, the first when he refuses to kneel to Arimanes (Byron 399) and the second when he dies on his own terms whilst denying the last spirit his claim on his soul (Byron 405-406). Manfred is described as egotistical and a self-tormentor that seeks redemption from his own self-consciousness that constantly reminds him of his crime. Manfred's crime is never in the foreground of the drama as the focus is on his burden of guilt, remorse and despair. Manfred is not interested in the outside world as he is a victim of fate that never resolves his inner conflict. Manfred's search for redemption for his guilt and his defiance to authoritative forces are what intrigues the reader. He wants to forget his past and seeks oblivion for himself. His remorse over a crime involving his beloved Astarte which is weighing so deeply on him he feels his only way out is death. Manfred is the fully formed 19<sup>th</sup> century version of the Byronic hero, self-absorbed and egotistical he paved the way for contemporary Byronic heroes.

After centuries of the traditional "expected" hero people got bored, they wanted more than the good hero in white clothes with blonde hair and blue eyes and the antihero in dark colours. This called for a new kind of hero, one that was not perfect in every way-someone life like. Out of this boredom of the traditional hero sprung the Byronic hero (Rose-Carpenter). Stein argues that the character has become so popular and pervasive in contemporary culture that if one starts to realise the parameter of his

type the examples seem endless. They range from western heroes, to science fiction heroes to the action-adventure hero and all seem to be descendants of Manfred (Stein 1). The hero is an antisocial and isolated outlaw but on the other hand an autocratic and a powerful leader. Byron's hero was designed to appeal to his audience and his writings were intentionally aimed at female readers. At the time the only escape into fantasy for women was literature and Byron's emotional manipulation and his use of passion and wildness to communicate an image of desire that was irresistible to women. This is still an appeal in contemporary culture, the Byronic hero is usually a handsome, mysterious and charming man but he has a dark secret, something about him makes draws the reader to the character although he is dangerous. The Byronic hero can take all shapes and forms. Stein makes a point of showing how the Terminator is Byronic, from *The Terminator* a film released in 1984,(36) and also how Lestat from Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*, published in 1976, is Byronic (87-88). In Stein's opinion the erotic glamour and superhuman power are the appeal of vampires. Lestat is resourceful and adaptive in a new technological age and feels that his immortality and heightened senses make him superior to human life. He creates his own justice outside the laws and proves his independence by rebelling against the rules by which vampires live. Lestat also sees himself as an outcast which is one of the main traits of the Byronic hero (Stein 87-98). Stein states that the Terminator's superhuman abilities, defiance of authority and independence provoke awe and admiration in the audience. However his human aspirations remind the audience that he is a role model not to be imitated (Stein 36). The Terminator embodies the fantasy of a superior father figure protecting the innocent and wreaking havoc on the guilty. He reflects the utter disbelief in law enforcement and in the justice system to work correctly. However in Stein's opinion *Star Trek's* Q is the most explicit reincarnation of the Byronic hero. Q is a character from the television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* which aired from 1987 until 1994. Q has superhuman abilities, he can transport himself throughout the universe, manipulate space and time and he has god-like powers to create or alter environments. Q is also world weary, bored and cynical and believes himself to be superior to human beings but still cannot refrain from meddling in their affairs for his own stimulation (Stein 135-36).

## 6. Conclusion.

The appeal of the Byronic hero are its flaws, the flaws everyone can relate to in some aspect and will empathize with. Defying authority and paving your own way has always been very appealing and that appeal has not dwindled in modern times. Byron made his hero to be a something people desired, a cocky handsome bad-boy searching for forgiveness for his past mistakes. The Byronic hero seldom can fulfil his desires or needs in full, he is more likely to be consumed or even destroyed by his own passions. Byron's character grew with him as an author and eventually Manfred rose as the fully rounded Byronic hero. The growth that occurred between the first cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and the later *Oriental Tales* and *Manfred* show Byron's maturity and his personal growth in his characters. Byron's personal tragedies and love affairs all echo into his work, making them gloomy and highly emotional. The complexity of the Byronic hero is something that has evolved with time as well, with its growing popularity in contemporary culture the Byronic hero has become a synonym for a charming good-looking bad boy, the thrill and excitement of liking him is the fact that he is bad for us but we fall for him anyway like James Dean in *A rebel without a cause*. Although the Byronic hero is attributed to Lord Byron and undoubtedly popularized by him, his character was based on the Greek myths, the narration from Genesis and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Up until today the Byronic hero still appeals mainly to female audiences as well as it did in Byron's own time. Byron was known for his scandalous affairs in his lifetime so his reputation as a romantic and a seducer has become one with the Byronic hero. Both Catherine Earnshaw and Bella Swan are not able to resist the charm and mystery of their male Byronic heroes, and in both cases it ends their lives respectively.

The Byronic hero as a leader of the underprivileged, will with defiance for oppressive authority assert the individual freedom. In modern times the Byronic hero has also come to symbolize the power of the middle class. The utter disrespect for hierarchy and social institutions is an important subject in today's imbalance of wealth and classes. Milton's Satan influenced Byron to include this trait in his character and undoubtedly it has made the character what it is today.



The Byronic hero has been popular ever since the first published copy of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The popularity of Byron is not only because of his poetry but also because of his protagonists. All the before mentioned works depend primarily on the protagonists rather than plot or verse for their effect (Thorslev 147). After Lord Byron's death in 1824 his legacy further popularized the hero making it a phenomenon in the literary world. It has survived centuries and has been modified and elaborated by many authors since Byron standing its ground as a more intriguing character than the one dimensional good hero.

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