*BYRON:*

The poetry of George Gordon Byron(1788-1824) by and large is conspicuous by the element of some free and rebellious elements and moral cynicism. ‘Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage’, a poetic travelogue expressing melancholy and disillusionment, brought him fame, while his complex personality, dashing good looks, and many scandalous love affairs, captured the imagination of Europe.

He wrote the verse tale: ‘The Prisoner of Chillon’, a hymn to liberty and an indictment of tyranny, and Manfred, a poetic drama whose hero reflected Byron’s own guilt and frustration.

His greatest poem ‘Don Juan’ is an unfinished epic- picaresque satire in Ottava Rima (a form of poetry consisting of stanzas of 8 lines of ten or eleven syllables, rhyming abababcc).

Among his numerous other works are verse tales and poetic dramas. As regards to his works, at first he seemed to have been wavering between the classical and romantic principles though he later ended up in a reconciliation of both in a new medium of satirical burlesque(a parody or comically exaggerated imitation of something).

Byron was a melodramatic exploiter of his own emotions, a rhapsodist of Nature and a liberal idealist deploring political oppressions.

He travelled Europe widely. He had a journey to Spain, Malta, Albania, and Greece which lasted almost two years. This provided him not only with abundant new material for his poetry but also with an opportunity to build up for himself a career of a poet: one who is a high- minded wanderer, exiled from a society which he despised . The appearance of the first two cantos of ‘Childe Harold’ in 1812 gave Byron an immediate celebrity status. Child Harold is indeed a projection of the poet himself, which is a sensitive, disillusioned, generous-minded character, prone to rhapsodize over history and to exhort degenerate nations to arise and recover their lost glory. In the poem, the contemplation of Venice rouses him to special eloquence: he devotes over 20 stanzas to an evocation, at once nostalgic and comforting, of the city’s past and contemplation of its present. It is in such passages that Byron’s kinship with the other romantic poets can be most easily traced. Through this work, he aspired to experiment with a verse form which could allow for a variety of expressions and moods, for satire as much as for sentiment. He as a critic of the anomalies of his own time and culture could very fluently and articulately express the spirit of the age(post-revolution era).

His ‘Don Juan’ is a satirical panorama of the ruling classes of his time. His ‘The Vision of Judgment’ is a delightful mockery and pungent satire of Southey’s panegyric of George III. His ‘Don Juan’ is expressive of his poetic genius, which is an ironic replica of the very subject of ‘Childe Harold’- full of the poet’s fancy. ‘Don Juan’ tells us the circuitous wandering of the hero across the Mediterranean world ending in a movement northwards to the Russia of Catherine the Great and finally westwards to the amorously frivolous world of aristocratic London society. It is full of Juan’s adventures and misadventures which serve as reflections of the poet on the supposed glory of war and heroism. In ‘Don Juan’ he could pour his medley of attitudes as ironist and idealist. For example, Juan in England gives Byron the opportunity for a brilliantly satiric portrait of the English society. In ‘Don Juan’, Byron produces a mock epic which is at the same time a criticism of life. ‘Don Juan’ is comic and satiric , but like all true comic satire it is based , indirectly, on a view of man and society.

Byron was one important romantic poet who defended the eighteenth century poetic tradition against his own age.

Byron was an egoist and was also acutely conscious of his guilt and sin- and all these have reflections also in his poetry (sometimes these two traits ran in harness in his art). According to W.H.Auden: “He had no unusual emotional or intellectual vision, and his distinctive contribution to English poetry was to be, not the defiant thunder of the rebel angel, but the speaking voice of the tolerant man-about-town.”

* As a matter of elucidation upon the nature of romanticism in Byron’s poetry, I also whatsapp the image of a poem along with this note titled: SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY.

This poem was written by Byron in 1814. It is a glowing tribute by him to his cousin. What you see in it? You find it to be a neatly controlled description of the beauty of the lady. He tries to express his feeling of a neat coordination between the inner virtue of the lady and her external beauty. To him the serenely smiling face of her is expressive of the lady’s life- which she has lived in a virtuous manner.

The poem is an artistic description of a beautiful lady. A successful relationship has been established between internal character and external beauty. The lady is not just a beautiful doll to be admired. She is a woman who is good, virtuous, calm, innocent and loving. Her beauty comes from inside her.

The poem is an artistically controlled composition. Byron has used Nature sparingly here: “cloudless climes”, “starry skies”, “gaudy day”. He has not used Nature as a foreground, as Wordsworth has done in his poems. The quality of the rhythm is such that the poem outpours to us an impression about the personal inspiration under which he has written it.