Thus coldly passing all that pass'd below,\textsuperscript{22}  
His blood in temperate seeming\textsuperscript{23} now would flow:  
65. Ah! happier if it ne'er with guilt had glow'd,  
But ever in that icy smoothness flow'd!  
'Tis true, with other men their path he walk'd,  
And like the rest in seeming did and talk'd,  
Nor outraged Reason's rules by flaw nor start,\textsuperscript{24}  
70. His madness was not of the head, but heart;  
And rarely wander'd in his speech, or drew  
His thoughts so forth as to offend the view.  
(from: \textit{Lara}, II. 289-360)
sometimes have fits of generosity, not moved by pity for the others, but by the pride of doing what few other people would be able to do; the same pride sometimes forces him to crime. He lives among people as if he were alone, cold and mysterious. But those who happen to see him cannot forget his aspect and behaviour; they cannot penetrate his soul but they feel haunted by his mysterious charm.

In this portrait of Conrad, Byron also gave a portrait of himself, or at least of the image that, throughout his life, he created of himself. He was in fact the model of all his "heroes" or, maybe, he modelled his image on that of his ideal "hero", a type of character descended from Milton’s Satan and from the heroes of the Gothic novel: a violent and mysterious man, dark and thoughtful, who often, in his past life, has had guilty secrets, but is endowed with great courage and finally redeemed by his passion for a woman. He sometimes echoes Shakespeare’s great tragic heroes; but while the Shakespearean hero is punished because of what he has done, Byron’s is crushed by blind fate and feels he is the victim of a will beyond his control (a Calvinistic idea of predestination). Yet he maintains, like Milton’s Satan, a dignity and an indomitable pride of his own, which makes him great even in his defeat.

Byron the non-romantic

Byron can be regarded as non-romantic in:
- his criticism of society, which he looked at with cynicism and scepticism;
- his deflation of romantic ideals;
- his sense of fun, which underlay even his gloomiest melancholy;
- his ironic distrust of his own emotions;
- his mock-heroic attitude, which enabled him to look at life and death with ironic detachment;
- his great wit, which could be cynical and sceptical;
- his concern with the true reality of things, as opposed to illusions and ideals;
- his concern with Man in Society rather than Man in Nature (unlike all the other Romantics);
- his skillful use of satirical couplets, in imitation of Pope;
- his mastery of the "ottava rima", in imitation of Italian mock-heroic writers;
- his lucid way of writing, modelled on 18th-century poetic style.

These features were already present in Byron’s first juvenile work. Then, during his first visit to Italy, in 1816, he discovered Casti’s Gli animali parlanti and Pulci’s Morgante Maggiore, and realized that their "half-serious rhyme", as he called it, was particularly congenial to his own mood and attitude. The heir of Pope, in the last part of his life he turned to burlesque and composed his best works, or at least works that modern critics and readers consider his best. Among these, one which is almost perfect in its structure is The Vision of Judgment.

The Vision of Judgment

The poem was conceived as a reply to Southey (1774-1843), the Poet Laureate, who, on the death of George III, had written a pompous poem...
entitled A Vision of Judgment to celebrate the dead king (though, because of his insanity and disordered rule, the monarch did not deserve any particular celebration). When the poem was published, Southey added a sententious preface in which he attacked “those monstrous combinations of horror and mockery, lewdness and impiety, with which English poetry has, in our days, first been polluted”. The reference was clearly made to Byron and the first cantos of his Don Juan.

Byron replied with a parody which eventually turned into a satire. He not only ridiculed the poor style, the lack of inspiration, the hypocrisy of Southey’s poem, but, in his funny vision of an imaginary Heaven, a vast place with rusty gates and a lot of angels bored and hoarse with singing, he alternated epic poetry with grotesque, social and political satire, and comic passages, like the following one (given below for study and analysis), in which St. Peter is informed by a cherub of King George III’s arrival:

269. George III and Napoleon, as the King of Brobdingnag and Gulliver, 1803 (caricature by J. Gillray, 1757-1815)

161. Saint Peter

1. What are the romantic and non-romantic features of Byron’s poetry?
2. When did he turn to burlesque poetry?
3. What was The Vision of Judgment conceived as a reply to?
4. Why didn’t George III deserve to be celebrated?
5. Who did Southey attack in the preface to his poem?
6. What did Byron reply with?
7. What features of Southey’s work did he ridicule?
8. What elements did he blend in his own work?