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| *Context* Romantic attitudes, socio-historical context | [Lord Byron](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Byron) used a skull his gardener had found at [Newstead Abbey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newstead_Abbey) as a drinking vessel. "There had been found by the gardener, in digging, a skull that had probably belonged to some jolly monk or friar of the Abbey, about the time it was demonasteried. Observing it to be of giant size, and in a perfect state of preservation, a strange fancy seized me of having it set and mounted as a drinking cup. I accordingly sent it to town, and it returned with a very high polish and of a mottled colour like tortoiseshell".  The cup, filled with [claret](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claret), was passed around "in imitation of the [Goths](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goths) of old", among the Order of the Skull that Byron founded at Newstead, "whilst many a grim joke was cut at its expense", Byron recalled to Thomas Medwin.  Ancient Britons drank from skulls and are thought to have used them in rituals (14,700yr old skull cup found in Somerset) |
| *A poem about….*  Interpretations, key Romantic themes, nature, mortality | Death/mortality-the idea that it is better to be re-born than it is to be buried and eaten by worms. Key Romantic theme of death/mortality-the spirit of the monk lives on in the skull  Could also be interpreted as a poem about moral decay as the skull belongs to a monk and is being corrupted through its use as a cup (drinking vs church)  Love- “I lived, I loved”-past tense implies that all of this happened in another lifetime (literally/metaphorically?) and that whatever love was there is now gone. The skull is nothing but a skull anymore, it does not seem to have the ability to love  Live and love are placed in the same clause-implication that they are one and the same BUT are separated by caesura, forcing the reader to pause-pondering tone-so life and love separated in this sense-link to contex-skull belonged to a monk. |
| *Speaker*  Who? Who is the poem addressed to? Attitude to subject e.g. ironic | Speaker=the skull-direct address to the reader (“start not”)  There is a strong sense of irony present and the skull almost appears to patronise the living who will die and be eaten by worms (“better to hold the sparkling grape”)  Tone : Poem begins with a happy/enthusiastic mood throughout the entire poem. (e.g. “nobler, sparkling, hope”) and remain constant throughout. This implies that the skull is happier being a cup rather than being in the ground  The attitude is one of happiness but contemplative at the same time as the cup analyses its existence both as an item to be used, and as part of a corpse. Reflective tone |
| *Form*  Sonnet, ballad, verse form, rhyme/rhythm | Verse form-6 quatrains  Rhyme scheme: Abab/cdcd/efef/ghgh/ijij/klkl  Written in trochaic tetrameter with a spondee at the start (“start not”)- ‘start’ in the sense of jumping back in horror. Imperative. Begins in the middle of the action of imagining the reader (or listener) reacting to the skull |

‘Lines Inscribed Upon a Skull’ – Byron One Page Guides

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| *Overall structure*  Shifts, changes, climax of narrative etc... | 6 quatrains all of which compare life and death and conclude that being dead and buried is far worse than being ‘recycled’ or reincarnated as an object (in this case a cup for drinking which is seen as the habit of the gods).  There is no climactic moment as such because the key idea is introduced at the start of the poem which resembles a retrospective narrative |
| *Languages*  Vocabulary- heightened/demotic? Rhetorical features | Personification-gives human qualities to the skull-“I lived”, I loved”- these are interesting in that they are emotions as opposed to physical traits, the cup is not seen as a stationary objects in this sense but as something ‘living’-could argue that it was the monk that experienced love and life then link to religious context (vows of chastity/loving God)  Paradox-gives deeper meaning-implies that man thrives to be the best even in death |
| *Sound effects*  Harsh & soft, onomatopoeia etc… | Harsh sound-plosive language –quaffed, lived, loved etc…. |
| *Imagery*  Metaphor, simile, images etc….. | Imagery  used to help the reader gain a sense of the filling of the cup which is with “the sparkling grape. From this the reader gains a sense if the essence of the cup and its role within a bigger picture. The image of the cup is a physical representation of Romantic concerns e.g. mortality. N/B- wine is referred to as the “sparkling grape”-implication that the wine, perhaps like the cup, also has an essence of itself in that it is neither one thing nor another (not wine, not a grape-exists somewhere in between the two-afterlife/what lies between life and death?? Alternate interpretation=grapes needed to make wine-life needed for death? Link back to theme of mortality)  Image of the cup-death present and talking about life and love. Romantic concepts.  Similes and comparative language  “I lived, I loved, I quaff’d, like thee;”-drinking, living & loving combined-important in life-appear to be universal concepts-not sure who audience is but know that he has “lived…loved….quaff’d” too. Byron seeing alcohol as an important feature of life?? |
| *Patterns of language*  Semantic fields, repetitions, opposition | Semantic fields-death/decay-“Skull, “died”, “bones” “worm” (?) “gone”, “dead”  -life-“living, lived, loved, life’s little day ( could go in either semantic field)  Repeated idea of death although only “worm” is repeated-thus we gain the concept of life in death/death in life depending on which way you look at it  Whereas wine is seen as the drink of the gods.  Very few repeated images/words in the poem-adds to its flow as we move from the skull to the living race of men who the skull scorns on for idolising death (ironic that the dead hate death) |
| *Punctuation and grammar*  Sentence length, end-stopping, caesura, verb mood-imperative, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory | LOTS of caesura (only 12 of the lines don’t have some form of caesura in them) generally the caesura (and end-stopping) occurs in lines concerning life, death and immortality (in reference to the gods drinking)  Lots of end stopping again reference to mortality-everything ends and death appears to be the beginning (repeated theme in each stanza/line)  Poem begins with an imperative mood (“start not”) and ends with a interrogative-although the readers learns a lot from the poem we are still left with a question-perhaps suggesting that life is full of questions |
| *Links to other poems* | Ode to a Nightingale  On this day I complete my 36th yr  Stanzas written in dejection, near Naples  To a Wreath of Snow  Julian M. and A.G Rochelle |