

Lord Byron: The Tragic Romantic Poet [B2]

Poeta venerato, riuscì a suscitare sia ammirazione che scandalo nella società del primo Ottocento. Quando non era intento a sedurre uomini e donne in ogni circostanza, scriveva alcuni dei più acuti versi satirici in lingua inglese o lottava per l'indipendenza della Grecia.

George Gordon Byron, better known as Lord Byron, was a British Romantic poet and satirist whose poetry and [mesmerising](#) personality captured Europe's imagination in the [early 19th century](#). Considered to be the greatest poet of his time, he was one of the major figures of the Romantic movement, the artistic and intellectual trend of that time which emphasised passion and individualism.

BORN WITH A DISABILITY

Byron was born on 22 January 1788 with a [club foot](#). His father died three years later, leaving him with his abusive mother. Byron inherited his title in 1798. Once at Cambridge University, he spent his time drinking, [gambling](#) and sleeping with prostitutes — and even kept a bear in his rooms. In 1809, he began a two-year tour of Mediterranean countries.

FAMOUS OVERNIGHT

In March 1812, Byron published the first two cantos of his comic, poetic travelogue Childe Harold's [Pilgrimage](#), based on his travels, and "became famous [overnight](#)", in his own words. The public loved Byron's descriptions of a Europe they could not visit because of the Napoleonic Wars. His [dashing](#) good looks and spontaneous character established him as the ideal Romantic poet, and he put his whole life into his work. Female fans started to follow him everywhere, and the expression Byromania was born.

BYRON SHOCKS SOCIETY

Away from his writing, Byron was having an affair with his half-sister Augusta, which produced a daughter. They [flaunted](#) the affair, shocking society. In 1815, he married Annabella Milbanke. The couple had a daughter, Ada, which Byron had hoped would be [stillborn](#). The couple's separation in 1816 was [notorious](#), with rumours of adultery, abuse, incest and sodomy.

BYRON'S DON JUAN

Constant scandals and huge debts forced the poet to leave England in 1816, never to return. The next eight years, however, would prove to be the most productive of his life. He spent the summer on Lake Geneva with the poet Shelley and wife Mary, and Mary's half-sister, Claire — with whom he had another daughter. Byron then [moved on](#) to Greece, where he took numerous male teenage lovers, and finally Italy, where he [claimed](#) to have slept with more than two hundred women. In 1819, he began his most famous work, Don Juan (1819-24). Byron's hero is a romantic looking for true love, whose adventures include a [shipwreck](#), pirates, [enslavement](#) and a Turkish harem. The epic poem was an immediate success, with its social satire, [bawdy](#), irreverent humour, and verbal pyrotechnics.

DEATH IN GREECE

In July 1823, Byron left Italy for Greece to join the Greek insurgents fighting for independence from the Ottoman Empire. He used his personal fortune [to fund](#) their fight. But he contracted malaria and died on 19 April 1824 — helped by doctors using [leeches to drain](#) him of two litres of blood. Byron became a hero all over Europe, and thousands followed his coffin through London's streets.

HUGE CULTURAL IMPACT

In his brief life, Byron had a huge cultural impact on Europe, the US, Latin America and even China. Britain's most famous poet still has an incredible

[grip](#) on the world's literary imagination — and two hundred years after his death, his place in Greek hearts is as strong as ever. In 2008, the Greek government announced a Byron Day to fall on the anniversary of his death. Nearly every city in the country has a street named after the poet, and many men are called Vyrona in his honour. It is ironic, however, that most of his poetry and letters have never been translated into Greek.

Glossary

- **gambling** = scommettere
- **notorious** = infame
- **shipwreck** = naufragio
- **to fund** = finanziare
- **grip** = dominare
- **early 19th century** = primi dell'Ottocento
- **stillborn** = nato morto
- **enslavement** = schiavitù
- **bawdy** = osceno, volgare
- **club foot** = piede equino
- **Pilgrimage** = pellegrinaggio
- **leeches** = sanguisughe
- **mesmerising** = affascinante
- **overnight** = da un giorno all'altro
- **dashing** = elegante
- **flaunted** = ostentare
- **moved on** = andare avanti
- **claimed** = affermare
- **to drain** = drenare