**English Romantic Verse** One-Page Guides

**Poet: Lord George Gordon Byron**

Poem: On This Day I Complete My Thirty Sixth Year

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| Context (biographical, Romantic attitudes, social/historical etc)  | This is Byron’s last poem. He wrote it on his 36th birthday in January 1824, after he had been fighting the Turks in Missolonghi for three weeks. He died four months later on April the 19th from a fever after incompetent Doctors bled him to death.  |
| A poem about… (Interpretations, key Romantic themes, nature, mortality) | The speaker has decided that after experiencing love, possibly reflecting Byron’s own failed marriage, that he will give up on it. Therefore he decides to direct his passion towards war instead. He wants to go to war to die a hero’s death so he will be remembered because he believes that turning 36 means he is running out of time (!) |
| Speaker (who? talking to whom? attitude to subject- ironic, reverent etc) | This poem is a soliloquy, Byron is addressing himself. We get a sense that he is trying to come to terms with the idea he will no longer look for love because so many of his past relationships have failed. He then makes it clear that he is redirecting his passion for love in to war and dying a memorable death.  |
| Form (sonnet, ballad, verse form, rhyme and rhythm) | On My Thirty Sixth Year is divided in to ten regular 4 line stanzas. It has an ABAB rhyme scheme throughout, but with a final 2 beat, short line – used to bring the stanza to a rather melancholic conclusion early on in the poem (‘a funeral pile’), but becomes triumphant (‘away thy breath!’) - the idea of dying in glory |
| Overall structure (shifts, changes, climax of narrative etc) | During the first four stanzas the poem appears to address his failed love life with him claiming he ‘cannot be beloved’. Because of this he gradually comes to terms with giving up on love, making it clear this is his intention from the first line when he says ‘Tis’ time this heart should be unmoved.’ But the fourth stanza seems to depict a turning point in his attitude to love as he implies he has no time for love as he believes his life will soon come to an end. The first half of the poem are full of allusions to his life ending soon with Byron writing things like ‘My days are in the yellow leaf’ and ‘No torch is kindled at its blaze-/A funeral pile.’ However after its rather bleak beginning there is a shift in tone in the sixth stanza when Byron begins to convey his passion for war using exclamatives. The poem concludes with Byron talking about his desire to die a hero’s death so he will be remembered. |
| Language (vocabulary - heightened or demotic; rhetorical features etc) | Byron uses mostly simple language however in the latter half of the poem he uses some old fashioned words like ‘thy’ that were not part of the common dialect of the time. This could be to emphasise his passion and dramatize the exclamations. He uses language associated with war and death such as ‘life blood’ ‘funeral’ and ‘glory’. Also he uses a rhetorical question to highlight that after the mistakes of his youth he has found his reason for living. |
| Sound effects (harsh and soft, onomatopoeia etc) |  |
| Imagery (metaphor, simile, images etc) | ‘My days are in the yellow leaf’ and the autumn imagery symbolises Byron’s belief his life is coming to an end and his suspicions proved to be correct as he died four months after writing the poem.Also he personifies Greece which shows that he is no longer looking for love in the traditional sense and he is fighting for Greece not an actual woman. |
| Patterns of language (semantic fields, repetitions, oppositions) | There is a sematic field around his life coming to an end, ‘ceased’, ‘yellow leaf’, ‘grief’, ‘fire’, ‘funeral pille’, ‘soul’, ‘life-blood’, ‘spirit’, ‘death’, ‘grave’ and ‘rest’. Furthermore another semantic field is about war, ‘fear’, ‘glory’, ‘hero’, ‘sword’, ‘banner’, ‘field’, ‘shield’, ‘death’, ‘soldier’ and ‘ground’.  |
| Punctuation and grammar (sentence length, end-stopping, caesura, verb mood - imperative, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory) | All of the stanzas are end-stopped, three with exclamation marks and the others with just full stops. This reflects the sense of this being something final that goes through the poem. The last line of every stanza is the shortest in the stanza. They contain monosyllabic words which makes them more impactful and memorable.  |
| Links to other poems | Ode to a Nightingale – end of life. Rime of the Ancient Mariner – dedicating life to something. Ode to a Grecian Urn – looking back on life.‘Last Lines’, by Bronte acts as an excellent contrast, looking at war in terms of human barbarity. |