



The Byronic Hero: A Study of The Giaour

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Byronic hero, Giaour, Vampire, Narcissism, Gothic villain, Frankenstein and self-destructive impulses.

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ABSTRACT *The most spectacular manifestation of the Byronic Hero is found in Byron's poem The Giaour. The poem is a disjointed fragment of a Turkish Tale. The section wise analysis of the poem is offered with reference to the revenge motive, the characterization of Giaour, Leila and Hassan, the setting, the use of image, and the representation of the Byronic hero and his peculiar traits and also of the vampire. The various transformations of the Byronic Hero and the Gothic villain into terrible actions but attractive charms are related. Frankenstein by Mary Shelley and Vampyre by Polidori are the earliest variations of the manifestations of the paradoxical nature of such a fictional character. Charlotte Brontë has put forward the character of Heathcliff that is motivated by the revenge theme. In films like Dracula, in Television serials and in works of novelists like Ian Flaming and J. K. Rowling the same figure of the Byronic Hero is portrayed with the self-destructive tendencies, narcissism and impulsive behavior. The Byronic Hero, Gothic villain and the Vampire are impulsively negative but undoubtedly fascinating.*

0-1 Byron's The Giaour (1813)

Byron's poem The Giaour, is a fragment of a Turkish tale. The poem begins with a reference to the tomb above the rocks. The location mentions the relationship between the rose and the nightingale. The location is such that the sweets given by Nature are returned in soft incense to Heaven. On these islands, there ought to be peace whereas the passions, lust and revenge are not only proudly riot but wildly experienced. The inheritors of Hell dwelt freely on this serene clime. The poet refers to the love of the bird nightingale or bulbul for the flower which is a well-known oriental myth that foreshadows the tragic doom in this Turkish tale in which Leila, Giaour and Hassan play their assigned roles. What was a glorious landscape has suffered on account of self-abasement, and that has paved the way to villain-bonds and the sway of despots? Young Giaour came like the simoom as the harbinger of fate and gloom to turn the palace into a tomb for Hassan's sin. His speedy arrival and sudden departure have been poetically described to create the atmosphere of suspense and thrill in the events unfolded. It is the story of incidents, which are marked by Passion, Lust, Rapine, Fate and Gloom. The mention of the bird 'bulbul' (nightingale) and the flower (gul) and their relationship foreshadows what is about to follow.

1 -2 Foreshadowed Tragic Doom

The tragic doom is indicated through the initial section in which the wave and the tomb predominate to ask a rhetorical question like 'when shall such Hero live again?' (The Giaour, line 6). The first line of The Giaour states that "no breaths of air break the wave" (The Giaour, line 1). Death is associated with the physical condition of the lack of breath. The language of death is used in connection with the 'Athenian's Grave' and how, 'that tomb which gleaming o'er the cliff,/ First greets the homeward-veering skiff.' (The Giaour, lines 2-4). The story begins with death because the poet Byron desires to suggest that the hero of the tale is dead, is no longer living.

The next section moves from death to life. It is a celebration of life, a song of nature and a tale of love. There is a lengthy reference to life where season smiles benignant over the blessed islands. Each gentle air is welcome. The garden queen the Rose flower is unbent by winds and unchilled by snows. Nature is as if the dwelling place for nature. Every charm and grace is mixed with the paradise. Man is enamored of distress. Man shall mar Nature into wilderness

and trample, brute-like over every flower. Then the image of Hell is evoked. Man is compared to a brute, and is compared to Nature as well. The consistency of life and death is brought out. Likewise, Man will do his best to conquer nature if he can. Man's life is finite but nature is infinite. In the fair clime, nature is not immune to pain at the hands of men. The days have passed when man was worthy of that clime. The hearts within the valleys bred the fiery souls that might have led them to sublime deeds. Each evil pollutes the mankind. This will lead to a mournful tale.

The poet points out the conditions in Greece in the past and at present. It is Greece but no more living Greece. However, it is so coldly sweet and so deadly fair. As soul is wanting, it is the loneliness in deaths. It is but to die and to go not knowing where that course lies in obstruction. The description reminds of a painful remembrance of the features of the dead, a few hours and but for a few hours after the spirit is not there. In case of any violent death, there is the expression of languor. The death from a stab preserves the traits of feeling or ferocity. Greece has been Freedom's home or Glory's grave. The living page of Greece will witness to the graves of those that cannot die.

0-2 Arrival of Giaour

On the far and dark sea, the fisherman's light skiff is being propelled by the oars, though worn and wearies with his toil he slowly but strongly plies the oar. On the Eastern night, the light boat reaches safer shores. The young rider Giaour comes thundering on a dark horse. The young and pale Giaour glides like a meteor driven by fiery passion. His aspect and his air are impressive. The crescent glimmers on the hill, the mosque's high lamps are still quivering. The flashes of each joyous peal are seen to prove the Moslem's zeal, on the night of Ramazan and the Bairam's feast. Who are you of foreign garb and fearful brow?

Giaour's face is marked by hatred and ghastly whiteness of gloom. His eyes glazed, and his arm was fiercely raised. Slumber starts at the owl's scream. He rides away and away for life. Winters of memory seemed to roll. It was eternity to thought! For infinite as boundless space, the thought that conscience must embrace, Giaour is gone and woe to that hour he came or went!

The horse has vanished from the stall. The lonely spider, the

Bat, the Owl and the wild-dog are mentioned in order to indicate that the blood that warmed his heart is shed. Never shall Hassan's Age repose along the brink at Twilight's close. There lingers Life. Solitude, Decay, Gloom and Desolation has dominated the scene. The wild-dog's howl over the fountain's brim is what proves that the lord of the house is no more alive. With Hassan's courtesy and pity died. Hassan is killed by Giaour. Man may destroy himself, and all the gilded halls lie in ruins. Life will go on as nature has been overgrown with these ruins. The stone and building materials used on Hassan's home are all dead materials. These crumble and give way before the living substances of nature of which wood overtakes the dead materials and thus introduces life again there.

The very setting of the story presents the complex relationship between life and death. The story is set in the East away from England. The East is associated with the rising of the sun and is traditionally linked with life. Light fades into darkness in order to bring out the connection with the West which is linked with death. In the case of characters of Hassan and Giaour, the representation is symbolic. Hassan belongs to the East, and that symbolizes life. Giaour, being a westerner, is associated with death. Giaour comes to the east and with him brought the death of Hassan, Leila and Giaour himself. Giaour arrives with the 'raven charger' that connotes the death. The dry fountain and thirst for blood to bring out the association with death. The famine and the winter of memory indicates that Giaour is the messenger of fate and gloom that will turn the palace into the tomb. (The Giaour, line 281). The autobiographical incidents are reflected. Leila is the fundamental source of life and death. Both Hassan and Giaour live for her love; they love her and are ready to suffer. Hassan has ended Leila's life, and that has caused his own death.

The belief about the vampire is that the vampire transforms itself into a moth or a butterfly. Then it tries to escape. The capture of the butterfly flying from the grave is often attempted to burn it in fire. "Rising on its purple wing/the insect-queen of eastern spring" and its pursuit is presented. A protracted image of the insect-queen from lines (386 to 421) foreshadows the move of deaths. The boy chasing the insect-queen which grows into manhood and Beauty is blighted in an hour. Its brightest hues, charm and beauty turn into the tears. The next image is of comparing the tormented mind with the scorpion surrounded by guilty woes, stings its own desperate brain. It is darkness above and despairs beneath.

Hassan dealt with Leila in a brutal manner. It was rumored that Leila went to the bath. Hassan came to know of her infidelity to him. Leila's gaze was like that of the Gazelle. Young Leila was treated as a soulless toy for a tyrant's lust; she stood superior to all because of the pomegranate-like hue of her cheeks and her shining hair. Leila was armed with beauty, and her heart was tendered to her mate. Her mate was Hassan, but Hassan found her faithless to him. She had become an infidel because she was charmed by Giaour. The Tartar was recognized by his yellow cap.

1-4 Fight for Love

The grove of pine is the place of action where Hassan disdains to light from his horse. Hassan's frown and furious words are dreaded more than his hostile sword. In fuller sight, more near and near, the ambushed foes appear and advance. It is rhetorically asked who leads them with a foreign brand. By his pallid brow, by his evil eye, his treacherous envy, his black barb and, by his vile faith. The foe is recognized to be lost Leila's lover- accursed Giaour- the renegade. Hassan judges Giaour to be a renegade. When the river rolls into the ocean, the sea-tides' opposing motion indicate the fighting of the opponents. Fate and fear drive them along. Their strife neither spares nor speaks for life. Love could never part for all that beauty sighs to grant. Hate bestows the last embrace

of the foe. When grappling in the sight, they fold those arms that never lost their hold. Once met, true foes are joined to death. The day was destined to have a stormy end and so Hassan falls and lies when the hour seals his end and his quenchless hate.

Both Hassan and Giaour live for their love for Leila. It is their love for Leila, which makes them both murderers and these results in their deaths. Leila is thrown in a sack into the water. She sleeps beneath the wave in her death. Leila's death leads to a series of other deaths. There is death even within the character of Giaour. He is frustrated that she will not come to him so that both can escape. Leila has already died and so there are no chances of happy future with her. Giaour kills Hassan and the purpose of his life—the thirst for revenge of Leila's death—is lost. This leads to a self-destructive, a life-negation tendency within Giaour's psyche. This depression, the mental obsession and the self-destructive quality are the features of Byronic hero.

Hassan's mother is waiting for his return as it is the hour of twilight. She sees the approaching Tartar. His dark face was distressed not on account of weariness but his being the angel of Death who has brought back Hassan's crest. The messenger informs her that her son Hassan has wedded a fearful bride- has met his Death at the hands of Giaour. Hassan died at a stranger's hand. The maids of Paradise have invited him to their hall waving the green handkerchief. On the other hand, the infidel, Giaour- the kafir is destined to writhe around Eblis. The unquenched and unquenchable fire shall dwell around and within his heart. He will be tortured by the inward hell. He will be sent as vampire on earth. The tomb will be his ghastly haunt. He will be required to suck the blood of his race, his daughters. He will have to drain the stream of life at midnight. His gnashing teeth and haggard lip will be wet with dripping blood. He will brood alone in his own cell. He mutters about flying foes, clashing sword and dying men. The scowl is dark and earthy- a nameless spell, unspeakable pain. As the bird ensnared by the gazing snake, Giaour will be gloomy.

1-5 Sufferings of Giaour

Grief and guilt stained the noble soul of Giaour. The softest hearts tend to love will be tortured by the inward hell. He will be sent as the vampire on earth. The tomb will but even the sternest hearts can feel the wound that time can never heal. Passion's fire and woman's art can turn and tame even the sterner heart. Release from pain is impossible if solitude is succeeded by grief. The bird pelican is believed to feed the young ones with her own blood as Giaour is being inwardly fed by his own despair. Giaour would rather be a toad, the thing that crawls. Death is what the haughty brave like Giaour must bear, must crave, Giaour is addressing the Friar and tells him of the blood on his sword- the blood of his for the sake of his beloved Leila. She died for him and so he sought his revenge by taking Hassan's life. That is how love finds its way through the paths where even wolves fear to prey. The curse and the crime are written on his brow like that of Cain. Faithless to him and so Hassan gave the blow but Leila being true to Giaour; Giaour laid Hassan low. Her treachery towards Hassan was truth to Giaour. Leila offered her heart to Giaour and so Giaour gave Hassan his grave, his death, and his doom. He died in the battle and then he pleaded to Allah in which his spirit ebbed away. This made Hassan enter Paradise, but Giaour did not have the same luck.

It is reported that those who dwell in a cold climate are cold in blood and their love is the same. In the case of Giaour, there was the boiling lava, with bursting heart, maddening brain, writhing in pain. The thought of Leila's death gave him the pains. Leila was a form of life and light but Giaour was destined to inwardly bleed, become woeful through his guilt. His only thought was of Leila, his love, his life, his hope and his own good. His love remained incomplete, unstated. Love is the light from heaven, a spark from immortal fire, a feeling

from the Godhead. Leila was dead, but Giaour breathed... His heart was burdened with a serpent because of his sins. Penitence could not be granted to him. He was unheeding, he was engrossed by his memories with ruined mind and withered frame, a scattered leaf with the autumn blast of Grief. He could not dream as sleep was denied to him. Despair was a stranger than his will, mightier than the prayer. He now desires nothing but the rest. His heart was desperate, and he had to exist when Leila was no more alive. His tale, Giaour unfolds to the confessor-the priest. This is the story of Leila, whom he loved and of Hassan, whom Giaour killed.

Time for Hassan is eternity to think but for Giaour, it is the point of trauma. Giaour is required to lead a living death. The image of the death spiral of the candle is aptly used as Giaour has become stagnant in the cycle of time, a stranger to time and change. Giaour tells the priest "to save the cross above my head/ Be neither name nor emblem spread/ By prying stranger to, be read,/ Or stay the passing pilgrims tread.(The Giaour, lines 1325-29).

Giaour has no chances of salvation, nor can be earned the death through any forgiveness. He dies under Hassan's curse and cannot confess, and condemns himself to have no life after death. Giaour has chosen the unnatural to linger, neither living nor dead inside his own self. Existence of the vampire is such that the ghastly haunt becomes the native place and has to suck the blood of daughters, sisters or wife. Consequently, no rest from such ghastly existence is possible. The Byronic hero is the vampire who is doomed to kill what he loves. The vampire exists outside of nature and violates the cycle of life and death. Giaour thus offers the cycle of life and death both within and outside of man. Giaour has to remain in a half-life until the end, a mysterious and restless force. Hassan dies because of Leila and that makes Giaour a vampire. Likewise, Giaour becomes the Angel of death. In the case of Giaour / And fire unquenched, unquenchable,/ Around, within, thy heart shall dwell;/The tortures of that inward hell (The Giaour, lines 751-754).

1-6 The Byronic Hero

The most dramatic manifestation of the Byronic hero is in *The Giaour* (1913) by Lord Byron, "some dead on hatred rose not with the reddening flush,/ of transient Anger's hasty blush,/ But pale marble o'er the tomb" (*The Giaour*, lines 236-8). (His) ghastly whiteness aids to gloom/ His brow bent – his eye was glazed" (*The Giaour*, lines 239-40). In these lines, the typical feature of the Byronic hero and the Gothic villain is presented, which is that this particular type of villain is marked not by the hellish deeds he performs, but by the way he bears himself. He is characterized by the other feature of his being a torn melancholic that because of his mental disposition cannot but commit villainous deeds. The Byronic hero and the Gothic villain are attractive because they are terrible and melancholic. The ambiguity bestows him with a fascination as is experienced in the case of *Giaour* (Byron), *Heathcliff*, (Charlotte Brontë), *James Bond*, *Ian Fleming* and others. The Byronic hero and the Gothic Villain make the law of their worlds themselves. The Byronic hero is homeless, and he is marked as a fugitive. The homelessness is seen on his face. *Giaour*—the Byronic figure – has a lonely soul being withdrawn from other men, human communities and human values as well. The Byronic figure's beloved as in the case of *Leila* in *The Giaour* is represented as the purest, the highest truth and a blessed grace. The Byronic hero has a belief in the possibility of love as the most important force. The Byronic hero is not only doomed, but he is a failure. The Byronic hero like the Gothic villain has a bad boy feature, but these make him successful with women. These types of men adopt a more predatory, scatter gun approach and have a desire to try new things. The main energy of the Byronic hero or Gothic villain comes from villainous actions, self-destructive impulses or character flaws. He is not simply a bad character but a multi-faceted person who is an embodiment of a villain, hero and lover. The tendency to lie and manipulate others

is noticed in the Byronic or Gothic villain. The selfishness associated with narcissism is a part of his make-up. He is known by impulsive behavior that gives little thought to consequences. Accordingly, the self-destructive and negative tendencies have enhanced the attraction for such figures the Byronic hero or the Gothic villain.

1-7 Present-day Manifestations of the Byronic Hero

The Byronic hero and the Gothic villain are linked with the vampire in 1616. Byron traveled within Europe with John Polidori as his companion. In Geneva, they proposed a ghost story writing contest. Mary Shelley's famous gothic story *Frankenstein* is the result of this contest, Byron has written *Fragment of a Novel Polidori* worked on it and published his short story *The Vampyre* in *New Monthly Magazine* in April 1819. To publish his story Polidori used Byron's name. The protagonist of the short story *The Vampyre* is Lord Ruthven – a shadowy, sinister figure waiting to feast on the blood of innocent. He is aristocratic, haughty and superior. Those who came into contact with him fell under a spell. They were hypnotized by the sheer evil that emanated from his presence. Furthermore, this character reappeared several times in the *Vampyre* tales and penny dreadful novels. Byron tried to disconnect, but the story was praised and became a craze all over the continent in the early nineteenth century. After Byron's *The Giaour* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* came *Dracula*, *Anne Rice*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and other popular depictions of Vampire. In print as well as in non-print media, there are several ways in which the Vampire tale is presented. *Charlotte Brontë's Wuthering Heights* presented a compelling villain in *Heathcliff* who has negative but fascinating traits. The film adaptations of *Dracula* are repeated several times. *Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Saga* and *Christine Feehan's Carpathian* novels present the impulsively aggressive but compulsively attractive protagonists. The Television series' *True Blood* and the *Vampire Chronicles* have changed the malevolent beast from the folklore to a romantic hero who can save and be saved. His attracting woman has become an added feature of this kind of Vampire or bad-boy stories. The heroes are handsome, rich, aristocratic, and sexy whereas the villains are evil and dangerous. *Mary Harron's* successful film *American Psycho* has a vicious protagonist. He prefers to kill his victims while being naked, and still he is extremely successful with a woman. *Edward Cullen* is the protagonist of *Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Saga*. He is head of a new generation of designer vampires. The two most popular series of novels of modern times are the *James Bond* novels and *Harry Potter* novels. *James Bond* is adventurous, but his ways are crooked. He is handsome but cool in his brutality. He is attractive but never hesitates to be violently destructive – and kills instantly, carries a gun in one hand and another hand is around the waist of a beauty. *James Bond* novels by *Ian Fleming* present the Byronic hero without a melancholic disposition. *Harry Potter's* moves are obstructed by *Professor Snape* and *Voldemort*; however, *Harry* is a wizard in the witchcraft too.

1-8 Conclusions

The Giaour by Byron has thus introduced this literary tale of attraction for the negative, and the popularity of this form has flourished – almost into a vast industry. It is certain that the *Giaour* spell will continue to attract, to haunt and to impress permanently. *Leila* binds the narrative thread that involves *Giaour* and *Hassan* and this account has bound generations of readers, listeners, and viewers of products of print and non-print channels. Lord Byron makes *Giaour* both fascinating and scared. *Giaour* is the actual criminal; he feels he has sinned and becomes hopeless of redemption and is cursed with enormous remorse for the crimes he has committed. His wicked acts of murder make him a villain-hero and Satan, who concern only with his own self without taking into account lives of others. *Giaour* also is relentless, a gothic figure and emotionally conflicted. *Hassan*, *Leila* and *Giaour* are victims of love and lacking of both *Hassan* and *Giaour* to the confidence in each other's right to live and not to succumb to the deadly doubt results in murdering of spirit.

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