THE SECOND GENERATION OF ROMANTIC POETS

In English literature there were two great generations of poets: William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the first; Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats in the second. These writers never formed a movement but they shared a feeling that they were giving voice to a period of political, social and intellectual change.

The Romantic poets of the first generation gave great importance to nature. Wordsworth considered nature as a source of joy, inspiration and knowledge, a mother and a moral guide.

The poets of the second generation were not only attracted to the beauty of nature, but also to its power. For Byron’s hero it was the companion of his loneliness or the counterpart of his stormy feelings when it was violently upset. They saw the individual essentially in a solitary state and exalted the atypical, the outcast, the rebel. This attitude led to the view that the habits, values, rules and standards imposed by a society grounded in reason had to be abandoned. The current of thought represented by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) encouraged the idea that the conventions of civilisation represented intolerable restrictions on the individual personality and produced every kind of corruption and evil. It followed that ‘natural’ behaviour, that is to say, unrestrained and impulsive, was good.

In Byron's masterpiece Childe Harold's Pilgrimage we find the first example of the Byronic hero. The idea of the Byronic hero is one that consists of many different characteristics. The hero must have a rather high level of intelligence and perception as well as be able to easily adapt to new situations and use cunning to his own gain. It is clear from this description that this hero is well-educated and by extension is rather sophisticated in his style. Generally, the hero has a disrespect for certain figures of authority, thus creating the image of the Byronic hero as an exile or an outcast. The hero also has a tendency to be arrogant and cynical, indulging in self-destructive behaviour which leads to the need to seduce women. Although his sexual attraction through being mysterious is rather helpful, it often gets the hero into trouble.

Rousseau’s theories also influenced the ‘cult of the exotic’, the veneration of what is far away both in space and in time. Not only did they welcome picturesque and frightening features and appearances, but also the remote and the unfamiliar in custom and social outlook. Therefore the remotest parts of Europe and the Near East became symbols for other modes of human experience.

EDMUND BURKE AND THE SUBLIME

Edmund Burke, whose Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful was published in 1757, believed, however, that "the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature . . . is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other." [Burke, On the Sublime, ed. J. T. Bolton. 58]

In addition to the emphasis which he places on terror, Burke is important because he explained the opposition of beauty and sublimity by a physiological theory. He made the opposition of pleasure and pain the source of the two aesthetic categories, deriving beauty from pleasure and sublimity from pain. According to Burke, the pleasure of beauty has a relaxing effect on the fibers of the body, whereas sublimity, in contrast, tightens these fibers. Thus, by using the authority of his ingenious theory, he could oppose the beautiful and sublime: "The ideas of the sublime and the beautiful stand on foundations so different, that it is hard, I had almost said impossible, to think of reconciling them in the same subject, without
considerably lessening the effect of the one or the other upon the passions". Burke's use of this physiological theory of beauty and sublimity makes him the first English writer to offer a purely aesthetic explanation of these effects; that is, Burke was the first to explain beauty and sublimity purely in terms of the process of perception and its effect upon the perceiver.

**Edmund Burke**
(12 January 1729 – 9 July 1797) was an Irish statesman born in Dublin. Author, orator, political theorist and philosopher, who, after moving to England, served for many years in the House of Commons of Great Britain as a member of the Whig party. He is mainly remembered for his support of the cause of the American Revolutionaries, and for his later opposition to the French Revolution. Burke was praised by both conservatives and liberals in the 19th century.[5] Since the 20th century, he has generally been viewed as the philosophical founder of modern conservatism.

**GEORGE GORDON BYRON** (page 296)

**CHILDE HAROLD’S PILGRIMAGE**

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is a lengthy narrative poem in four parts written by Lord Byron. It was published between 1812 and 1818 and is dedicated to "Ianthe" (Charlotte Harley, 1801–1880, the second daughter of 5th Earl of Oxford). The poem, written in the “Spenserian Stanza”, consisting of eight iambic pentameter lines followed by one alexandrine (which is a 12-syllable iambic line), describes the travels and reflections of a world-weary young man who, disillusioned with a life of pleasure and revelry, looks for distraction in foreign lands. In a wider sense, it is an expression of the melancholy and disillusionment felt by a generation weary of the wars of the post-Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. The title comes from the term childe, a medieval title for a young man who was a candidate for knighthood. The poem contains elements thought to be autobiographical, as Byron generated some of the storyline from experience gained during his travels through Portugal, the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea between 1809 and 1811.

Childe Harold became a vehicle for Byron's own beliefs and ideas. Despite Byron's initial hesitation at having the first two cantos of the poem published because he felt it revealed too much of himself, it was published, at the urging of friends, by John Murray in 1812, and brought and its author to immediate public attention. Public readings of the poem caused genteel ladies to swoon and, as Byron remarked, “I awoke one morning and found myself famous”. They evoke the glorious past and the famous monuments of the countries Byron visited.

In the third canto Byron uses the attraction to the natural world to to experiment human ability to forget. The fourth canto, which is set in Italy, contains several descriptions of nature, especially of the sea, depicted as the image of sublime and eternity, thus reflecting his mood and feelings.

The differences between the first two and last two cantos ca be easily noted. It is clear that the later cantos are superior poetically: they are the work of a mature Byron, and one who was under the influence of a new friend, Percy Bysshe Shelley.
“Apostrophe to the Ocean”

*Apostrophe to the Ocean* is one of the most renowned masterpieces of George Gordon Byron, which conveys the author’s love for nature by including his unique, romantic style of writing. As this poem is entirely dedicated to the mighty ocean, the main subject of this work is about man versus nature. The title, "Apostrophe to the Ocean" relates to the literary device when the writer speaks to an absent, or dead person as if they were present or personifies an inanimate object as a person not present. Following the namesake, Lord Byron exclaims his wild emotions to the ocean, as if it were the woman he loved and desired.

**CLXXVIII.**

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the Universe, and feel
What I can ne’er express, yet cannot all conceal.

**CLXXIX.**

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
Man marks the earth with ruin—his control
Stops with the shore;—upon the watery plain
The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
A shadow of man’s ravage, save his own,
When for a moment, like a drop of rain,
He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
Without a grave, unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown.

**CLXXVIII.**

C'è piacere nei boschi senza sentieri,
C'è estasi sulla spiaggia solitaria,
C'è compagnia dove nessuno interferisce,
Presso il profondo mare, e musica nel suo ruggito.
Io non amo di meno l'uomo, ma di più la natura,
Da questi nostri colloqui, in cui rubo
Da tutto ciò che posso essere, o che sono stato prima,
Per fondermi con l'Universo, e sentire
Quel che non posso mai esprimere, e tuttavia non posso nascondere.

**CLXXIX.**

Rotola, tu profondo e blu scuro Oceano—rotola!
Diecimila flotte ti percorrono invano;
L'uomo copre la terra di rovine—il suo controllo
Si ferma dove comincia la tua riva;—sulla superficie dell'acqua
I naufraghi sono tutti opera tua, nemmeno rimane
L'ombra dello scempio dell'uomo, eccetto il proprio,
Quando per un momento, come una goccia di pioggia,
Affonda nelle tue profondità con un gemito di bollicine,
Senza tomba, senza rintocchi di campane, senza bara, e ignoto
His steps are not upon thy paths,—thy fields
Are not a spoil for him,—thou dost arise
And shake him from thee; the vile strength he wields
For earth’s destruction thou dost all despise,
Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,
And send’st him, shivering in thy playful spray
And howling, to his gods, where haply lies
His petty hope in some near port or bay,
And dashest him again to earth:—there let him lay.

George Byron also discusses his views about industrialization; throughout the poem, he points out the deleterious effects of human exploitations. Therefore, the poem “Apostrophe to the Ocean” depicts George Byron’s view of the concept of man versus nature by revealing his belief: the power of nature is insurmountable.

In the first stanza we see the poet in perfect solitude but, at the same time, with Nature. He feels he is in communion with the Universe and, more in detail, with the most powerful element in Nature: the sea. Its roar is music to his ears and he steals his being from his interviews with the natural world around him.

The second and third stanzas deal with the major conflict of the poem: man versus nature. In these parts, Byron concludes that man has ruined the earth; however, his destruction cannot reach the vast depth of the ocean. Byron uses many poetic devices such as similes and imageries to contribute to the effect. A man is just “like a drop of rain” against the power of the ocean and he can do nothing but “sink into its depths with bubbling groan.” Byron gives the ocean the right to revenge Nature: “The vile strength he wields/ For earth’s destruction thou dost all despise/ Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies, ... to his gods.” (21–23).