INTRODUCTION

SECTION - B.

MAN AND THE POET.
Thai Byron became a narrative poet of a prosaic character. In an age which idealized and idolized imagination and produced lyric poetry in the main, this was very significant. Reacting against the classical school, the Romantics went to the opposite extreme and produced lyric poetry in which they are mainly concerned with the life of the spirit. Byron, however, stood in the midway. He was much influenced by the discipline and satiric temperament of the Neo-classicals of the 18th Century, and became a narrative satirist, where he is mainly concerned with the life of the Body. He lived in "the patent age of new inventions/For killing bodies, and for saving souls" (DJ/I/132) and he set out to save the bodies rather than the souls.

But a satirist is not born, he is made. It is his keen awareness of the contemporary situation and his utter distaste for it that make him a satirist. "And the sad truth which hovers ov'r my desk / Turns what was once romantic to burlesque". (DJ/IV/3). And a satirist can never be a lyric poet, for his purpose is not to soothe but to shock. His artifacts and machinery are quite different from those of a lyric poet, and he must concoct a story which is used as a medium to give utterance to his feelings. We shall see in the following pages how the diverse forces of his time, including his
heredity, shaped his temperament and his attitude to life and how the poet was made out of the man.

The Byrons or the Buruns could trace their history back to the Norman conquest when they came over from Normandy and settled and distinguished themselves in England. Their ancestral home, the Nevstead abbey, was purchased from Henry VIII by one Sir John Byron in 1540. One of the Byrons, a friend of Charles I, helped the King in the civil war and as a reward was made a peer. Byron's (the poet's) father was the eldest son of the younger brother of the fifth Lord Byron from whom Byron inherited the peerage. He had a dashing personality, quite handsome and was a complete rake. He earned the nickname 'Mad Jack' for his violent character, wild behaviour and soaring debts. Byron got from his father his dashing personality, handsome features, the habit of running into debts, his wild character, but above all and most important of all his careless and unconventional attitude to life. Both the father and the son cared little for what people thought about their doings.

Byron's mother, Catherine, hailed from the Gordon of Gight family who could trace back their lineage to royalty. The first laird of Gight, Sir William Gordon had been the son of the Earl of Huntly and Annabella Stuart.
sister of King James II. They had in them the cynical ferocity of the Highland blood and there was a string of violent deaths in the family. One was murdered, two were hanged for murder and assassination and several, including Catherine's father, were drowned. Added to this Highland strain was a Celtic strain in Byron. "Mad Jack's mother was Sophis Trevenion of Caerhayes, Cornwall. This Celtic blood in him prevented him from having the equable and easy-going temper of an Englishman. This also explains his remarkable mobility of thought and feeling.

Byron was born on 22nd January, 1788, unfortunately with a defective foot. When he tried to put his heel on the ground his ankle twisted over and he could only stand on his toes. This was a sore point in his heart and he remained extremely sensitive to this throughout his life. Many a critic has sought to trace Byron's cynicism to an inferiority complex arising out of this misfortune. He fought this bad luck, as he fought all the odds of life, by taking those physical exercises which did not always show his defect or those which could be taken inspite of it. He was assiduous in the study of shooting and fencing which like swimming, boxing and horsemanship could be practised despite his handicap and also because these were the sporting activities of a man-about-town. He often made himself the
the butt of his bitter jokes about his deformity. Speaking about his Greek campaign, "I (Byron) do not know how it will end, but one thing is certain, there is no fear of my running", he remarked gaily glancing at his lame foot. Talking about immortality he wrote to Hodgson, "As to your immortality, if people are to live, why die? And our carcases which are to rise again, are they worth raising? I hope, if mine is, I shall have a better 'pair of legs' than I have moved on these two and twenty years, or I shall be sadly behind in the squeeze into paradise." The tone may be flippant but we cannot fail to discern the terrible bitterness.

The idea of the original sin and the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination were imbibed in him at the age of five by his Latin teacher Paterson. It was responsible for many of his precipitate actions and also made him superstitious. In 1801, a fortune-teller, Mrs. Williams by name, told his mother that he would marry twice and the second wife would be a foreigner. Byron should also be careful of his 27th and 37th year. The prophecy was made in the boy's hearing and he was deeply impressed by it. He set sail for the Greek

campaign on July 13, 1823, a Friday - both of which were ominous for him. He chose the day and the date deliberately because he had the premonition of his impending death. He was warned of his 37th year and he would be 37 on 22nd January, 1824, before the Greek campaign was expected to be over. He enquired of Tita, his personal Italian servant, if he desired to leave Greece and go back to Italy. "Yes", he said, "If your lordship goes, I go". "No, Tita," Byron answered, "I shall never go back from Greece. Either the Turks or the Greeks or the climate would prevent that". His belief in predestination can be seen in his works; it also made him a fatalist. He wrote to Teresa Guiccioli, "- but circumstances, chance and death are the rulers of men, and we shall see in time the unfolding of our destiny". Having heard the stories of his ancestors, he thought himself predestined to lead an ardent and guilty life. Secretly there dwelt a Calvinist in his heart who was to judge his moral dissipation, hope to live a better life and despise the too easy women who swarmed around him. He sought to reconcile the Calvinist Byron with the man-of-the world Byron and the attempt gave rise to his unpredictable

temperament, and the contrasts, contradictions and incongruities that we find in him and in his 'Don Juan'.

The blood of the mad, bad and luckless Byrons and the cynical intemperateness of the Gordons often clashed and the mother and the boy became totally estranged. He wrote to Augusta, "I have never been so scurrilously abused by any person, as by that woman, whom I think, I am to call mother, by that being who gave me birth, to whom I ought to look up with veneration and respect, but whom, I am sorry. I cannot love or admire". She tried to bring him up strictly and desired to give him a fair education and his reaction to her guardianship was "No captive negro, or prisoner of war, ever looked forward to their emancipation, and return to liberty, with more joy, and with more lingering expectation, than I do to my escape from (this) maternal bondage." This was the beginning of his hatred of all bondage and the germ of rebellion against all things conventional, was planted "He remembers her in the mother of Don Juan; Sagest of women, even of widows, (his mother was one) She/Resolved that Juan should be quite a paragon" (O.J/ I/36), and the result of such strict and formal education

6. Ibid. P - 76.
is derided by Byron contemptuously, "half his days were passed at Church, the other/Between his tutors, confessor and mother" (D.J/I/49).

He got the first shock of his life in love from Mary Chaworth of Annesley. She was the grand-niece of Mr. Chaworth who was killed in a duel by the fifth Lord Byron from whom Byron inherited his title. She is remembered in Don Juan with a nostalgic passion, "I have a passion for the name of 'Mary' / For once it was magic sound to me; ....... / A spell from which even yet I am not quite free" (D.J/V/4). He fell desperately in love with her with all the passions of the Byrons. One day however, he overheard Mary saying to her maid, "Do you think I could care anything for the lame boy". It touched the most sensitive chord of his soul and came to him like a dagger thrust. It is probable that after this incident his attitude to love and women began to take a new direction. Just after this incident he wrote to Augusta, "for love in my humble opinion, is utter nonsense, a mere jargon of compliments, romance and deceit". And in his poem, "Juan much flattered by her love, or lust; - / I cannot stop to alter words once

written. / And the two are so mix'd with human dust, / That he who 'names one', both perchance may hit on" (D.J/ IX/77).

He was a man who could not do without women but also could not live with them and despised them. "It is unlucky that we can neither live with or without these women", and in Don Juan "Alas! the love of women! it is known / To be a lovely and fearful thing". (DJ/II/199)

He had scores of affairs with women - "I think at least two hundred of one sort or another, perhaps more" - but with the exception of Mary Chaworth he felt no attachment to any one but Countess Teressa Guiccioli whom he met in Italy. Byron did not want women to understand him, he wanted them to amuse him, "I ask nothing of a woman but to make me laugh", he told brutally to his wife in the first days of his marriage. She was a mathematical prodigy and, in her attitude to life, a bit wigged and powdered. Byron could not help having a dig at her, "I thank you (Lady Melbourne) again for your efforts with my princess of parallelograms who has puzzled you more than the hypothenuse. Her proceedings are

quite rectangular, or we are two parallel lines prolonged to infinity side by side but never to meet. It might be humorous but the prophecy proved to be too true - the lines never met. He wrote to Lady Melbourne, "and the fest is that my wife, if she had common-sense, would have more power over me than any other whatsoever", and the mathematical Annabella lacked this common-sense. She understood him and married him with the intention of reforming him. This only angered and irritated Byron, hence the rift resulting in separation. He remembers her in the mother of Don Juan, "Her thoughts were theorems, her words a problem" (DJI/1/13) and, "Some women use their tongues - She 'look'd' a lecture, / Each eye a sermon, and her brow a homily" (DJI/1/15), the mathematical and reforming Annabella.

His love for Teressa Guiccioli was deep and sincere for she amused him and pleased him and she was his last, longest and deepest attachment. But even here we find his contradictory character, the man, divided against himself, the emotional and passionate Byron and the practical Byron, the Byron that is and the Byron that

should have been. On 10th June, 1819, he wrote to her, "My sweetest soul — believe that I live for you alone — and do not doubt me"; and on 11th June, he wrote, "I am writing to you in tears — and I am not a man who cries easily. When I cry my tears come from the heart and are of blood". In the next month, on 28th July, he wrote to Augusta, "I had a liaison (Teressa) according to the good old Italian custom — she miscarried in May — she is pretty — a great coquette — extremely vain — excessively affected — clever enough — without the smallest principle — with a good deal of imagination and some passion". We must not doubt, however, that in all this Byron is true to himself. The tears of the lover Byron are as true as the shrewd remarks passed by the other Byron who speaks from his experience of life and women. But even Teressa could not hold her spell over him for long. Once the Italian conspiracy failed he began to think that he was leading an utterly useless life in Italy. "But I feel — and feel bitterly — that a man should not consume his life at the side and on the bosom of a woman and a stranger; that even a recompense and it is much, is not enough, and this Ciceronian existence is to be condemned".

The women that could really tame, at least temporarily, the impetuous Byronic passion were neither the calculating Annabelles nor the amusing, elegant, aristocratic Teresses but the untamed passionate ones. 

"the lips of a Venetian girl with large black eyes, a face like Faustina's, and the figure of a Juno - tall and energetic as a pythoness, with eyes flashing and her dark hair streaming in the moon light - one of those women who may be made anything. I like this kind of animal". He liked this kind of 'animal' because of their violent energy and their impetuosity, their uncontrolled passion. "I like energy - even animal energy of all kinds". Once Angelina, one of Byron's mistresses in Italy, wondered if Byron could not get rid of his mathematical wife. Byron humorously remarked if she would have her poisoned and to that her answer was a dead silence, and he remarks, - "the passions of a sunny soil is paramount to all other considerations". It was this passion which Byron admired. The poetry of his time seemed to be lethargic, slow and dreamy. Hence he poured forth his passion and energy in his narratives and in his characters.

Loneliness and boredom were the background of his existence. A fatherless child, estranged with his mother, with the knowledge of his handicap always haunting him, he desperately sought a haven where he could repose his weary head, but which he never found. "Yet I want a country, and a home. I might still be a decent citizen, and found a house, and a family as good - or better - than the former".\textsuperscript{21} He got tired of everything sooner or later. He was at his happiest with men-of-the-world - cheerful Moore, Loyal, dogmatic Hobhouse, sardonic, hard drinking Scrope Davis; but there was something in his deeper self against which their friendship could not prevail! I could not bear the company of my best friend above a month; there is such a sameness in mankind upon the whole, and they grow so much more disgusting everyday, that were it not for a portion of Ambition and a conviction that in times like the present, we ought to perform our respective duties, I should live here all my life in unvaried solitude".\textsuperscript{22} But the 'disgusting sameness' which drove him to like 'unvaried solitude' also brought weariness in its turn", Oh! the misery of doing nothing but make love, enemies and verses",\textsuperscript{23} he wrote to Elizabeth pigot from Trinity College.

\textsuperscript{22} March. Vol. I.P. - 180 - 181.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. P - 135.
It was his sense of loneliness that drove him to live a reckless and dissipated life, "I have really no friends in the world", he wrote to Hodgeson, and he was only 22. By nature he was passionate and his loneliness sprang from the psychological pressures that hemmed him from his birth. So for him, "The great object of life is sensation - to feel that we exist, even though in pain. It is this 'craving void' which drives us to gaming - to battle - to travel - to intemperate, but keenly felt pursuits of any description, whose principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from their accomplishments". Here Byron is not really defending his position but uttering a great general truth of a passionate but lonely life. Each moment has to be lived, even though painfully, just to feel that we exist, for the stormy and the passionate the pain becomes a pleasure. This "craving void" was felt by all the Romantics but while others tried to fill it with their dreams and visions Byron attempted to fill it; as a man, with physical action, as a poet with poems of passion, sensation and action. "Level roads don't suit me, as thou knowest,


It must be uphill or down, then I am more 'au fait' "26 he wrote to Augusta. To avoid the void he leapt from sensation to sensation, from mood to mood, in life as well as in his poems. This inevitably bounced back on itself and in moments of lucid intervals it brought weariness and self pity". I cannot tell what will become of me - to leave or to be left would at present drive me quite out of my senses; and yet to what I have conducted myself".27 The tragedy was that he knew that his life of sensation and excitement would not cure his malady and his attempt to escape only led him to a new trap. "I am very lonely and should think myself miserable were it not for a kind of hysterical merriment which I can neither account for nor conquer".28

He had to fight this loneliness which led him to the sort of vehement self assertion that we find in his works and drove him to all the incongruities and absurdities that the critics level against him. As he would not admit defeat, "I may be ill or well - in high or low spirits - in quick or obtuse state of feelings -

like anybody else, but I can battle my way through", 29
he devised his own way to fight this demon and along
with this all the other evils of life and society.

But, since life is most a jest is,
As philosophers allow,
Still to laugh by far the best is,
Then laugh on - as I do now.
Laugh at all things
Great and small things,
Sick or well, at sea or shore;
While we are quaffing,
Let's have laughing
Who the devil cares for more". 30

So he laughed away all the 'Great and Small'
things of life by assuming the pose of a farceur, but
it was only a pose. He had to laugh to hide his misery
and loneliness, to keep his tears unshed, but the heart
bled within, "If I laugh at any mortal thing. / 'Tis that
I may not weep" (DJ/IV/4). Like the skilled boxer he was,
he tried to dodge the weariness of life, stave it off
with a shrug, but really he could not. When he was repro­
ached for his low spirits Byron wrote to Moore,

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"When from the heart where sorrow sits,
Her dusky shadow mounts too high,
And over changing aspect flits.
And clouds the brow or fills the eye;
Heed not the gloom, which soon shall sink,
My thoughts their dungeons know too well -
Back to my breast the wanderers sink,
and bleed within their silent cell"\textsuperscript{31}

The poet laughed, the man shrugged but the soul cried.

The Romantic radicals considered society as something artificial and hence thought themselves outsiders. Because of his passionate nature Byron felt this alienation rather deeply and hence his attack on society is vehement and in unambiguous terms. "The circumstances you mention at the close of your letter is another proof in favour of my opinion of mankind, such you will always find them, selfish and distrustful. I except none - The cause of this is the state of society .... .. but I do not think we are of this disposition, for you find friendship as a school boy, and love enough before twenty".\textsuperscript{32}

He had faith in the basic goodness of man but not in man as a product of society. He had little faith in a society

\textsuperscript{31} Hoverth, R.G. Op. Cit. P - 84.
\textsuperscript{32} March. Vol. II. P - 150.
which after feting him in 1812, after his "Childe Harold", treated him so coolly in 1816, after his separation with his wife. He detested what he called its canting and hypocritical morality. "The motive power in England today", he wrote in 1821, "is cant; cant political, cant poetical, cant religious, cant moral; but always cant .... I say cant because it is a thing of words, without the smallest influence on human actions".33 To Lady Blessington he remarked, "There are but two sentiments to which I am constant, a strong love for liberty, and a detestation of Cant".34 Bernard Blackstone traces the hatred of Byron for Cant back to his father, the 'Mad Jack' Byron. "Mad Jack's independence of convention, his complete scorn of conformity became a guiding light for his son through the shoals and shallows of Southwell small-town society, as well as, later, in the whirlpool of London and Venice. We can, perhaps trace his hatred for cant back to this source".35 All the principal characters of his 'Tales' are not only lonely but are socially alienated. They move in society but never get their feet wet. They communicate but themselves remain enigmatic and incommunicable. Juan, however, enjoys more

freedom for he is the child of Byron's mature years when his disillusionment was complete, when he could accept his own alienation with a contemptuous smile.

But life has to be lived and the vacuum has to be filled - with anything sensational, hence, "for my heart alights on the nearest perch - if it is withdrawn it goes God Knows where - but one must like something". He could not understand his innermost feelings and groped frantically for a foothold. The heroes of his 'Tales' are not only creatures of passion, they are the victims of the same uncertainty and in their attempt to seek their own identity they perish tragically. His drinking bouts from a human skull and nocturnal orgies at Newstead Abbey, strutting forward and backward all resplendent with daggers and pistols in his drawing room, being always ready for a duel, playing deep and getting deep into debt, were his attempts to fill the void. These were the bonds that held him to life and he remained to the end a creature of moods. His creative efforts were the results of being in such moods which were always tuned to a high pitch. "Come home 'Solus' - very high wind -

36. March, Vol. IV, P - III.
lightning - moonshine - solitary stragglers muffled in cloaks - women in masks - white houses - clouds hurried over the sky, like spilt milk blown out of the pail - altogether very poetical. It is still blowing very hard - the tiles flying, and the house rocking - rain splashing - lightning flashing - quite a fine Swiss Alpine evening, and the sea roaring at a distance. Even in a single observation his vision shifts quickly and surely to diverse objects - muffled stragglers, lightning and moonshine, masked women, rocking house, flying tiles - all are taken in at a single glance and in the midst of all these confusing objects of vision he hears the distant roar of the sea. Images of sights and sounds jostle together to get into place. Yet all these confusing diversity are fused and blended together to give it a coherence and unity achieved by his keen power of observation and his ability to put them in the most compact form to bring out the totality of the image - the wildness of the setting - 'altogether very poetical'. Not only are the images dynamic, they have a dash and virile energy never to be found in the works of his contemporaries. This also shows his concept of the subject of poetry and its treatment, that it should be dynamic and

should move forward by the sheer force of its intrinsic energy which we find in his narratives.

He did not conceive his role in this world a poetic one, "Poetic fame is by no means the sum of my wishes" 38 - but as a man of action. More interested in the here-and-now of human affairs he wished to do something tangible for them. "I prefer the talents of action - of war, of the senate, or even of science - to all the speculations of those mere dreamers of another existence (I don't mean religiously but fancifully) and spectators of this apathy. 39 So when the Italian uprising failed, the easy and unvaried life in the Venetian Society, even the arms of Teresa, began to get on his nerves. He began to think seriously of emigrating to South America, of buying a province in Chile, in Peru or Mexico. The weariness and boredom born out of monotony and inaction must be avoided, whatever the price. "Better be an unskilled planter, an awkward settler, better be a hunter, or anything, than a flatterer of fiddlers and a fan carrier of a woman". 40

For Shelley poetry was an instrument to reform society, for the others poetry was pure self expression giving a view of the poet's own idealized world, for Byron writing poetry was only a sign of 'effeminacy'. Believing himself born for action he preferred politicians and men of action to writers and singers who are 'dreamers of another existence', - "but I do think the preference of 'writers' to 'agents' - the mighty stir made about scribbling and scribes, by themselves and others, a sign of effeminacy, degeneracy and weakness. Who would write who had anything better to do? 'Action - action - action' - said Demosthenes: Actions - actions, I say, and not writing - least of all rhyme", he wrote in his diary on 24th November, 1813. This preference of actions to dreams made him a narrative poet of vigorous actions and passions.

There was a time when he entertained the thought of entering into politics seriously. But the politics of his time, even of the liberals, the whigs, was impossible for him. He realised the self interestedness and the reactionary role of the politicians and shook the dust of politics off his shoes. "No one can be more sick of, or indifferent to politics than I am, "he wrote

to Murray in 1820, "if they let me alone; but if the time comes when a part must be taken one way or the other, I shall pause before I lend myself to the views of these ruffians". He realized the problems of his day but with his experience he also realized that they won’t be solved by the politicians of his time. He owed no allegiance to any institution, political, social or religious and remained to the end arrogant and impatient.

His contempt for the politicians sprang from another reason. In 1815 he wrote to Leigh Hunt, "Politics; the barking of the war dogs for their carrion has sickened me of them for the present". Wars according to Byron are seldom fought on moral grounds; in most cases it is the result of the machinations of the politicians of whom Byron was sick to the core. So though he desired a life of action and preferred men of action to 'scribblers' yet he detested war and bloodshed of all sorts. In the 'siege of Ismail' in 'Don Juan' he praises Suwarrow for his professional competence as a general but condemns him when he takes no note of the loss of human life. "I am not insensible to glory", he wrote to

Noel Long in the active service, "and even I hope before I am at rest, to see some service in a military capacity, yet I cannot conquer my repugnance to a life absolutely and exclusively devoted to carnage, or bestow any appellation in my idea applicable to a 'mercenary' soldier, but the slave of blood". 44 "He was the first Englishman", wrote Ruskin, "who felt the cruelty of war and in its cruelty the shame". 45

"The drying up of a single tear has more of honest fame than shedding seas of gore" wrote Byron in 'Don Juan' (D.J./VIII/3). He condemns wars and war-mongers on humanitarian grounds, that they consider human life expendable. Wars can be justified only when it is fought on the grounds of defence of freedom, country or of laws. (D.J./VII/40). But when it is fought merely for the lust of power or greed it becomes a crime against humanity and is hateful. He says in his usual light hearted way but with bitter irony, "'Let there be light'! said God', and there was light'/'Let there be blood', says man, 'and there's a sea!" (D.J./VII/41) "For war cuts up not only branch, but root" (D.J./VII/41).

His great humanitarian feelings led him to acts of magnanimity whenever people were in trouble. Coleridge's "Christabel" was cut up by Edinburgh Review and because Byron praised it he also was not spared. He wrote to Moore, "I praised it (Christabel) firstly because I thought well of it, secondly because Coleridge was in great distress .... I am very sorry that J (affery) has attacked him because poor fellow, it will hurt him in mind and pocket". His involvement in the Italian conspiracy and the Greek war of his defence of the Luddites did not come only from a love of liberty or protest against the economic exploitation of the working class, but also from a genuine humanitarian impulse. To Mr. Mayer, the English consul at Prevesa, he wrote, "Coming to Greece, one of my principal objects was to alleviate as much as possible the miseries incident to a warfare so cruel as the present. When the dictates of humanity are in question, I know no difference between Turks and Greeks. It is enough that those who went assistance are men, in order to claim the pity and protection of the meanest pretender to human feelings". Wordsworth also was a champion of the suffering and downtrodden but he could never get down to such depth. He was satisfied

47. L & J. Vol. VI. P - 326.
with expressing his sympathy, which is passive, but Byron translated his sympathy into action.

Byron was not a professed atheist like Shelley but his opinions on anything religious were unconventional and show his skeptical habit of mind. The Calvinist doctrine that was poured down his tender gullet never left its grip on him. But the logical and realistic Byron found it difficult to believe anything that was not tangible. He did not believe in the miracles of Christ which is one of the foundation stones of the Christian faith, "As to miracles I agree with Hume that it is more natural that men should 'lie' or be 'deceived' than things out of the course of Nature should happen". 48 Nor did he believe in any revealed religion, the essence of Christianity, "I do not believe in any revealed religion for no religion is revealed". 49 For him religion meant the religion of man. It was something wider, more comprehensive and more humanistic than professed by the Church or any other religious bodies of the world. "I trust that God is not a Jew but the God of all mankind". 50 In 1807 he wrote to Noel Long, "of religion I know nothing

49. Ibid.
at least in its favour'. The reason of this distrust and disgust is not a contempt for religion as such but a contempt for all religions cannot spread in the name of religion by the Church and other institutions of its kind.

The honoured principles of religion have been vitiated by centuries of corruption and vice and abuse. "Who will believe that God will damn men for knowing what they were never taught - .... I am no Platonist, I am nothing at all, but I would sooner be a Paulician, Manichean, Stoic, Gentile, Pyrrhonian, Zoroastrian, than one of the seventy two villainous sects who are tearing each other to pieces for the love of God and hatred of each other ....... let me live - well, if possible; and die without pain. The rest is with God, who assuredly had 'He came or 'Sent' would have made himself manifest to all nations and intelligible to all." In the opinion of Byron the very basis of Christian religion is an anathema. The saviour of mankind was sacrificed to satisfy the scoundrels. But the passive suffering of Christ does not exonerate the guilty of their crime, "the basis of your religion is 'injustice'; the

'son of God', the 'Pure', the 'immaculate', the 'innocent', is sacrificed for the Guilty. ..... You degrade the Creator in the first place, by making Him a begetter of Children; and in the next you convert Him into a tyrant over an immaculate and injured 'Being', who is sent into existence to suffer death for the benefit of some millions of scoundrels*. His opinions do not exactly make him anti-religious or intolerant to religion as they show his unorthodox and unconventional attitude toward an honoured and established institution. He felt that religion as practised by the people was a blind faith, that all blind faiths are static for it leads to a closed mind and, whatever is static is bound to become corrupt in the long run. This is not simply an unorthodox view, it is a modern and scientific way of thinking. He was not tied to any establishment and hence always enjoyed an open mind, "being of no party, I shall offend all parties" (D.J./IX/26). 

His student days' excursion in the realm of poetry, 'Hours of Idleness', got a direct hit from the Edinburgh Review and he retaliated by his "English Bards" 

and Scotch Reviewers which made the critics sit up and chew their pens thoughtfully. The poem was a satire in which he swung his flail viciously in a wide arc, and Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Scott, the critics, all were cut up and pickled. Later, however, he realised that he took his youthful vengeance a little too far than was good and sober. "How came George Bankes to quote 'English Bards' in the House of Commons? All the world keep flinging that poem in my face". F4 However, there was no mistake about the steely sureness of the lines, the virility of its tone and the convincing quality of his assertions. And these qualities became a part of his poetic temperament which he retained to the last. It did one more thing to him, it showed him the way where his genius lay — in satiric composition. With it also began his long struggle with the world that refused to understand him in his totality.

After he came back from his travel in 1811 he published his 'Childe Harold' which was an immediate success. It rang with the tragic skepticism of a sickened generation, that of the Regency Society, and gave a picture of Europe as the wars and revolutions had left it. Poetry was no longer something ethereal and sublime,

It had come to step with life. This was also the beginning of Byron's significant long poems - the narratives. During his stay in England of the Regency period, from 1812 to 1816, he wrote a number of poems, the 'Tales' and others which were immensely popular and he became a European figure. That the 'Tales' were written during this period had relevance to the condition of the time of their composition. The snobbery and the hollow social gossips were utterly contemptuous hence the wild eastern setting of the 'Tales' and the enigmatic, inexplicable and lonely characters drew him inexorably. "The 'Tales' represent an as yet immature expression of confused impulses, a split personality trying to find itself, an attempt to escape from what he considered to be the futility of English high society into an environment where he found himself at home". It was an attempt to forget the drudgery, silliness and boredom of the present and escape to a land where men move by the instinctive primitive virtues of passion, where they love and hate equally intensely, remain proud and unyielding even in death.

where even sinners have their brief moments of glory".

"I know not why I have dwelt so much on the same scenes, except that I find them fading, or confusing (if such a word may be) in my memory, in the midst of the present turbulence and pressure, and I felt anxious to stamp before the die was worn out. .... with those countries and events connected with them, all my really poetical feelings begin and end"58 he wrote about his Eastern Tales. The wonderful scenic beauty of the East, and the simple, open but passionate and fierce characters of its people impressed Byron much.

The great popularity which he enjoyed for his 'Childe Harold' and the 'Tales' did not, however, last long. When his marriage with Annabelle came to an unhappy end he had to leave England in 1816 — for ever. It was only after his rejection by the English society, of which he had been the darling, that for the first time he began to take himself seriously, both as a man and as a poet. Still eager for fame and popular success he felt himself alienated from them. He took up the role of the wronged man who wanted to hit back to regain his mental balance. There grew in him the tendency to shock them, to outrage their susceptibilities and beliefs, to break the spell of their cherished ideals. When this agony of the mind

In the last two Cantos of Childe Harold—subsided a little he was able to write in the objective and detached manner which distinguishes his best works. His own society and beliefs which had crumbled around him are reflected in the crumbling remains of great civilizations and great men that we find in Childe Harold, Canto III and IV, written after 1816. And his steady growth to mature sensibility and almost prophetic understanding can be followed in the Ottava Rima Poems—Beppo, The Vision of Judgement and Don Juan.

In the first period, upto 1809, he is effusive and personal—a budding romantic poet making his debut—and more concerned with himself than with the world around him. In the second period, from 1812 to 1816, he is tempered by experience after his travel and is more mature and is able to understand himself. He wrote to Augusta after his first travel, "Buffeting with the world has brought me a little to reason and two years of travel in distant and barbarous countries has accustomed me to bear privations and consequently to laugh at many things which would have made me angry before". In the third period, from 1816 to his death, he comes completely cut of his egotistical shell and faces the real earthy world. The core of the malignant trouble was found to be an inner

57. March. Vol. II. P - 86.
fire of antagonism to society and he plunged headlong into an unrelenting attack on it. "The satiric Byron of the last period is a disillusioned idealist whose disillusion has made manifest a formerly latent social sense".

Though Byron headed the Romantic Movement of his own generation yet he was quite unlike his contemporaries as far as romantic ideals and aspirations were concerned. "His temperament and upbringing put him outside the 'Establishment' ....... he was more an 'Outsider' who never quite fitted the accepted judgements in politics or in literature". 

His poetic cult had one foot in the 18th Century and the other in his own. He was a life long admirer of the Popean school and Pope himself, hence romantic longings and a strong realistic sensibility always jostled in Byron's mind. Precision and control vied in him with gusts of emotion. "His tales of adventure in far places, his garrulous confessional habits, his attitude to history and liberty proclaim him a romantic; his admiration for Dryden and Pope and his interest in social round, his keen eye for the ridiculous and his strong

common sense link him with out Augustans". 

But the mature Byron of the 'Don Juan' period is more anti-romantic, more realistic and more keenly and painfully aware of the world than the Byron of the 'Tales' and other early works. The romantic Byron is not lost but in his later works, after 1816, he is subdued, giving way to another Byron, the man of the world, with a more refined poetic and satiric sensibility. For this reason the cutting edge of his satire in this period is more subtle, full of innuendoes, than the almost blunt frontal attack of the 'English Bards'. The passion is still there but it is now controlled and purposive. Whereas in 'English Bards' passion and anger are its driving force; in his mature works it is bitter irony and genial humour that keep them under steam. Passion is now outplayed by a genial humour which makes them more lively and endurable.

Byron realised the necessity of the precision and control of Augustan poetry but he also realised the necessity of expressing the new Romantic ideals and aspirations. He, however, did not see any point in a controversy between classical and Romantic ideals.

"- he considered the distinction, 'romantic and classical' as merely a continental debate. He certainly was not conscious of belonging to the Romantics". He certainly was not conscious of belonging to the Romantics.  And we can have his own opinion in this regard, - "I perceive that in Germany as well as in Italy, there is a great struggle about what they call 'Classical' and 'Romantic' - terms which are not subjects of classification in England, at least when I left four or five years ago. Some of the English scribblers, it is true, abused Pope and Swift, but the reason was that they did not know how to write either prose or verse; but nobody thought them worth making a seat of. Perhaps there may be something of the kind sprung up lately, but I have not heard much about it, and it would be such bad taste that I would be sorry to believe it". He was a romantic minus the romantic weaknesses and a neo-classical minus his rigidity and unwholesome love for the Status Quo. He wished to replace the 'milk and water' poetry of Romanticism by something vigorous and masculine. "- he had a dual concept of poetry, the Popean ideal, on the one hand, of balanced wit and pungent satire in polished verse that he emulated but hardly achieved, and the

Romantic goal on the other, of 'Look in your heart and write' poetry, as self expression, a liberation of the inner feelings. While most of his poetry, indeed some of his best, fell into the second category, it is necessary to understand that in his deepest being he did not approve of it.63

His satiric penchant drew him inevitably towards the 18th Century Augustans and Juvenal. But he was aware that the 18th Century satire was static but Romantic feelings were dynamic. He realized, rather late, that the rigid Augustan form could not be the proper vehicle for the newly liberated Romantic aspirations. He was a Romantic narrative poet and the Augustan track was too weak to carry the romantic load; for Byron, the track became too wide for the yells. He found the form in the Ottava Rima - a stanza form of eight iambic pentameter lines rhyming ab ab ab cc - which originated in Italy but came to him via Hookham Frere's 'Whistle craft'. He uses this form in 'Beppo', 'The Vision of Judgement' and 'Don Juan', where he transcends the melodramatic romanticism of so much of his earlier works and produces the great anti-romantic, serio-comic poetry of his mature

years. They carry the sure signs of sober understanding of life and his belief in a life which he had really experienced. "They express a zest for life which is conditioned but not inhibited, by a sober sense of what life really is".64

We also find a contradiction in the very fact of his being a poet, as if he was ashamed of what he was, a poet. In 1811 he wrote to his mother, "I have done with authorship ....... scribbling, a disease I hope myself cured of".65 And in 1819 when he was riding the crest of his poetic fame he wrote to Murray, "If one's years can't be better employed than in sweating poesy, a man had better be a ditcher".66 He wished to be a man of action and do something tangible for people known and visible. Unlike his contemporaries he did not wish to be carried on the 'viewless wings of poesy', nor did he believe in the role of inspiration in poetic composition as all his contemporaries did — "Your brother John, he wrote to Elizabeth Pigot, "is seized with a poetic mania, and is now rhyming away at the rate of three lines per hour — so much for inspiration".67 He was very much

66. Ibid - P - 199.
skeptical about the poetic conventions of his own time and doubted its worth so far as the relation between literature and life is concerned, "With regard to poetry in general", he wrote in 1817, "I am convinced the more I think of it, that he (Moore) and all of us - Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, Moore, Campbell, I - are all in the wrong, one as much as the other; that we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system or systems, not worth a damn in itself". 68 He preferred the Augustans for their precision and control as opposed to the romantic effervescence and also because they dealt with facts of life, as opposed to the romantic dreaming. They also wrote narratives as Byron did, but Byron's genius and expansive temperament and varied experience could not be contained within the confines of their polished dignity. Commenting on Hunt's 'Rimini' he wrote, "I told him that I deemed it good poetry at bottom, disfigured only by a strange style. His answer was that his style was a system, or upon systems, or some such cant; and when a man talks of system, his case is hopeless". 69 He was always against systems - a rebel, which is a typical romantic virtue, and in this he was a romantic. "Byron's world is not a

69. Ibid. P - 186.
system; it is a network of systems and orders, some of which may overlap in some ways, some of which do not.\textsuperscript{70}

For Byron poetry is not 'emotions recollected in tranquility', for he never knew what tranquility is, in his whole life, nor is it born out of inspiration, nor is it spinning the yarn of an airy imagination. For him it is passion which is the source of poetry and also its soul. "His was not the tranquil, meditative nature of Wordsworth, finding solace in rusticity, moral lessons in birds' nests and Celandines, and material for narratives in village idiots; nor the rapt contemplative ability to empower self-identification with skylarks, nightingales, Grecian Urns and West Winds, like Shelley and Keats. Emotion recollected in tranquility was not for him. He wrote while the emotion was fresh, and preferably engaged by hatred, injustice or passion."\textsuperscript{71} He wrote poetry because he could not help it. It was like a safety valve that released the inner pressure and relieved him. "My mind has been from late and later events in such a state of fermentation that as usual I have been obliged to employ it in rhyme .... this is my usual resource...... if it were not for some such occupation to dispel reflection during 'inaction' - I believe I should

\textsuperscript{70} McGann, J. J. 'Don Juan in Context'. J. Murray, 1976 p-103.
\textsuperscript{71} Bell, A. C. Op. Cit. p - 7.
very often go mad", 72 he wrote to Lady Melbourne when he was writing *The Bride of Abydos*. He said, "Poetry is the lava of imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake". 73

For the subjects of his poetry he relied on the facts of real life and his own experience. Once he was asked to write a dirge for a girl whom he had never seen and known and he declined, saying, "I would not write anything, without some personal experience and foundation". 74 This reliance on experience gives his poems the sure signs of authenticity and breathes life into them. He does not traffic in abstract ideas; things which are improbable, which do not corroborate with facts - historically or geographically or with real life - have no place in his works. "But I hate things all fiction, there should always be some foundation of fact for the most airy fabric - and pure invention is the talent of a liar". 75 With Byron poetry must be a transcript of life and he liked to find even myth historical. The legend of 'Hero and Leander' intrigued him and prompted him to swim the Bosphorous from Sestos to

73. Ibid. P - 179.
to Abydos to support the cause of the legend or myth. Of 'Meroe Finek' he says, "it is not a political play - it is strictly historical, read the history and judge". He was glad to discover local tradition at Verona supporting the factual basis of 'Romeo and Juliet' (Letters to Moore 7th November, 1816 and to Murray 25th November, 1816).

How much he was drawn towards the active and physical side of life will be clear to us if we have a look at the luggage boot of Byron before he went for his travel in 1816. Here goes - "8 large, solid leather trunks; camp kettle with stoves; water vessels; brass plates to be affixed to the baggage as labels; matting to wrap fragile items; hammock to sleep in at sea; pistols, powder flasks, rifles, carbines, ramrods, bullet moulds, cartridges, balls, gunpowder, and a magazine for storing them. Six portable 3 feet telescopes, six sliding astromic operaes (might be opera glasses with longer range), two silver hunting spring compasses, an elaborate sextant, and a thermometer". which looks more like that of an explorer than of a poet's. When he was involved in the Italian conspiracy he wrote in his diary his

plan of action, "I advised them (Italian patriots) to attack in detail and in different parties, in different places (though at the same time), so as to divide the attention of the troops (Austrian), who though few, yet being disciplined, would beat any body of people (not trained) in a regular fight unless dispersed in small parties and distracted with different assaults. Offered to let them assemble here if they choose. It is a strongish post - narrow street, commanded from within with tenable walls".  

This sounds more like a guerilla leader planning his campaign against a tactically stronger enemy than the ruminations of a cooing poet. He made this point clear in his letter to Lady Byron, "for nothing but a guerilla war can at all equalize unpractised men with a regular army". This throws in relief his worldliness and practical sense and his realism and also shows him less as a dreamer and more as a man of action.

Born out of the wedlock of a handsome but a rake of a father and a scrupulous, strongly religious and intemperate mother, Byron inherited the handsome appearance, the wastrel character and the anti-establishment

attitude of the father and scrupulousness, intemperance and some religious bent, of the mother. He dreamed of becoming something and became something else and the tension born out of the contrasts and contradictions of his life never gave him any rest. All his melancholy, misanthropy, cyclosism and indifference sprang from this and gave him his enigmatic, unpredictable and mercurial character that baffled his acquaintances. His works also, which carry the stamp of this mercurial change of moods, baffled the critics. Himself being aware of this he said to Lady Blessington, "Now, if I know myself, I should say, that I have no character at all - I think of myself is that I am so changeable, being everything by turns and nothing long - I am such a 'melange' of good and evil, that it would be difficult to describe me". He was very handsome but defective in the leg; a sort of puritan yet a rake; moved on impulse but had a strong common sense and a practical bent of the mind; was superstitious but did not believe in faith; attached to his friends but sometimes betrayed their confidences; extremely generous but capable of ordinary meanness; was soft hearted but could turn violent.

and cruel; was a romantic poet but had not faith in either imagination or inspiration; simultaneously attracted and repelled by women; and tragically, a genius of a poet who did not want to become a poet. All these tortured and lacerated his soul which finds its outlet in the passionate outbursts in his poems.

We have tried to show here the shaping forces behind the development of Byron's temperament, both as a man and as a poet, which also set the pace and tone of his poetic career, the direction to the kind of poetry that he would write, the narratives. For Shelley the man and the poet may be the same individual but have distinctly separate identities, the one having no influence over the other. "The poet and the man are two different natures: though they exist together they may be unconscious of each other, and incapable of deciding upon each other's powers and effects by any reflex act." 82 For Byron the two are a single unit and the poet should come out of the man and so it does in his case. His reliance on personal experience to understand the world, his unconventional views about all established institutions and his attitude to life in general made him a great

critic of life; his natural tendency to see the oddities and incongruities of life, to see the truth under the veneer of falsehood made him a great satirist. It was inevitable that Byron should write narratives, for lyrics, soft and 'effeminate' as they are, could never bear the strain of the masculine passion and pungent satire that Byron wielded. All great books say something important about life; Iliad is great because all life is a struggle, Odyssey is great because all life is a journey, the Book of Job is great because all life is a riddle; 'Don Juan' does not aim that high but it tells us with a bitterly sad irony that, what appears to be true may be false at the bottom. Hence it becomes the best expositor of modern society thriving on social, economic and political complexities, and is a crusade against all falsehood, sham and hypocrisy. As the man could never come to any compromise with life so the poet also kept up the same defiance.

"For I will teach, if possible, the stones/ To rise against Earth's tyrants/ Never let it be said that we still truckle unto thrones". (O.J./VIII/135).

Having gone through the process of the making of Byron as a narrative poet we are now in a position to enter into our next field of enquiry. We shall now briefly skim over the history of poetic narration through the ages in general and discuss the mechanics of Byron's narratives in particular. This should equip us to enter into the poems themselves.