

his own dark mind." The loss of a capacity for pure, unjaded emotion is the constant burden of Byron's lament;

No more, no more, O never more on me
The freshness of the heart shall fall like dew:

and again,

O could I feel as I have felt—or be what I have been,
Or weep as I could once have wept, o'er many a vanished scene;
As springs in deserts found seem sweet, all brackish tho' they be,
So, midst the withered waste of life, those tears would flow to me.

This mood was sincere in Byron; but by cultivating it, and posing too long in one attitude, he became self-conscious and theatrical, and much of his serious poetry has a false ring. His example infected the minor poetry of the time, and it was quite natural that Thackeray—who represented a generation that had a very different ideal of the heroic—should be provoked into describing Byron as "a big sulky dandy."

Byron was well fitted by birth and temperament to be the spokesman of this fierce discontent. He inherited from his mother a haughty and violent temper, and profligate tendencies from his father. He was through life a spoiled child, whose main characteristic was willfulness. He liked to shock people by exaggerating his wickedness, or by perversely maintaining the wrong side of a dispute. But he had traits of bravery and generosity. Women loved him, and he made strong friends. There was a careless charm about him which fascinated natures as unlike each other as Shelley and Scott. By the death of the fifth Lord Byron without issue, Byron came into a title and estates at the age of ten. Though a liberal in politics he had aristocratic feelings, and was vain of his rank as he was of his beauty. He was educated at Harrow and at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was idle and dissipated, but did a great deal of miscellaneous reading. He took some of his Cambridge set—Hobhouse, Matthews, and others—to Newstead Abbey, his ancestral seat, where they filled the ancient cloisters with

eccentric orgies. Byron was strikingly handsome. His face had a spiritual paleness and a classic regularity, and his dark hair curled closely to his head. A deformity in one of his feet was a mortification to him, and impaired his activity in many ways, although he prided himself upon his powers as a swimmer.

In 1815, when at the height of his literary and social *éclat* in London, he married. In February of the following year he was separated from Lady Byron, and left England forever, pursued by the execrations of outraged respectability. In this chorus of abuse there was mingled a share of cant; but Byron got, on the whole, what he deserved. From Switzerland, where he spent a summer by Lake Lemman, with the Shelleys; from Venice, Ravenna, Pisa, and Rome, scandalous reports of his intrigues and his wild debaucheries were wafted back to England, and with these came poem after poem, full of burning genius, pride, scorn, and anguish, and all hurling defiance at English public opinion. The third and fourth cantos of *Childe Harold*, 1816–1818, were a great advance upon the first two, and contain the best of Byron's serious poetry. He has written his name all over the continent of Europe, and on a hundred memorable spots has made the scenery his own. On the field of Waterloo, on "the castled crag of Drachenfels," "by the blue rushing of the arrowy Rhone," in Venice on the Bridge of Sighs, in the Coliseum at Rome, and among the "Isles of Greece," the tourist is compelled to see with Byron's eyes and under the associations of his pilgrimage. In his later poems, such as *Beppo*, 1818, and *Don Juan*, 1819–1823, he passed into his second manner, a mocking cynicism gaining ground upon the somewhat stagey gloom of his early poetry—Mephistophiles gradually elbowing out Satan. *Don Juan*, though morally the worst, is intellectually the most vital and representative of Byron's poems. It takes up into itself most fully the life of the time; exhibits most thoroughly the characteristic

alternations of Byron's moods and the prodigal resources of wit, passion, and understanding, which—rather than imagination—were his prominent qualities as a poet. The hero, a graceless, amorous stripling, goes wandering from Spain to the Greek islands and Constantinople, thence to St. Petersburg, and finally to England. Every-where his seductions are successful, and Byron uses him as a means of exposing the weakness of the human heart and the rottenness of society in all countries. In 1823, breaking away from his life of selfish indulgence in Italy, Byron threw himself into the cause of Grecian liberty, which he had sung so gloriously in the *Isles of Greece*. He died at Missolonghi, in the following year, of a fever contracted by exposure and overwork.

Byron was a great poet but not a great literary artist. He wrote negligently and with the ease of assured strength; his mind gathering heat as it moved, and pouring itself forth in reckless profusion. His work is diffuse and imperfect; much of it is melodrama or speech-making, rather than true poetry. But, on the other hand, much, very much of it is unexcelled as the direct, strong, sincere utterance of personal feeling. Such is the quality of his best lyrics, like *When We Two Parted*, the *Elegy on Thyrsa*, *Stanzas to Augusta*, *She Walks in Beauty*, and of innumerable passages, lyrical and descriptive, in his longer poems. He had not the wisdom of Wordsworth, nor the rich and subtle imagination of Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats when they were at their best. But he had greater body and motive force than any of them. He is the strongest personality among English poets since Milton, though his strength was wasted by want of restraint and self-culture. In Milton the passion was there, but it was held in check by the will and the artistic conscience, made subordinate to good ends, ripened by long reflection, and finally uttered in forms of perfect and harmonious beauty. Byron's love of Nature was quite different in kind from Wordsworth's. Of all English

poets he has sung most lyrically of that national theme, the sea; as witness, among many other passages, the famous apostrophe to the ocean which closes *Childe Harold*, and the opening of the third canto in the same poem,

Once more upon the waters, etc.

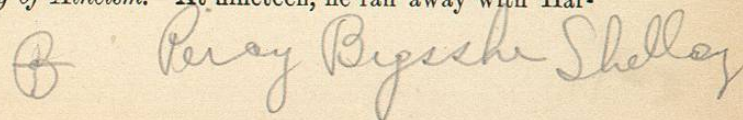
He had a passion for night and storm, because they made him forget himself.

Most glorious night!

Thou wert not sent for slumber! Let me be
A sharer in thy fierce and far delight,
A portion of the tempest and of thee!

Byron's literary executor and biographer was the Irish poet, Thomas Moore, a born song-writer, whose *Irish Melodies*, set to old native airs, are, like Burns's, genuine, spontaneous singing, and run naturally to music. Songs such as the *Meeting of the Waters*, *The Harp of Tara*, *Those Evening Bells*, the *Light of Other Days*, *Araby's Daughter*, and the *Last Rose of Summer* were, and still are, popular favorites. Moore's Oriental romance, *Lalla Rookh*, 1817, is overlaid with ornament and with a sugary sentiment that clogs the palate. He had the quick Irish wit, sensibility rather than passion, and fancy rather than imagination.

Byron's friend, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), was also in fiery revolt against all conventions and institutions, though his revolt proceeded not, as in Byron's case, from the turbulence of passions which brooked no restraint, but rather from an intellectual impatience of any kind of control. He was not, like Byron, a sensual man, but temperate and chaste. He was, indeed, in his life and in his poetry, as nearly a disembodied spirit as a human creature can be. The German poet, Heine, said that liberty was the religion of this century, and of this religion Shelley was a worshiper. His rebellion against authority began early. He refused to fag at Eton, and was expelled from Oxford for publishing a tract on the *Necessity of Atheism*. At nineteen, he ran away with Har-

 Percy Bysshe Shelley

riet Westbrook, and was married to her in Scotland. Three years later he deserted her for Mary Godwin, with whom he eloped to Switzerland. Two years after this his first wife drowned herself in the Serpentine, and Shelley was then formally wedded to Mary Godwin. All this is rather startling, in the bare statement of it, yet it is not inconsistent with the many testimonies that exist to Shelley's singular purity and beauty of character, testimonies borne out by the evidence of his own writings. Impulse with him took the place of conscience. Moral law, accompanied by the sanction of power, and imposed by outside authority, he rejected as a form of tyranny. His nature lacked robustness and ballast. Byron, who was at the bottom intensely practical, said that Shelley's philosophy was too spiritual and romantic. Hazlitt, himself a Radical, wrote of Shelley: "He has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophic fanatic. He is sanguine-complexioned and shrill-voiced." It was, perhaps, with some recollection of this last-mentioned trait of Shelley the man, that Carlyle wrote of Shelley the poet, that "the sound of him was shrieky," and that he had "filled the earth with an inarticulate wailing."

His career as a poet began, characteristically enough, with the publication, while at Oxford, of a volume of political rimes, entitled *Margaret Nicholson's Remains*, Margaret Nicholson being the crazy woman who tried to stab George III. His boyish poem, *Queen Mab*, was published in 1813; *Alastor* in 1816, and the *Revolt of Islam*—his longest—in 1818, all before he was twenty-one. These were filled with splendid, though unsubstantial, imagery, but they were abstract in subject, and had the faults of incoherence and formlessness which make Shelley's longer poems wearisome and confusing. They sought to embody his social creed of perfectionism, as well as a certain vague pantheistic system of belief in a spirit of love in nature and man, whose presence

is a constant source of obscurity in Shelley's verse. In 1818 he went to Italy, where the last four years of his life were passed, and where, under the influences of Italian art and poetry, his writing became deeper and stronger. He was fond of yachting, and spent much of his time upon the Mediterranean. In the summer of 1822 his boat was swamped in a squall, off the Gulf of Spezzia, and Shelley's drowned body was washed ashore, and burned in the presence of Byron and Leigh Hunt. The ashes were entombed in the Protestant cemetery at Rome, with the epitaph, *Cor cordium*.

Shelley's best and maturest work, nearly all of which was done in Italy, includes his tragedy, *The Cenci*, 1819, and his lyrical drama, *Prometheus Unbound*, 1821. The first of these has a unity and a definiteness of contour unusual with Shelley, and is, with the exception of some of Robert Browning's, the best English tragedy since Otway. Prometheus represented to Shelley's mind the human spirit fighting against divine oppression, and in his portrayal of this figure he kept in mind not only the *Prometheus* of Æschylus, but the Satan of *Paradise Lost*. Indeed, in this poem, Shelley came nearer to the sublime than any English poet since Milton. Yet it is in lyrical, rather than in dramatic, quality that *Prometheus Unbound* is great. If Shelley be not, as his latest editor, Mr. Forman, claims him to be, the foremost of English lyrical poets, he is at least the most lyrical of them. He had, in a supreme degree, the "lyric cry." His vibrant nature trembled to every breath of emotion, and his nerves craved ever newer shocks; to pant, to quiver, to thrill, to grow faint in the spasm of intense sensation. The feminine cast observable in Shelley's portrait is borne out by this tremulous sensibility in his verse. It is curious how often he uses the metaphor of wings: of the winged spirit, soaring, like his skylark, till lost in music, rapture, light, and then falling back to earth. Three successive moods—longing, ecstasy, and the revulsion of despair—are

expressed in many of his lyrics; as in the *Hymn to the Spirit of Nature* in *Prometheus*, in the ode *To a Skylark*, and in the *Lines to an Indian Air*—Edgar Poe's favorite. His passionate desire to lose himself in Nature, to become one with that spirit of love and beauty in the universe which was to him in place of God, is expressed in the *Ode to the West Wind*, his most perfect poem:

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is;
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
 Will take from both a deep autumnal tone
 Sweet, though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
 My spirit! be thou me, impetuous one!

In the lyrical pieces already mentioned, together with *Adonais*, the lines *Written in the Euganean Hills*, *Epipsy-chidion*, *Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples*, *A Dream of the Unknown*, and many others, Shelley's lyrical genius reaches a rarer loveliness and a more faultless art than Byron's ever attained, though it lacks the directness and momentum of Byron.

In Shelley's longer poems, intoxicated with the music of his own singing, he abandons himself wholly to the guidance of his imagination, and the verse seems to go on of itself, like the enchanted boat in *Alastor*, with no one at the helm. Vision succeeds vision in glorious but bewildering profusion; ideal landscapes and cities of cloud "pinnacled dim in the intense inane." These poems are like the water-falls in the Yosemite, which, tumbling from a height of several thousand feet, are shattered into foam by the air, and waved about over the valley. Very beautiful is this descending spray, and the rainbow dwells in its bosom; but there is no longer any stream, nothing but an iridescent mist. The word *ethereal* best expresses the quality of Shelley's genius. His poetry is full of atmospheric effects; of the tricks which light plays with the fluid elements of water and air; of stars,

clouds, rain, dew, mist, frost, wind, the foam of seas, the phases of the moon, the green shadows of waves, the shapes of flames, the "golden lightning of the setting sun." Nature, in Shelley, wants homeliness and relief. While poets like Wordsworth and Burns let in an ideal light upon the rough fields of earth, Shelley escapes into a "moonlight-colored" realm of shadows and dreams, among whose abstractions the heart turns cold. One bit of Wordsworth's mountain turf is worth them all.

By the death of John Keats (1796-1821), whose elegy Shelley sang in *Adonais*, English poetry suffered an irreparable loss. His *Endymion*, 1818, though disfigured by mawkishness and by some affectations of manner, was rich in promise. Its faults were those of youth, the faults of exuberance and of a sensibility, which time corrects. *Hyperion*, 1820, promised to be his masterpiece, but he left it unfinished—"a Titanic torso"—because, as he said, "there were too many Miltonic inversions in it." The subject was the displacement by Phœbus Apollo of the ancient sun-god, Hyperion, the last of the Titans who retained his dominion. It was a theme of great capabilities, and the poem was begun by Keats with a strength of conception which leads to the belief that here was once more a really epic genius, had fate suffered it to mature. The fragment, as it stands—"that inlet to severe magnificence"—proves how rapidly Keats's diction was clarifying. He had learned to string up his loose chords. There is nothing maudlin in *Hyperion*; all there is in whole tones and in the grand manner, "as sublime as Æschylus," said Byron, with the grave, antique simplicity, and something of modern sweetness interfused.

Keats's father was a groom in a London livery-stable. The poet was apprenticed at fifteen to a surgeon. At school he had studied Latin but not Greek. He, who of all the English poets had the most purely Hellenic spirit, made acquaintance with Greek literature and art only through the medium of

John Keats

classical dictionaries, translations, and popular mythologies; and later through the marbles and casts in the British Museum. His friend, the artist Haydon, lent him a copy of Chapman's Homer, and the impression that it made upon him he recorded in his sonnet, *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*. Other poems of the same inspiration are his three sonnets, *To Homer*, *On Seeing the Elgin Marbles*, *On a Picture of Leander, Lamia*, and the beautiful *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. But Keats's art was retrospective and eclectic, the blossom of a double root; and "golden-tongued Romance with serene lute" had her part in him, as well as the classics. In his seventeenth year he had read the *Faerie Queene*, and from Spenser he went on to a study of Chaucer, Shakspeare and Milton. Then he took up Italian and read Ariosto. The influence of these studies is seen in his poem, *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil*, taken from a story of Boccaccio; in his wild ballad, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*; and in his love tale, the *Eve of St. Agnes*, with its wealth of mediæval adornment. In the *Ode to Autumn*, and *Ode to a Nightingale*, the Hellenic choiceness is found touched with the warmer hues of romance.

There is something deeply tragic in the short story of Keats's life. The seeds of consumption were in him; he felt the stirrings of a potent genius, but he knew that he could not wait for it to unfold, but must die

Before high-piled books in charactry
Hold like rich garners the full-ripened grain.

His disease was aggravated, possibly, by the stupid brutality with which the reviewers had treated *Endymion*; and certainly by the hopeless love which devoured him. "The very thing which I want to live most for," he wrote, "will be a great occasion of my death. If I had any chance of recovery, this passion would kill me." In the autumn of 1820, his disease gaining apace, he went on a sailing vessel to Italy,

accompanied by a single friend, a young artist named Severn. The change was of no avail, and he died at Rome a few weeks after, in his twenty-sixth year.

Keats was, above all things, the *artist*, with that love of the beautiful and that instinct for its reproduction which are the artist's divinest gifts. He cared little about the politics and philosophy of his day, and he did not make his poetry the vehicle of ideas. It was sensuous poetry, the poetry of youth and gladness. But if he had lived, and if, with wider knowledge of men and deeper experience of life, he had attained to Wordsworth's spiritual insight and to Byron's power of passion and understanding, he would have become a greater poet than either. For he had a style—a "natural magic"—which only needed the chastening touch of a finer culture to make it superior to any thing in modern English poetry, and to force us back to Milton or Shakspeare for a comparison. His tombstone, not far from Shelley's, bears the inscription of his own choosing: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." But it would be within the limits of truth to say that it is written in large characters on most of our contemporary poetry. "Wordsworth," says Lowell, "has influenced most the ideas of succeeding poets; Keats their forms." And he has influenced these out of all proportion to the amount which he left, or to his intellectual range, by virtue of the exquisite quality of his *technique*.

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1. Mrs. Oliphant's *Literary History of England, 18th-19th Centuries*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1883.
 2. *Wordsworth's Poems*. Chosen and edited by Matthew Arnold. London, 1879.
 3. *Poetry of Byron*. Chosen and arranged by Matthew Arnold. London, 1881.
 4. Shelley. Julian and Maddalo, Prometheus Unbound, The Cenci, Lyrical Pieces.

5. Landor. Pericles and Aspasia.
6. Coleridge. Table-Talk, Notes on Shakspeare, The Ancient Mariner, Christabel, Love, Ode to France, Ode to the Departing Year, Kubla Khan, Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni, Youth and Age, Frost at Midnight.
7. De Quincey. Confessions of an English Opium Eater, Flight of a Tartar Tribe, Biographical Sketches.
8. Scott. Waverley, Heart of Midlothian, Bride of Lammermoor, Rob Roy, Antiquary, Marmion, Lady of the Lake.
9. Keats. Hyperion, Eve of St. Agnes, Lyrical Pieces.
Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1871.