



Byronic Hero

- A type of fictional character who is a moody, brooding rebel, often one haunted by a dark secret from his past
- Modeled after Byron's own life
- But also after Byron's central figures in such works as:
 - *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1818)
 - *Manfred* (1817)
 - *Cain* (1821)

Sources of the Byronic Hero



- German *Sturm and Drang* literary movement
- Late 18th C Gothic novel villain/heroes
- Prometheus
- Goethe's *Faust*
- Milton's Satan



William Blake & Milton's Satan

“Note. The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it.”

--From *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (ca. 1790-93)



Percy Shelley & Milton's Satan

“Nothing can exceed the energy and magnificence of the character of Satan as expressed in *Paradise Lost*. It is a mistake to suppose that he could ever have been intended for the popular personification of evil. Implacable hate, patient cunning, and sleepless refinement of device to inflict the extremest anguish on an enemy, these things are evil; and although venial in a slave are not to be forgiven in a tyrant. . . Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God as one who perseveres in some purpose which has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments. Milton has so far violated the popular creed . . . As to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil.

--From *A Defence of Poetry* (1821)



Characteristics of Byronic Hero

- Rebellious
- Proudly defiant in attitude toward conventional social codes and religious beliefs
- Exile or outcast
- Searching for truth to give meaning to his life



Characteristics of Byronic Hero, Continued

- Individualist w/extraordinary capacity for passion
- Suffers deeply from remorse
- Moral or spiritual transgression
- Solitary wanderings through awesome landscapes (attempt to purge himself of sin)
- Remains sympathetic despite his sin (not guilty of intentional cruelty)
- Nobility in grief
- Eloquence