CHAPTER - IV

BYRON'S ACHIEVEMENT
We have tried to trace the development of Byron's poetic genius and attempted an estimate of his narrative art and poems. Now it remains to be seen what Byron achieved by all this. Was he simply a stunt man who wanted to be different just for the sake of it or did his narratives carry such conviction that they convinced others of his views on liberty and social values? Of literary works it is very difficult to arrive at a definite conclusion and Byron, because he deviated from his age, became one of the most controversial poets of all times.

On the personal plane Byron and his society were out of joint, and on the poetic plane Byron was almost a pariah in the holy temple of English Romanticism. The society could not swallow his unconventional views on morality, religion, philosophy and politics and outlawed him and he in turn found its hypocrisy and pretensions intolerable and detestable and turned his back upon it. His extrovert temperament, his realistic approach to life, his practical bent of mind, his regard for the common man and the common reader, his lack of faith in poetic inspiration and imagination, his eye for the falsehood under the veneer, made it impossible for him to work it out in the manner of his fellow Romantics. His own age failed to understand him in his totality and the critics sat on the fence being baffled by his bawdiness and his genius. In
the Victorian era he fell completely into disrepute, it was the heyday of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats.

Because he deals with real life so we see our own image in it and respond to it at once. The image, however, is not always pleasing - but then, the truth about our own self is not always pleasing, hence the controversy. Shelley believed that the poet is the strongest force for the moral rehabilitation of man and poetry is his weapon. Byron believed in no such visionary idealism nor did he believe in the reformative power of poetry, "Who was ever altered by a poem?"\(^1\) Appreciating this realism in Byron, Wilson Knight says, "He is poetry incarnate. The others are dreamers; he is the thing itself."\(^2\) And Shelley himself admitted the universality of Byron's poetic appeal, "He touched the chord to which a million heart responded, and the coarse music which he produced to please them, disciplined him to the perfection he now approaches (in D.J.)"\(^3\).

If literature has any purpose then it is to expose and to entertain. In other words it should reflect the world in a pleasing manner. It is, however, the art of commu-

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nication that makes a work interesting and pleasing, however unpleasant the exposition may be. "The first concern of any writer is to entertain, to make his works interesting". And the great artist is the one who, in his exposition, does not confine his circle but widens and expands it.

Byron meets the above conditions squarely. He exposed his society and his time, he pleased his readers inspite of his so called irreverence and wrote in such language and style that it reached the common readers. "The end of all scribblenent is to amuse", he wrote to Hodgson and he stuck to this aim without of course making any compromise with the principle of his life. "My great comfort is, that the temporary celebrity I have wrung from the world has been in the very teeth of all opinions and prejudices. I have flattered no ruling powers; I have never concealed a single thought that tempted me. They can't say I have truckled to the times, nor to popular topics". He made his narrative poems the vehicle of this uncompromising attitude to all outdated values which were held to be sacrosanct for ages.

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6. Ibid. P - 96.
He said, "I write only for the reader, and care for nothing but the 'silent' approbation of those who close one's book with good humour and quiet contentment". No poet of his time, except Wordsworth, was so much concerned for the reader as Byron was. But there is no humour in Wordsworth and he seems to be pleased to content himself rather than his readers. A dying girl once wrote to Byron that she could not die without thanking him for the pleasure that his poems had been giving her for the last few years. And Byron wrote, "These are things which make one at times believe one's self a poet". He did not write poetry only to please himself or to express his ego, "I have never thought very highly of poetry nor of poets 'merely as poets' - and my becoming one - if indeed I am so - is the result of temporary solitude and accident". He revived the narrative tradition and gave it his own character. He made it a potent instrument of expression for his passionate feelings that came in moments of solitude; it was an 'accident' that he could not help. He once planned to start a newspaper in collaboration with Moore and he made his purpose clear in his letter, "I

doubt not that we could distance the commonplace blackguards who have so long disgraced commonsense and the common reader. Significantly he wanted to name it Tenda Rossa, an allusion to the delicate hint of Tamerlane to his enemies by a Tenda (Tent) of red colour, before he gave battle.

The very style and manner of writing poetry in Byron's time made it difficult for the common reader to reach them, the themes and subject matters were beyond the common understanding. Hence Byron chooses the subject matters of his narratives which are intelligible to all and in his mature works he deliberately chooses the diction of prose, conversational and colloquial English, even slang, to crash through the cant of the romantic glitter, "in force of diction, and inextinguishable energy of sentiment, he clearly surpasses them all, 'words that breathe and thoughts that burn' are not merely the ornaments but the common staple of his poetry. ... ... he is of all living writers the most concise and condensed and would fain hope may go far, by his example to redeem the great reproach of our modern literature - its intolerable prolixity and redundance", wrote Jeffery in Edinburg Review in February, 1817. His sentences are cut and dried,

straight and point blank, and he uses a language and style as if he might be talking from the next room. His narratives also show his delight in the ways of the world even when the ways are repulsive to his taste which are softened by his wit and humour, "I am if anything too childish with a greater turn for the ridiculous than anything serious". This natural ability to look at a thing from an absurd angle makes his poems so entertaining,

"Whereas, if one sole-lady pleased for ever
How pleasant for the heart, as well as liver".

(0.J./2/213).

Byron as a man of the world knew that man as an animal has not altered much through the years of his civilization. What has been given to him is a veneer which he hated. He never cared about and, completely ignored, the charges of immorality and irreverence in his works and so in his narratives he set out to tell the world what men really were and not what they were supposed to be. Jeffery complained, - "he has exerted all the powers of his powerful mind to convince his readers, both directly and indirectly, that all ennobling pursuits and disinterested virtues, are mere deceits or illusions - hollow and despicable mockeries for the most part and at best, but

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laborious follies. 13 This was an unfortunate misunderstanding. Byron never attacked the really disinterested virtues, he attacked only the motivated ones; not the really ennobling pursuits, but the pursuits which are at bottom selfish. When he deflates Love, Patriotism, devotion, Constancy, Religion etc. he does not really attack their true intrinsic virtues but their hypocritical manifestations; he attacks the show not the thing itself. Being a man who never hid anything, even his own dissipation, from any one, he hated with all the strength of his being all pretensions and hollow shams of man and his society. He did not spare even himself and much of what he wrote about others may appear to be a kind of self criticism. He knew with the insight of a seer that the pillars on which the society stood were worm-eaten and hollowed out by artificiality and he hit it to bring it down with a crash. 'Irreverence' and 'Immorality' are the weapons of his narrative satire to shock the society out of its etherized sleep and to remove the blinkers of illusion.

The enigmatic, chimerical and contradictory nature of Byron's personality was a baffling problem for the critics to solve. Hardly any one tried to gauze the depth

of his divided personality and take a dispassionate view. They passed judgements which are just as varied and contradictory as the poet himself. There might be some element of truth in all of them but never it is the whole truth. Bertrand Russell contends that the fuel that fed the aristocratic rebellion of Byron was his desire for self-assertion; 14 Gilbert Height seeks the cause for the extraordinary variations in his outlook and his personality in his starvation diet; 15 Guy Steffen says of Don Juan, a great poem of extraordinary sharpness and force. 16 While T.S. Eliot observes, "of Byron one can say, as of no other English poet of his eminence, that he added nothing to the language, that he discovered nothing in the sounds, and developed nothing in the meaning of individual words" 17 Wilson Knight quoting the scorpion imagery from 'The Giaour' says, "The rhetorical tension is maintained with a never failing grip. Each word is charged, each sentence tight"; 18 and again quoting from the same poem "See the choice placing of a well considered diction; also the peculiarly soft use of consonants". 19 George M.Ridenour speaks of Don Juan.

15. Ibid. P - 149.
16. Ibid. P - 96.
19. Ibid.
"the style of the poem itself presents a striking combination of the conversationally off-hand and the elaborately rhetorical", and again, "Lord Byron had a real genius for the handling of the rhythm".

These are modern judgements but if we go back in time we see that the scene does not change at all. Carlyle complained, "No genuine productive thought was ever revealed by him to mankind; indeed no clear undistorted vision into anything; but all had a certain falsehood a brawling, abstragd, insincere character". But Ruskin said, "Here at last I found a man who spoke only of what he had seen and known; and spoke without exaggeration, without mystery, without emmity and without mercy ... of all things within range of human thought, he felt the facts, and discerned the nature with accurate justice, "and again, "Byron wrote as easily as a hawk flies and as clearly as a lake reflects, the exact truth in the precisely narrowest terms". Bagehot thought him to be an entertainer, "Doubtless there is much in Byron besides his dismal exaggeration, which made the 'sensation', which gave him a wild moment of dangerous fame. As so often happens, the

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20. West. P. Ibid. P - 123.
21. Ibid. P - 125.
cause of his momentary fashion is the cause also of his lasting oblivion". In the maze of these varieties of opinions, bewilderingly contradictory, it becomes difficult for any one to arrive at the truth - but they at least show the elusive nature of the poet and his works.

His experience taught him that in this impermanent world where everything is dynamic and change is the law of nature, no artist can be consistent in his doctrine. This may appear to be a devil of a logic, but if the world is illogical what could he do? His objective sensibility made him realise the dynamism of world conditions, that everything in this world is subject to change, and as art is the reflection of life it should logically be varied in character. "Clearly Byron would not be satisfied with only two systems; he wants more, he sees the whirligig of taste, the fluctuations of fame. Everything passes, nothing matters finally, as everything will be engulfed by change".

The astonishing mobility of his temperament shocked the contemporary readers of Don Juan. One Mr. Francis Cohen complained to Murray, alleging that in life we are never 'Scorched' and 'Drenched' at the same time. "Blessings on his experience!" retorted Byron and supplied a long list

of assorted occasions when a man may expect to be simultaneously 'Scorched and Drenched'. "Did he never play at cricket or walk a mile in hot weather? Did he never spill a dish of tea over his testicles in handing a cup of tea to his charmer, to the great shame of his nankeen breeches? Did he never swim in the sea at noonday with the sun in his eyes and on his head, which all the foam of the ocean could not cool? Did he never draw his foot out of a tub of too hot water, damning his eyes and his valets? Did he never inject for Gonorrhea? or make water through an ulcerated urethra? Was he ever in a Turkish bath, the marble paradise of sherbet and sodomy?" The insistence on experience of facts, reference of art to real life, is characteristic of Byron. "Besides my Muse by no means deals in fiction./She gathers a repertory of facts". (D.J./XIV/13); "for I am cautious to a pitch/of nicety, where a fact is to be gained" (D.J./XVI/16) "and it is part of a true poet to escape from fiction/Whenever he can" (D.J./VIII/86). He feels certain that poetry is, and can be, a direct transcript of life, and that responses which one experiences in real life, have a claim to be given place in the realm of art. He never deviated from this conviction and hence his narratives are bright.

bright and illuminating examples of fact-based stories which are within the range of experience and imagination of all. His own opinion about the style and manner of his Don Juan also shows this conviction that the true foundation of poetry and art is experience. "As to Don Juan—confess—you dog—and be candid—that it is the sublime of 'that there' sort of writing—it may be bawdy—but is it not good English?—it may be profligate—but is it not 'life', is it not the 'thing'?—Could any man have written it—who has not lived in the world?—and toiled in a post-chaise? in a hackney coach? in a Gondola? against a wall? in a court carriage? in a vis-a-vis?—on a table?—and under it?" 27 This conviction seems to be carried to its logical extreme when we hear his opinion about painting, "I know nothing of painting—and that I detest it—unless it reminds me of something I have seen or think it possible to see". 28

Most of the criticisms of his works in his own time were on moral and religious grounds, and his unorthodox views of every extant values. His Cain raised the question of his Christian attitude, Childe Harold was charged with errors in taste and perversion of morality, the pungent shock tactics of The Vision of Judgement roused

their indignation, the personal and political satire in
Don Juan was accused of profligacy and cynical deflation
of all moral values. And yet almost all of them awarded
him the palm so far as his genius was concerned. It was
a criticism in which outrage and delight were evenly
fused and the balance could easily tip to one extreme or
to the other. And so in popularity he remained unfavoured.
During the 19th Century at least forty one translations
of one or more Cantos of Childe Harold appeared in not
less than ten different languages, and as many as thirty
four translations of Manfred in twelve different languages.
The Corsair sold 13000 copies on the first day of publica-
tion. And hence, "No matter how often Byron was consigned
to oblivion, the vitality of his - negligent, insolent,
moping, glowering, ribald, witty and flashy - continued
to defy the prophets". 29

The great enthusiasm with which Byron was received
outside England was no less due to the fascination of the
Byronic personality than of his works. His fast living,
his experiences, his varying moods, his out of the way
beliefs, his unconventional approach to all values, became
a byword in the continent and America. North American
Review wrote in January, 1832, "Minds that could not

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understand his beauties, could imitate his great and glaring defects. Souls that could not fathom his depth, could grasp the straw and bubbles that floated upon his agitated surface, until at length, every city, town and village, had its little Byron, its self tormenting scoffers at morality, its gloomy misanthropist in song. In the continent, however, something deeper was added to Byron's surface dazzle. He was acclaimed as a champion of Romanticism in its clash with Classicism. He became the source of inspiration of two generations of French Romantics and of many German Romantic poets. "In the eyes of the French admirers, Byron was less a human being, however remarkable, than a portent, the personification of natural forces. He became a symbol of revolt against the existing poetic cult and a beacon light for the new generation of European poets. They saw him not merely as a poet but an European figure of rebellion, a destroyer of conventions, a trail blazer.

Many a great head swam when the Byronic spell reached them. The Giaour astonished Alfred de Vigny and Lamartine was dazzled by it. The latter considered Child Harold to be the epic of the day. Hugo De Musset, Gautier and George Sand also responded to his magnetic influence.

Goethe and Heine in Germany and Leopardi in Italy thought greatly of Byron. Pushkin specifically learnt English to read Byron in the original and he alludes to the Lord often in Eugene Onegin. Lermontov's hero in A hero of our own times is cast in the mould of a Byronic hero. "The Romantic figure par excellence which was to become so potent an influence in literature of Western Europe. Pushkin, Lermontoff, Heine, Musset, Lamartine, Vigny, Hugo, Dumas, - almost every 19th Century writer of renown in prose and verse came at sometime under the Byronic spell." So, though the reactions were different, some went for his personality, some for his masculine vigour, some for his passion, some for his mobile, extrovert and rebellious temperament etc; the remarkable influence of his narratives cannot be underrated.

His tragedies which were severely condemned by the critics were found adaptable for the theatre and even Werner, the weakest, was staged. The dramatic version of Mazeppa provided the Victorian stage with one of its greatest spectacles, the perilous ride of the Tarter prince tied to a wild horse. "Manfred was acted in Covent Garden in 1834, Marino Faliero at Drury Lane in 1821, The Two Foscari in the Medden Theatre, Norwich; Cain in Edinburg.

Marino Fellero by the London Society in recent times. Werner enjoyed considerable popularity with Macready as Werner, while Sardanapalus had a vogue in Germany enthusiastically supported by Kaiser Wilhelm II”.

Byron’s magnetism had a more powerful influence upon the painters and musicians than on the stage directors. Rossini composed a choral elegy on his death and took part in it himself. The new composers, the Romantics, from Berlioz to Tchaikovsky, found Byronism an inspiration for many works. There were at least two versions of Le Corsair, somewhat fantastic, but containing Conrad, Medora and Gulnara, and danced many times in Paris, London and St. Petersburg. Medora was danced by Anna Pavlova and Karsavina in the present century. Of the innumerable painters who chose Byronic subjects for their canvas, Delacroix was the most fitted by temperament to catch the vigour and vividness of the prototype. “Their Juans and Haldees, Mazeppas, Manfreds and picturesque modern Greeks paid tribute to him under only two aspects - the lover and the sublime rebel”. There is no

35. Ibid. foot note. P - 496.
example of any author who could influence his own age and later ages in so many diverse fields of art and culture, and it is not difficult to realise that Byron could not have achieved this success if he did not beat out a new track for himself. It was his narratives, both poems and dramas, that gave the artists so many different subjects - characters, scenes, moods of varied passion and intensity - to draw upon.

It was Goethe who first raised his voice against the folly of those who judged such a poet by standards of purity and morality instead of boldness, audacity and grandeur. From him too came the sublime tribute in the second part of Faust - the symbolic portrayal of Byron as Euphorion, the offspring of Faust and Helen of Troy. Of Byron's satiric genius Goethe remarks, "and as we approach closer we become aware that English poetry is already in possession of something we Germans totally lack - a cultured, comic language". 37

To read Byron is to come in contact with a singular personality. His life and his work are inseparable - in fact his poetry sprung from his life and his experience, not dreamt in dreams. So the great quality of his poems is his sincerity and fidelity to the facts of life. "His

greatness was his truth to fact, conceived as action, feeling, energy; not as the material for picture painting, reflection or analysis\textsuperscript{38}. His experience, however, did not give him any joy. Maturity disillusioned him and made him miserable. The disillusionment brought weariness and boredom and created a sort of inner vacuum. All his life he tried to fill this vacuum by passionate bursts of emotion which find their expression in the characters and the various moods of his narratives. "But more or less, the whole is a syncope/Or a 'singultus' - emblems of emotion/That grand antithesis to great ennui", (O.J./XV/2). But the disillusionment also enabled him to take the heightened and transfigured view of things, and show us what kind of world is actually in front of us, with all its glowing splendours as well as its horrifying evils. And to achieve this end he had to know the world and its people first hand, and understand them, "If we see no nation but our own, we do not give mankind a fair chance; it is from 'experience' not 'Books', we ought to judge of Mankind"\textsuperscript{39}. The scope and range of his experience is deep and sweeping and so he can tell us what the others never knew or cared to know. "Byron's imagination is synoptic, it takes in, as the Metaphysicals did, enormous ranges of disparate material. The tendency of the other Romantics (with Blake always the great exception)...


\textsuperscript{39} March, Vol. - 1. P - 173.
was to contract and delimit; Wordsworth with his corner in the Lakes, Shelley with his Vegetarian ethical paradise, Keats commuting between Wardour street middle ages and bosky snoozings in the vale of Health, Coleridge dreaming in a lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Linton. Byron, on the contrary, continuously expands moving outwards in ever widening circles.  

He prefers sense to sensibility and though not exactly head to heart yet he never allows the heart to prevail over the head if there is any confrontation. So by his narrative satires of a vigorous and modern character, he became the most anti-romantic poet in an age of prevalent romanticism. The unconventionality of his expression, his laughing distrust of systematic ideologies, his constant disregard for rigid values make his work look odd for they do not fall into any known pattern, but if we look deep we shall realise that their oddities are also their beauties. "The grotesqueness, if one wishes to call it that, of Byron's art testifies that it is not the poet who speaks but 'a man'. And Byron speaks not as a man applying traditional moral precepts to a fixed hierarchical society, but as a man developing out of his consciousness of the individual's double role - that of a free agent and that of a creature

conditioned by the shifting pressure of the society". The 'shifting pressure' of the society proved too much for the others to bear and they went covering back to their individual cocoons. Only Byron met it head on and scattered the feelings of the impact in his narratives and they have become the living image and artistic symbol of the social, political and moral degeneration of a whole age.

The peculiarity that distinguishes Byron from the other Romantics is that, whereas for the others poetry is an expression of the 'self', for Byron poetry is Life itself. But he sees that much of life is rotten and the question is how to talk about the rotten things of life without making it hurt? Then he turns to satire and infuses it with his inimitable humour. He gives us 'stale' food but 'cooks' it so well that we 'eat' it with an appetite. Only Shelley among his contemporaries knew the evils and felt as strongly, but in his poems the thoughts are lost in the labyrinth of the allegories, symbols and his utopian idealism. Wordsworth had sympathy for the 'Beggar' but Byron was more concerned with the problem of begging than the beggar himself, which is perhaps a better way of tackling the problems of life than 'swinging the luminous wings ineffectually in the void'. The very inward-looking character of their temperament makes them ineffective as expositors.

Byron's attitude towards the Romanticism of his day is one of uneasiness. He gets rid of this by frankly admitting the impossibility of achieving its goal or by a satiric detachment from the whole question.

From Hours of Idleness to Don Juan is a long journey. It is the story of Byron's pilgrimage in search of a form, a tone of voice, a style of his own, and a set of imagery which will be expressive of his changing mood, his contradictory ideas of what he thinks of the world and no less of himself. Being a product of his age he had romantic leanings but temperamentally he was opposed to it. His problem was to integrate his two selves, the extrovert rebel and the Romantic satirist, and he achieves this by his sometimes bitter, sometimes rollicking, sometimes genial, sometimes cynical, but mainly humour. He sought to reconcile Romantic aspirations with the unalterable facts of the contemporary situation and of the human conditions in general. He could not for this purpose employ either the established techniques of the 18th Century poetry or the newer techniques of his Romantic contemporaries. He faced the problem straight and by giving a free play to his passionate and creative impulses produced a kind of rhetorical poetry that flows like lava in long stretches. "A strong instinct for reality, for what is here and now, always competes in Byron with a thirst for the remote, the primitive, the exotic". 42

Byron had no philosophy or any message for the posterity, at least not a philosophy elaborately developed as was done by Wordsworth in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry*, Keats in his letters, and Coleridge in his *Biographia*. He was a fighter and a rebel and this spirit of war was his philosophy and his message was his rebellion against all sorts of injustice, hypocrisy and cant of the society. But he not only preached them, like the others, but also practised them himself and hence they are so convincing. "It is my respect for morals that makes me so indignant against its vile substitute cant, with which I wage war, and this the good world chooses to consider as a sign of my wickedness".43 His is not a poetry to be read alone to sink oneself within oneself, it is not that kind of poetry which puts us into a sort of fitful sleep and carries us to world of dreams of the poet himself. His poetry is about our actions, our feelings, our beliefs, our illusions and our follies which are best expressed through the medium of his narratives. His poetry tingles our nerves, jars our imagination, shakes our rooted beliefs, knocks us out of our complacency till we feel that we exist. He makes us stand before a magic mirror that shows the self within not the veneer without. Hence he firmly asserts,

"I maintain that it is the most moral of poems (Don Juan) — but if people won't discover the moral that is their fault not mine." The society which thrived on vanity and falsehood, would not discover the moral of Don Juan because it would not want to.

He was the only one among his contemporaries who knew that in real life there is no 'ought' but only 'is', there are no dreams but only existence. And Byron has his own conception of existence, "when one subtracts from life, infancy (which is vegetation), sleep, eating, and swilling — buttoning and unbuttoning — how much remains of downright existence? The summer of a door-mouse". And in Childe Harold, "Did man compute Existence by enjoyment, and count o'er such hours against years of life — say, 'Would be name three, score?'" (CH/III/34). He could communicate this 'downright existence' to his readers and hence his narratives assume the stature of life. But the existence outside the feverish and passionate enjoyment of life, — 'the swilling, buttoning and unbuttoning', which was routine — was a dreary void. "I have no conception of any existence which duration would not render tiresome". Then he turned to poetry which became his passionate poetic existence.

46. Ibid. P - 225.
"Thus to their extreme verge the passions brought
Dash into poetry, which is but passion".

(O.J./IV/106)

Others looked away or buried their heads in the sand and thought that the storm would pass them by. Only Byron faced it undaunted and unflinching. He was a Romantic whose romanticism lay in living a fast life - in shooting, gaming, swimming, drinking deep and plunging recklessly into debt; in having affairs with scores of women, in risking his life and all for the cause of liberty of foreign countries, in establishing legends to be facts of life - in short, in trying to understand life and the world in all its varied aspects - not only its beauty and sweetness but also its absurdity, incongruity and pretensions. Hence with fine sarcasm he says of his own poem and of the others, "For me, who wandering with Pedestrian Muses,/Contend not with you on the winged steed". (O.J/1/8).

He was an aristocrat and knew their virtues and vices inside out, he knew human weaknesses but did not fail to see human greatness. Inspite of his merciless attack on society he did not lose faith in its constituents - men. "Men is born passionate of body, but with an innate, though secret tendency to the love of Good in his Main Spring of Mind." He looks at life like a curious onlooker.

47. L & J. Vol. - 5 P - 457.
and has the detachment of a great artist to pass judgement impartially and without ill-feeling. This shrewd power of observation coupled with an artistic detachment are things peculiar to Byron's genius. "Byron will be present at this as at any other exhibition of energy, human and cosmic, and admire it for its energy while condemning it for its destructiveness. This power to stand aside, to appreciate aesthetically, while immersing himself to feel with and to condemn it morally is something Byron shares with Blake and Shakespeare". 48

There are some obvious similarities between the age of Byron and ours. His was exhausted by the Revolutions, the Napoleonic wars the Industrial Revolution and its miserable crop, as ours is hollowed out by the holocaust of two world wars. The environmental conditions which give rise to emotional complexity in the mind of the imaginative people were present in both. Like the moderns Byron uses a prosaic diction, common-place images, colloquial words and even slang, in the works of his last period. In this sense Byron is the most modern among all his contemporaries. Like Shaw he is a breaker of idols, exposing the sham and hollowness of the cherished beliefs of his day, and just like Shaw he does it so wittily that no one takes any

offence. "Like many of the poets in present favour, he frequently juxtaposed discordant elements in a deliberate effort to crash through the cant of his day, awaken the etherized reader, and shock him out of his complacency into some new perception or fresh in sight". 49 There was no poet in his time who took up his sword against the 'Establishment' as zealously as he. Shelley was the great exception, but the cause of his failure is obvious, "Real flesh and blood - I do not deal in - you might as well go to a gin-shop for a leg of mutton as expect anything human or earthly from me". 50 And Byron primarily deals in the 'real flesh and blood'.

If Chaucer brought down poetry from the kingdom of God to the kingdom of man then we can say that Byron brought down poetry from the realm of fancy down to earth. He wrested it from the hands of the initiated and delivered it in the hands of the people, from the confines of romance and imagination he took it out in the open, fresh air. "Don Juan was specifically written to warn its age and the succeeding ages, against the solipsistic dangers latent in the new theories of poetry. ... ... Don Juan was an attempt to restore poetry to its proper place and function, both for its (von)good and for the benefit of the world it meant to serve". 51

Byron had, however, a more difficult task to do than Chaucer, he had to fight a war on two fronts, alone and at the same time. On the social front he had to fight its vanity, snobbery and pretensions, and on the poetic front he had to fight with the current poetic cult and conventions. The society of Chaucer was neither so complex nor so cohesive. There was no 'Establishment' or 'System' apart from a time-worn social tradition which Chaucer kept untouched. But Byron's society was different. In his time began the age of collective personality, the society, became move cohesive, the 'Systems' or 'Establishments' more rigid and the Industrial Revolution put men into two distinctly separate camps - the Haves and Have nots. The weaknesses of the characters of Chaucer are more individual than products of the society, but Byron's characters are the products of the existing social order of the times. The highly entertaining narratives of Chaucer show his keen observation, his zest for life and his wit and sense of humour. Here Byron is in line with the great pioneer of modern narratives, he also shows the same power of observation, zest for life, and an ability to hit without hurt. "As a tale-teller we must rate Byron very high indeed. I can think of none other than Chaucer who has a greater readability with the exception of Coleridge." 52 Byron is

the first modern poet who addresses his readers collectively, like a public orator, and not individually; he is the first poet who hits the evils of the system and not the evils of the individual; and so in a sense, he is more conscious, more progressive and quite ahead of his time.