

*English Literature II*

# Byron's *Don Juan*



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## Introduction

*Don Juan* is considered to be Byron's masterpiece by modern critics. Byron began to write it in July 1818 and the poem had never been finished until he died in 1824. This unfinished poem contains seventeenth canto, although it is unfinished, it is still a longest satirical poem of any English poem.

The character Don Juan represented a Byronic hero in Byron's work. Byron chose to write *Don Juan* to against the moral society in his age. He wrote to his friend Thomas Moore in 1820 that "*Don Juan* will be known by and bye, for what it is intended, ---a Satire on *abuses* of the present sates of Society...." In this poem, he revealed and taunted the hypocrisy of upper class.

## About Don Juan

Don Juan is a character in Spanish legend. His story has been written by different authors. The Spanish writer Tirso de Molina wrote Don Juan in his play *El Burlador de Sevilla (The Rogue of Seville)*. Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* is also about the story of Don Juan.

Allegedly, Don Juan is a womanizer that he even seduces a girl and kills her father. However, under Byron's writing, Don Juan is portrayed as a man who imperceptibly falls in love with many women.

## Poem Style of *Don Juan*

*Don Juan* is written in the easy conversational style which is in first-person narration reflecting to Byron's own tone. The poem is written in ottava rima, an eight line stanza, and the rhyme scheme is ababacc. It is the poetic form favored by the Italian satirical writers of mock-heroic romances.

## Criticism

Some critics indicate that Byron himself had similar manners to Don Juan. In the opening of Canto I in *Don Juan*, Byron wrote, "I want a hero: an uncommon want..." "I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan..." Byron established the type of Byronic hero who drifts and refuses to come to the moral sense.

Don Juan has been criticized as an immoral person as he plays with many ladies. However, from Byron's view point, he regards Don Juan as one who remains amoral in sex. It is to say "beyond good and evil".

Byron is strongly stands by Don Juan's side, because he reveres Don Juan's characteristics from what others portray. Later of the poem, Juan even becomes a slave who is oppressed by ancestral ideas which is also what Byron satirizes. It strongly describes that Byron does not want to be constrained by moral society and he

against the traditions.

In the critical essay “*Don Juan* and Byron’s Imperceptiveness to the English Word” written by Peter J. Manning, He criticizes about the love between Juan and Haidée, who is a seven-teen-year Greek girl. Manning indicates that “the language is unnecessary.” In Canto II of *Don Juan*, “They had not spoken; but they felt allured....” It represents a romantic figure of love in Byron’s mind. Bryon pursues the human nature of love and there is nothing to do with moral. The Greek girl Haidée may also refers to the later life of Byron that he helped the Greek revolution and is recognized as a Greek national hero at that time.

## Reflection

After doing this research of Byron’s *Don Juan*, I partially agree with Byron that his love is beyond good and evil which is amoral. The character of Don Juan reflects his own personalities that he is romantic and unrestrained. *Don Juan* criticizes the civilized culture is against the human nature. I think that the man-made rules make people become hypocrites. Nowadays our society, many people in the higher social status pretend to have highly moral standards in public, but actually they are not so in private. In this case, Byron is a true person who has this courage to present himself. He loves and lives by his own heart. However, on the other hand, I disagree with Byron is that if all of us become the kind of Byronic heroes, it might cause the disorder in the society. Even though the love of Byron is beyond the morality, the morality has been set up for such a long time and we hardly live without it.

## Conclusion

The character Don Juan reflects Byron’s attitudes of love. Byron wrote Don Juan to criticize the religious society. He was a passionate person and searched for his own identities. In his master poem Don Juan, it shows his ideal love of romanticism.

## References

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