

# 16. George Gordon Byron

## George Gordon Byron

### *Don Juan* (1818-1824)

#### A hero 58

*The prologue to Don Juan makes fun of traditional epic poems, whose heroes were usually perfect, but it is also critical of Byron's contemporary society.*

I want a hero: an uncommon want,  
When every year and month sends forth a new one,  
Till, after cloying<sup>1</sup> the gazettes with cant<sup>2</sup>,  
The age discovers he is not the true one;  
5 Of such as these I should not care to vaunt<sup>3</sup>,  
I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan—  
We all have seen him, in the pantomime,  
Sent to the devil somewhat ere<sup>4</sup> his time.

1. **cloying:** having filled, satiated
2. **cant:** something banal and hypocritical
3. **vaunt:** praise
4. **ere:** before

## George Gordon Byron

### *Hebrew Melodies* (1815)

#### *She Walks in Beauty* 59

The poem belongs to a collection of lyrics, *Hebrew Melodies*, with heterogeneous material and is one of the most popular by Byron. Here he describes his second cousin's wife.

She<sup>1</sup> walks in beauty like the night  
 Of cloudless climes<sup>2</sup> and starry skies,  
 And all that's best of dark and bright  
 Meet in her aspect and her eyes;  
 5 Thus mellowed<sup>3</sup> to the tender light  
 Which heaven to gaudy<sup>4</sup> day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less  
 Had half impaired<sup>5</sup> the nameless grace  
 Which waves in every raven tress<sup>6</sup>  
 10 Or softly lightens o'er her face,  
 Where thoughts serenely sweet express  
 How pure, how dear their dwelling place<sup>7</sup>.

And on that cheek and o'er that brow  
 So soft, so calm yet eloquent,  
 15 The smiles that win, the tints that glow<sup>8</sup>  
 But tell of days in goodness spent  
 A mind at peace with all below<sup>9</sup>,  
 A heart whose love is innocent.

1. **She:** Lady Wilmot Horton, his cousin's wife, a beautiful woman he saw at a party in mourning dress
2. **climes:** countries
3. **mellowed:** sweetened (it. *addolciti*)
4. **gaudy:** very rich
5. **Had half impaired:** Would have half impaired (it. *avrebbero sciupato, rovinato*)
6. **raven tress:** pitch black tresses
7. **dwelling place:** i.e. the lady's mind (it. *dimora*)
8. **tints that glow:** the colours that shine
9. **with all below:** with all the world around