

Byronic Hero, Prototype of Superman and the Cultural Values of Byron

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Abstract

Byron has the psychological disposition of passion, indulgence, fury, self-esteem, self-inferiority, hatred and resistance, and these kinds of psychological dispositions influence his cultural personality. He with his natural simplicity fought and battered wildly the hard shell of modern civilization. There is no romantic poet like Byron making such a comprehensive, profound and thorough negation for human liberation in modern civilization. Byron has a non moral tendency in the cultural personality, but in fact it is a kind anti civilization tendency in romantic style. Byron used his Byronic hero to express the rebellion to the whole value system of the traditional civilization and pushed the trend of new individualism to a new stage. Byron initiated a new concept of culture value, which is a kind of spiritual connection with the Superman Philosophy of Nietzsche. The readers after reading Byron's works can not help but to meditate about the humanistic significance. As the Chinese readers focus on how Byron and Byronic hero he depicted influence Chinese Romantic poets as well as the whole literature circle in the long run.

Key words: Byron; Byronic hero; Nietzsche; Superman; Cultural values; Chinese romantic literature

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INTRODUCTION

The Enlightenment has bred the Romantic Movement, and the peak of the Romantic Movement is featured by the appearance of Byron. Byron has put criticism on the old culture to the climax since the beginning of the Enlightenment. In fact, from the point of view of cultural change, Byron really can be called Napoleon in the sense of literature and culture who was against the traditional cultural values and described the prototype of the modern Superman. Rousseau appreciated the virtues, while Byron appreciated the evil. This is not only the distinction between Byron and Rousseau, but also the distinction between Byron and other great people since the Enlightenment Movement.

Byron's psychological natures are interrelated and work together to decide his cultural personality: First, passion and indulgence make him play the love game forming the confrontation between natural love and the ancient morals. In the deep sense of guilt Byron suck the sweet at the same time, and the traditional morals cast him with the nickname of "love devil". Second, self esteem, resistance and rage make him hate all repressive external authority and social system. He holds compassion for the weak and supports the weak nation to fight for freedom and independence but also advocates individualism and anarchism. Third, contempt for the moral hypocrisy, especially that in the British aristocracy makes him not fit for the upper class and became the rebellion of the nobility. Fourth, hatred, violence and arrogance make him resist the power at the same time, and loneliness and helplessness bring him to the extreme pessimism and despair. The special psychological character affects Byron's cultural personality. There is no romantic poet like Byron makes such a comprehensive, profound, thorough negation of modern civilization. In the pursuit of the freedom and liberation of human nature, Byron is seeking the ideal of a new cultural value through the

depicting the characters of Byronic Hero. It should be said that Byron himself is such a hero!

1. BYRONIC HERO AND PROTOTYPE OF SUPERMAN

Nietzsche called for true self and individualism, which is the common pursuit of Romantic literature. The characters in his works try to deny himself, transcend himself, change himself and even remold the world. He dared to say "The Lord is dead" and refuse to follow the arrangement of God and declare that there is no destined destination. What is different is that Nietzsche is looking for it through the superman type. Nietzschean "Superman" was born as a contradictory mixture similar with external attributes and internal attributes of Byronic hero. Based on the two sides, Nietzsche emphasized Superman's transcendence of human physical ability. This transcendence is often misunderstood as admiration for the gods or as the expansion of one's own power so as to achieve complete control of destiny. In the era of industrial age, when the gods were no longer as prevailing as before the emergence of Nietzschean Superman seemed to indirectly verify the psychological demands of human beings' attempt to conquer the nature and the gods. But a fact that Nietzsche, the creator of the Superman theory, is a philosopher is ignored. Nietzsche originally intended to encourage and appeal to people not to worship the gods, moreover to free human as an individual with high self recognition from the old civilization, cultural background and traditional morals. Compared with the Byronic hero, some interesting common attributes such as self-destructive liberalism, being isolated from the public, contempt of the criticism etc. can be found in Nietzsche's narration. Nietzsche inspired the solitary individuals to struggle in maintaining independent personality and dignity. In the process of bitter struggle, the individual heroes develop themselves fully and display their personality clearly. Through their seemingly fearless fight, the heroes succeed in proving their value and significance of living in this mortal and carnal world. Their independent personality and dignity make them holy and sacred in the dark and hierarchical society. Yet their intentional or unintentional mistakes and trivial or mortal sins as well as the correspondingly caused suffering and despair prove that freedom of individuality and liberty is relative not definite and also improve that the indulgence in the absolute freedom can make a person go to the destruction or even hell. So in fact Nietzschean Superman is actually the continuation of the Byron hero. To put it in another way, Byron is the spiritual mentor of Nietzsche.

Byron's hero does not want to get rescued by self-exile and does not want to change the situation through the political and social resistance but through the bearing loneliness to understand the meaning of life and pain. But

Byronic hero is still proudly independent, never compromise to a hard life. Byronic hero with the natural desire in the way of Superman style behaves in the opposite direction of the moral law, resulting in the accusation from the public as being without morality. And in Nietzsche's view, life is a spring of happiness. The natural impulse of the original desire can not be stopped, but the traditional Christian morality is against life. The human's life of this kind of happiness is considered as a sin, so that mankind has always carried the fear of moral crime, leading to the people's weak vitality, so Nietzsche takes view of the innocence of the formation to deny the traditional moral basis. Similarly, Byronic hero's love and desire to chase happiness and unstrained style are all the natural state of human nature, all showing negation of traditional moral civilization. Therefore, Byronic hero showing the characters of Nietzsche's superman overthrow the moral system of the western countries.

2. HUMANISTIC MEDITATION ABOUT BYRON

Byron was one of the people who fought for freedom and liberation in nineteenth Century. After Byron died, "Byron Heat" appeared in European continent. Lots of poets considered living like Byron who was against the oppression, fought for the freedom as the highest honor. This is very rare in the history of European literature. Byron used his actions and his poems to closely link and knot together with the emotions and feelings of the oppressed mass. From the perspective of the social and political revolution and the national movement, the significance of Byron and his works are highly recognized by people in particular by people in China.

In the history of British Romantic literature, Byron's creations and works describing the picturesque nature may not as good, refined and elegant as those of Wordsworth and Keats and in the artistic effect of poetry there is no much of the original contribution in Byron's works. However, romantic poetry is characterized as full of description of strong feelings, it seems to be true that only Byron's creation and works are to live up to the standard of Romantic literature as far as the intensive emotion. To put it in another way, other poets' works can be compared to the trickling rivulet Byron's works can be compared to the main river or sea in the sense of the strength of emotion. There is no doubt that Byron represents the peak of the romantic literature of the United Kingdom and the Europe. As Russell said, the most famous romantic person probably would have to be Byron. From the perspective of the history of western culture, Byron is also a river or a sea, a sky touching mountain. His passionate poems, blowing like a hurricane, roll up monstrous waves in a vast expanse of water. As Russell said Byron was equipped with complete romantic elements, such as rebellion, resistance, contempt

of the routines, thoughtlessness, noble behavior etc.. He is the Napoleon in the European cultural circle. He has caused a lasting meditation for Humanity (Russell, 1997, pp.233-235).

Byron's description is in his strong spirit of transcendence and the will of life. The connotation of people's self awareness, which is the core of the culture, is growing up in this soil which is cultivated by Byron. And Byron proudly stood on the traditional culture which is more tall and sturdy.

Byronic hero with strong self awareness has the inherent characters of breaking through spirit and strong living will which broaden the definition of self awareness defined and pursued by writers and poets since the Renaissance in Europe. Byronic hero is a man of flesh or mould who is not immortal and not equipped with superpower. Byronic hero is stronger and tougher individual who outshines the mediocre royals like hesitating and weak Hamlet or confused Faust. The Byronic hero braves unpleasant or dangerous conditions and marches forward with burdens.

Byron and Byron's heroes, which showed a non moral tendency, which means that Byron's doubt, challenge and rebellion to the whole value system of the traditional civilization since the morality is the core of culture and civilization, in fact, Byron's rebellion going beyond the moral realm is directed to the whole culture and civilization. Byron is not like Nietzsche denying the old morality consciously reconstructing the new one. In fact, it is not necessarily a successful reconstruction. While Byron's characters seem to advocate the spirit and principles of the ancient Greek gods who live in the world with no sense of sin in the ancient Greek myth. Byron describes a series of characters with values of the ancient Greek culture, and these characters have been forced into desperate or the dead end of the old moral environment. The intense rebellion in the moral and cultural sense is the cultural reason why Byron is called "demon", this is precisely why Byron has the most profound cultural value.

Byron and Byronic hero are away from the public, sometimes they have the extreme individualism, but they love human beings and this love is featured with the eagerness of Promethean, depth of Jesus Christ. At this point, we can say, Byron in the cultural sense can be comparable with Napoleon in the sense of the social and political significance: Napoleon has brought a new era of political freedom in Europe; Byron advocated a new cultural value, which is further developed into the philosophy of Superman in the modern era by Nietzsche. There is no wonder the philosopher Russell mentioned repeatedly in his Western history of philosophy, Nietzsche is always very sympathetic to Byron. Sometimes viewpoint of Byron is also occasionally closer to Nietzsche's view. Nietzsche views the great man as god; in Byron's opinion, the great man is like Titan who

has usually been fighting with. The words "occasionally" and "sometimes" should be changed to "often". It can be said that Byron is the spiritual mentor of Nietzsche, and the Byronic hero is the prototype of superman! (Russell, 1999, pp.229-300)

The poets in China have been admiring Byron and appreciating his works since the Romantic literature was introduced to China. Byron's works inspired the poets in China with the awareness of Romantic thinking. Typically speaking, in the Movement of May the Furth in China the young took advantage of the spirits and ideology of Romantic works especially the works of Byron which are full of rebellious force to break through the restrain and confine from the Chinese classics, get free from the routine writing, liberate the individual character of poets and show the poets' dignity and rights. The change in modern Chinese literature is called the "New Literature" and is considered as the liberation of literature as well as the liberation of people. The self-esteem is one of the core in Byron's works which made the poets in China at that time realize their condition of the "dead-living man", recognize the real nature of the conventional writing style which ruined the natural character of human being. A Chinese great literature man named Guo Muoruo influenced by this recognition once wrote his opinions as I was the god and the reflection of the nature. His findings reflected the new idea of the human itself. It is easy to find the self-expression and self-praise in a way of "hysterical condition" in his poems. He depicted a super big "self" who can stand on one side of the world and even can swallow the universe; this "self" can make the sun bow to him and can come to life again after the death just the burned and dead phoenix can have another life. Just like Byron who praised "devil", Satan, he praised the "gangsters" and cheered "long life" to the gangsters in the social revolution. He called for the pressed people to fight and destroy all the "dark force". Another great literature man named Lu Xun admired the rebellious character and in his writings he expressed his identification with Byron and Byronic Heroes. He depicted the characters in his works who have a lot in common with the Byronic heroes. Though the characters are not as unstrained and outstanding in the world as the Byronic heroes, they are equipped with the eagerness for self-liberation and strong self-awareness; they are against the outside world and endure the loneliness and isolation but stick to their own principals; they hate the society at that time and refuse to follow the routine and conventional standard; they are so different that they are isolated by most of the people; they mock the society and even themselves. It is not difficult to find this kind of characters in his masterpiece *Dairy of a Madman*. Xu Zhimo the great poet also admired the rebellious spirits of Byron. In his work of Byron, he called Byron as the greatest son of the world and believed that the treaded road in the earthly world is not prepared for Byron and the earthly chains can not lock the wings and

feather of Byron. The contempt for the society and the passion to rebel as that of Byron echo in his poems (Luo, 1992).

CONCLUSION

Byron represents the peak of the Romantic Movement, the Byronic heroes are featured with much stronger romantic emotions: passion, indulgence, fury, self-esteem, self-inferiority, hatred and resistance which mold his cultural personality. His cultural personalities can find relics in the following literature men. Nietzsche as the most typical one expresses another similar feeling and spirit of the human figure, the superman. The superman tries to deny himself, transcend himself, change himself and even remold the world. He dared to say "The Lord is dead" and refuse to follow the arrangement of God and declare that there is no doomed destination. In fact Nietzschean Superman is actually the continuation of the Byron hero. To put it in another way, Byron is the spiritual mentor of Nietzsche. The readers after reading Byron's works can not help but to meditate about the humanistic significance. Byronic hero are equipped with the rebellious spirits which influence not only the poets but also the common

mass of live and even to fight in the extreme hard conditions. Chinese readers focus on how Byron and Byronic hero he depicted influence Chinese Romantic poets as well as the whole literature circle in the long run.

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