

The Byron Centenary  
by Cain.

Of all those demi-Gods whose  
paths <sup>in the</sup> <sup>jungle of the</sup> world Blake blazed,  
Byron was the Hercules - the mightiest  
and most formidably insane.

He ~~is~~ is like an ogre in a  
fairytale - a pin-brain crashing  
his way across Europe by dint  
of whirling arms and legs, his  
savage club striking at random  
in his blind agony.

He had no idea where he was  
going; he doubted whether there

was anywhere to go. Nor had he knightly  
weapons; he was, as an artist, no  
more than a cave-man carving  
fide times on well-gnawed winter-logs.  
There is hardly a line of all his huge  
volleys of verse that sticks in the  
memory, or, when it chances so to  
do, means any thing. The bulk of  
his work is unreadable, in the true  
sense: one wades through it, indeed,  
delights in much of it, perhaps; but  
one does not go back to it again  
and again, drawing with each fresh  
new thought fresh wine from  
the skin of being read.

was anywhere to go. Nor had he kindly  
weapons; he was, as an artist, no  
more than a cave-man carving  
rude runes on well-gnawed reindeer-bones.  
There is hardly a line of all his huge  
volleys of verse that strikes in the  
manner, or, when it chances so to  
do, means anything. The bulk of  
his work is unreadable, in the true  
sense: one wades through it, indeed,  
delights in much of it, perhaps; but  
one does not go back to it again  
and again, drawing with each fresh  
new draught fresh wine from  
the same of being less.

was anywhere to go. Nor had he knightly  
 weapons; he was, as an artist, no  
 more than a cave-man carrying  
 rude stones or well-gnawed reindeer-bones.  
 There is hardly a line of all his huge  
 volleys of verse that strikes in the  
 memory, or, when it chances so to  
 do, means anything. The bulk of  
 his work is unreadable, in the true  
 sense: one wades through it, indeed,  
 delights in much of it, perhaps; but  
 one does not go back to it again  
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 new draught fresh wine from  
 the same of being less.



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weapons; he was, as an artist, no  
more than a cave-man carrying  
rude stones on well-gnawed reindeer-horn.  
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volleys of verse that strikes in the  
memory, or, when it chances so to  
do, means anything. The bulk of  
his work is unreadable, in the true  
sense: one wades through it, indeed,  
delights in much of it, perhaps; but  
one does not go back to it again  
and again, drawing with each fresh  
new thought fresh wine from  
the same of living veins.

His heroes are all of a type, Blackguards,  
Corsairs, rakes, murderers, and madmen.

Is it answered how then came he  
to wield, as he did without doubt, more  
influence over his contemporaries than  
any other ~~man~~ poet of his ~~age~~ time, than  
Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats or Blake?

The question draws a smile from Chio.  
owed his

His greatness to those very qualities which  
have earned him <sup>obscure</sup> ~~oblivion~~ in the end.

The pell-clad giant, stalking through  
the trackless forests of Europe, was  
just the one and only type that could  
possibly make his mark.

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Civilization had gone smash.

American Independence and  
French Revolution had crushed  
civilization and Christianity  
into a cocked hat - the cocked  
hat of Napoleon Bonaparte!

The encyclopedists had knoched the  
knops from under the quincrack  
stems of the *Oeil-de-Bœuf*.

It was no time for listening  
quietly to some plans of  
reconstruction. No two men  
could be found to agree on  
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The encyclopedists had knoched the  
knops from under the quincrack  
spice of the Oeil-de-Bœuf.

It was no time for listening  
quietly to sane plans of  
reconstruction. No two men  
could be found to agree on  
fundamentals. All were greed

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that a priori dogma was absurd.

God had been dethroned and Reason set up in His place: but what is Reason unless the chaos of odds and ends of partial argument?

So nothing could be heard but blustering voices - Camille Desmoulins, Danton, Vallein. And these heroic lives lay at the mercy of snakes like Robespierre, till presently came Bonaparte, more violent, cunning, and aggressive than all, with his ~~idea~~ <sup>idea</sup> that no human voice <sup>could possibly be</sup> ~~was~~ loud enough to denounce the riot, and

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therefore - Cannon his name!

Those who have read the Memoirs  
of his period - Marlbot, the Duchesse  
d'Albanc, and the rest - see  
one thing stand out plain above all  
else, that the only type of man  
who could rule was the hot  
lecturing bully. Successors of the  
Sea Green Incomptible, the F  
thived only in sly secrecy by-paths  
of the world.

Now of this huge burly Leaver-  
handed Football-Forward kind  
of man the type in letters

was George Gordon. His hero might  
come of <sup>the</sup> *vieille noblesse* like  
Marbot, or of the beefiest  
canaille like Muscat: in every  
case the type was essentially  
the same in the spiritual world,  
that of blind Samson, crazed  
Alcides, Orlando Furioso, the  
strong man in a lawless land,  
utterly incapable of seeing his goal  
for lack of guiding himself towards  
it, in his bewilderment taking the  
best glittering pebble for the Pearl  
of Great Price, and, strong or  
weak, wounded by the swarms of

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little men around him, going at  
last clean out of his mind, and  
saying "let me perish with the  
Philistines!" pulling the temple down  
about his ears' ears!

Consider Byron's aims in life!  
He never had an aim. He believed  
in nothing: how could he? So he  
must grasp perfume at the fiasco  
of romance and swear down his own  
views of his own folly: "The King's  
daughter is all glorious within: her  
raiment is of wrought gold"  
He ends by taking up the cause of  
Greece, pretending it the cause of

"Freedom" - whatever that might  
mean! He had no faintest inkling  
of the merits of the novel: he had  
learned Greek at School, admired  
Greek Sculpture, thought Greek  
costumes picturesque, and Greek  
brigands fine tall fellows of their  
kind.

Byron shows nowhere as much  
intelligence as would serve to guide  
a quill to a coconut. He never  
thought about anything twice: the pain  
would have been thereby intolerable.  
Even to think of a thing once - it  
hurt him so that he had to

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get rid of it in a melodious  
howl!

Therefore, for all his Gargantuan  
gestures, for all his Titan vehemence,  
for all his rage for Freedom, he  
achieved nothing in the cause; as  
how could he, not knowing what he meant  
by the word?

Shelley, with scarce a gift to match  
his dream, did infinitely more for  
Liberty; since despite his jejune  
ineptitude, his querulous prejudices,  
and his vague notions, like thin  
dawn-bried clouds, he led at

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least a faint-etched image of the  
Ideal State whose Law <sup>should be</sup> ~~was~~ liberty;  
Thus those in whose hearts his lightnings  
kindled the Enthusiastic Energy to  
make his dream come true, had  
at model of attainment towards  
which to work.

But Byron's Freedom was the  
ruthless rage of the Thunderstorm,  
a brooding darkness only lit by  
venomous flashes that blasted  
where they struck, ~~but~~ its fury  
descried to dissolve itself by  
its own internal strain and  
incoherence, leaving no mark  
of its fulgurant roar but a

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seared landscape.

Observe a little more in detail  
this quality of incoherence in that  
heaped-up agglomeration of stresses!

Who can quote any poem of Byron  
which may stand for the expression  
of even the ~~hundredth~~ <sup>ten thousandth</sup> part  
~~of a millionth~~  
of that stupendous stature? We know

him as it were by intuition based  
upon those myriad fitful glimpses  
where his flesh broke from the  
storm. There is <sup>no</sup> ~~no~~ <sub>verse, no</sub> <sup>no</sup> ~~no~~ <sub>line, no</sub>

phrase which implies constructive  
energy, <sup>not</sup> ~~or~~ even the knowledge  
or so much as the possibility of

any knowledge, ~~upon~~ whereon to  
 build the world anew. He is all  
 furious aimless affirmation and  
 negation, cancelling out, the  
 very image of those opposite  
 strains in the Helix whose  
 clash is program - with the  
 Lion,

Content once more with Shelley!  
 He, in his wildest wrath of  
 denunciation, ~~is~~ bases his  
 denial on the assumption of  
 some principle of Truth. He  
 only revolts from some injustice  
 because he sees the Image of Justice.

Byron revolts in sheer Satanic spite.  
 Cain is not the revolutionary who  
 dreams of the Ideal Family, and is  
 ready to kill Abel - and the Old  
 Folk at Home, too, at a pinch,  
 and whistle for Lilith to come  
 with him and start the whole  
 job over again. He is the Anarchist  
 (the kind imagined in Newspapers)  
 who wants to smash things up  
 like a schoolboy in a fit of  
 temper without the slightest reason  
 - nay, hardly with desire! - of any  
 positive "Good" to replace the  
 "Evil" which he finds intolerable.

Here then we come back to our view  
 of Byron as one aspect of the Zeitgeist.  
 The men of the first decade of July  
 seized the Bastille with the definite  
 intention of clearing the ground for  
 the ideal structures indicated by  
 Rousseau, Paine, Jefferson, and  
 their like.

The discovery was then made - by  
 History: men have apparently not  
 made it yet! - that the most  
 excellent plans will not work  
 unless the material for the  
 building is prepared beforehand;

and this is a matter of centuries.  
~~How~~ The Experience of the Unconscious  
 determines the destiny of Mankind;  
 and no man is wise enough either  
 to foresee or even to detect so  
 much as the superficial nature  
 of this Mystery.

In consequence, the lath and plaster  
 jerry-building of the New Régime  
 collapsed on the heads of its  
 builders, in most cases severing  
 them neatly from their tombs.  
 Then the machine, blinded, in  
 baffled agony, went reeling  
 down to chaos; and instead

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of cutting off heads on the strictest  
principles of Fraternal Justice and  
Aspiration to Universal Goodwill,  
they cut them off because there did  
not seem to be anything else in  
particular to do. The machine  
at last clogged with its own  
excrement: all principles alike  
had perished, and the moment  
came when the most unscrupulous  
giant, <sup>available</sup> was free to focus the  
bewildered attention of the  
survivors upon himself, and,  
remarking - in common language! -

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"I am the Man of Destiny" calmly  
began to clean up the mess. A few  
- slight obstacles - a Duc d'Anguine  
to threaten the survival of royalty,  
or a Barras that of parliamentarism  
- were easy to remove.

Had Byron lived, he might in  
his own person have survived the  
wreck of his prejudices and passions;  
he might have come to govern  
himself as Napoleon came to  
govern France. There is small  
hint in anything he wrote that  
he had hopes of finding any

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such goal to his Pilgrimage. Yea,  
Even so, Napoleon, "strong man armed,"  
could not "keep his goods in peace."  
The reason ~~is~~ alas! no man is strong  
enough to build for himself and  
by himself.

But - more than enough of this!  
It saddens us too much. For we  
all of us, all who are worthy  
~~the~~ ~~whole~~ decent burial; love  
Byron beyond almost any other  
man of his age; is not he  
the strong, the self-willed  
turbulent schoolboy soul in

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ourselves - the image of our own  
time with its consciousness, the  
outburst of our violent vitality?

Not a word more, than, ~~for~~ unless  
this: that as we cannot remember  
him, so neither can we forget  
him and gild ~~up~~ upon the  
savage rock that overwhelmed  
him ~~in~~ ~~Shelley's~~  
immortal tribute:

"The Pilgrim of Eternity, whose  
Over <sup>his</sup> ~~whose~~ living head  
like heaven is bent  
and gaze thereon, and hush

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In ev'ry one hearts the  
~~infinite~~ ineffable sadness  
of the anti-phane:

"Verily I say unto you, They have  
their reward."

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