

= Allegra Byron =

Clara Allegra Byron (12 January 1817 ? 20 April 1822) , initially named Alba , meaning " dawn " , or " white " , by her mother , was the illegitimate daughter of the poet George Gordon , Lord Byron and Claire Clairmont , the stepsister of Mary Shelley .

Born in Bath , England , she initially lived with her mother and Mary Shelley and Percy Bysshe Shelley , but was turned over to Byron when she was fifteen months @-@ old . She lived most of her short life with boarders chosen by Byron or in a Roman Catholic convent , where she died at age five of typhus or malaria . She was visited only intermittently by her father , who displayed inconsistent paternal interest in her .

= = Early life = =

Allegra was the product of a short @-@ lived affair between the Romantic poet and her starstruck teenage mother , who was living in reduced circumstances in the household of her stepsister and brother @-@ in @-@ law . Claire wrote to Byron during the pregnancy begging him to write back and promise to take care of her and the baby . Byron ignored her . After her birth , she was initially taken into the household of Leigh Hunt as the child of a cousin . A few months later the Shelleys and Claire took the baby back as an " adopted " child . Claire bonded with her baby daughter and wrote in her journal with delight about her close , physical connection with little Allegra , but she was also dealing with emotional and financial pressures from the Shelleys that made it difficult for her to keep the baby with her . The Shelleys were fond of Allegra , but Mary Shelley feared that neighbours would believe Percy Bysshe Shelley fathered her as the truth about her relationship to Claire leaked out . William Godwin , Mary 's father and Claire 's stepfather , had immediately leaped to that conclusion when he learned of Allegra 's birth . In an October 1817 letter to Percy Bysshe Shelley , Mary Shelley remarked that their toddler son William disliked Allegra , but was fond of his baby sister Clara . She saw her son 's reaction to Allegra , who was no blood relation to him , as " an argument in favor of those who advocate instinctive natural affection . The Shelleys were constantly in debt . Mary Shelley wanted the baby to be sent to Byron and wanted her difficult and temperamental stepsister , who had too close a relationship with her husband , to leave her house .

After the child 's birth , Shelley wrote to Byron " of the exquisite symmetry " and beauty of " a little being whom we ... call Alba , or the Dawn . " He asked Byron what his plans were for the child . Later , Shelley acknowledged the child 's presence was becoming something of an embarrassment . Byron asked his half @-@ sister Augusta Leigh to take Allegra into her household , but Augusta refused . Hostile to Claire and initially sceptical that he had fathered her daughter , Byron agreed to take custody of Allegra under the condition that her mother have only limited contact with her . Shelley warned Claire that this might not , after all , be the best plan for Allegra , but Claire hoped that her daughter would be more financially comfortable and would have a better chance at a good life if she lived with her father . " I have sent you my child because I love her too well to keep her , " she wrote to Byron .

Byron requested that her name be changed from Alba , which also related to " Albé , " Claire Clairmont 's nickname for Byron , to Allegra , an Italian name meaning " cheerful , brisk " and relating to the musical term " allegro . " During the journey to turn the child over to Byron , Claire wrote in her journal that she had bathed her daughter in Dover , but then crossed the passage out , as if afraid to mention the baby 's name . The child was baptised with the name Clara Allegra before her mother relinquished her to Byron . Byron discussed spelling Allegra 's surname as " Biron " instead of as " Byron " to further distinguish her from his legitimate daughter , Augusta Ada Byron . Byron offered to pay Shelley for the expense of Allegra 's upkeep during her first months of life , but Shelley indignantly refused and said the cost was a trifle .

= = Resemblances to Byron = =

Mary Shelley had called the baby Allegra " the little Commodore " because of her sturdy body and

alert , intelligent look . Byron was also pleased with Allegra 's resemblances to himself in appearance and temperament . When she was eighteen months old , he wrote in a letter to a friend : " My bastard came three days ago ? very like ? healthy ? noisy & capricious . " In an 1818 letter to his half @-@ sister Augusta Leigh , Byron wrote that " She is very pretty ? remarkably intelligent ... She has very blue eyes ? that singular forehead ? fair curly hair ? and a devil of a spirit ? but that is Papa 's . " In 1819 , in another letter to Augusta Leigh , Byron described two and a half @-@ year @-@ old Allegra as " very droll " and again commented on her resemblance to himself in physical appearance , temperament and interests : " (She) has a very good deal of the Byron . Can 't articulate the letter ' r ' at all ? frowns and pouts quite in our way ? blue eyes ? light hair growing darker daily ? and a dimple in the chin ? a scowl on the brow ? white skin ? sweet voice ? and a particular liking of Music ? and of her own way in every thing ? is that not B. all over ? " The child had forgotten any English she had learned and now spoke only Venetian Italian . In March 1820 , he complained in a letter that three @-@ year @-@ old Allegra was vain and " obstinate as a mule " . Her behaviour was sometimes unmanageable , probably as a result of her unstable living arrangements and frequent changes in caregivers . At age four , the naughty child terrorised Byron 's servants with her temper tantrums and other misbehavior and told frequent lies .

As she grew older , Allegra also demonstrated a talent for acting and singing . Byron 's mistress Teresa , Contessa Guiccioli , whom Allegra called " mammon " , remarked on Allegra 's talent for mimicking the servants and for singing popular songs . Byron felt her talent for mimicry , another talent she shared with him , might amuse other people in the short term but would eventually be a cause of trouble for her .

Stability and the affection of the nuns at the Capuchin convent in Bagnacavallo , where she spent the last year of her life , improved Allegra 's self @-@ control . Still , the nuns indulged her because of her charm and she was rarely punished for breaking the rules .

= = In poetry = =

Percy Bysshe Shelley , remembering his 1818 visit to Byron , when he rolled billiard balls with Allegra , immortalised the toddler as Count Maddalo 's child in his 1819 poem Julian and Maddalo : A Conversation :

In the next stanza he imagines her grown to a woman : " A wonder of this earth ... Like one of Shakespeare 's women . "

= = Convent education = =

Shelley , who visited the toddler Allegra while she was being boarded with a family chosen by Byron , objected to the child 's living arrangements over the years , though he had initially approved of Claire Clairmont 's plan to relinquish her to her father . During the summer of 1819 , Allegra stayed with four different families and was abandoned by her nursemaid . Byron sent her to stay for long periods with his friend , British consul Richard Belgrave Hoppner , but Hoppner 's wife didn 't like Allegra and sent her to stay with three other families in as many months . Though he 'd originally agreed to permit Claire to visit their daughter , Byron reneged on the agreement . Shelley often tried to persuade Byron to let Claire see her daughter and they thought of ways to regain custody of her . Claire was alarmed by reports in 1820 that her daughter had suffered a malarial @-@ type fever and that Byron had moved her to warm Ravenna at the height of the summer . Claire wrote that Allegra must be moved to a more healthy climate if she was to survive and pleaded with Byron to send their daughter to her in Bagni di Lucca , a town with a cool mountain climate . However , Byron didn 't want to send Allegra back to be raised in the Shelley household , where he was sure she 'd grow ill from eating a vegetarian diet and would be taught atheism . He pointed out that all of the other children in the Shelley household had died . The Shelleys ' first three children had all died young . Byron believed the rumours that a fourth child , Elena Adelaide Shelley , was Claire 's daughter by Shelley and Allegra 's half @-@ sister . Elena died in a foster home in 1820 at age seventeen months . " Have they raised one ? " Byron wrote in a letter to a friend in the fall of 1820 .

Shelley wrote to his wife Mary that Allegra looked pale and quiet when he saw her in 1818 . When he saw her again in 1821 at the Capuchin convent in Bagnacavallo , when she was four , he again felt she looked pale and delicate and was infuriated by the Roman Catholic education she was receiving , though he had initially told Byron he approved of her being sent to a convent . " (Besides) Paradise & angels ... she has a prodigious list of saints ? and is always talking of the Bambino ... The idea of bringing up so sweet a creature in the midst of such trash till Sixteen ! " he wrote . " However , though Shelley thought the little girl was more serious and contemplative than he remembered , he said she had not lost her " excessive vivacity . " After five months in the convent school , her behaviour had also improved ; she obeyed the nuns readily and was well @-@ disciplined , though Shelley didn 't think the nuns had been too severe with her . The child asked Shelley to " tell her mother she wanted a kiss and a gold dress and would he please beg her Papa and Mammina to visit her . " Allegra no longer had any real memory of Claire , but had grown attached to " her Mammina , " Byron 's mistress Teresa , Countess Guiccioli , who had mothered her . Teresa gave the little girl her own childhood toys and played with her when she spent weeks recovering from a childhood illness .

Claire Clairmont had always opposed Byron 's decision to send her daughter to the convent in March 1821 . Shortly afterwards , she wrote him a furious , condemnatory letter accusing him of breaking his promise that their daughter would never be apart from one of her parents . She felt that the physical conditions in convents were unhealthy and the education provided was poor and was responsible for " the state of ignorance & profligacy of Italian women , all pupils of Convents . They are bad wives & most unnatural mothers , licentious & ignorant they are the dishonour & unhappiness of society ... This step will procure to you an innumerable addition of enemies & of blame . " In March 1822 , she dreamed up a plot to kidnap her daughter from the convent and asked Shelley to forge a letter of permission from Byron . Shelley refused .

Byron had arranged for Allegra to be educated in the convent precisely because he , unlike his former lover Claire , thought favourably of the manners and attitudes of Italian women who had received convent educations . He disapproved of what he called Claire 's " loose morals " and " Bedlam behavior " and didn 't want her to influence Allegra . He also believed that his daughter , given her illegitimacy , would have a far better chance of marrying well in Italy than she would in England . A Roman Catholic girl with a suitable dowry , raised in a convent , would have a decent chance of marrying into high Italian society . He wanted the child to become a Roman Catholic , which he viewed as the " best religion . " " If Claire thinks that she shall ever interfere with the child 's morals or education , she mistakes ; she never shall , " wrote Byron in a letter to Richard Belgrave Hoppner in September 1820 . " The girl shall be a Christian and a married woman , if possible . " Her mother could see Allegra , he added , only with the " proper restrictions . " Byron wrote to Hoppner in March 1821 that Allegra would receive better care in the convent than she would with him . His mistress , Teresa , Countess Guiccioli , had a happy experience at the convent boarding school where she had lived from the age of five , and had also persuaded Byron that a convent school would be the best place for Allegra . He also viewed the convent as the safest place for her with revolution brewing in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies .

Allegra was doted on by the nuns at the convent , who called her " Allegrina , " and was visited once by Teresa 's relatives . Probably with considerable assistance from the nuns , four @-@ year @-@ old Allegra wrote her father a letter in Italian from the convent , dated 21 September 1821 , asking him to visit her :

My dear Papa . It being fair @-@ time , I should like so much a visit from my Papa as I have many wishes to satisfy . Won 't you come to please your Allegrina who loves you so ?

The abbess of the convent included her own note inviting Byron to come to see Allegra before he left for Pisa and assuring him " how much she is loved . " On the back of this letter , Byron wrote : " Sincere enough , but not very flattering ? for she wants to see me because ' it is the fair ' to get some paternal Gingerbread ? I suppose . " Byron never responded to Allegra 's letter or visited the child during the thirteen months she was in the convent .

= = Death , burial , and a memorial = =

Allegra died on 20 April 1822 , attended by three doctors and all of the nuns at the convent , of what some biographers have identified as typhus . Byron biographer Benita Eisler speculated that she died after suffering a recurrence of her malarial @-@ type fevers , which she had also suffered from the previous autumn .

Byron sent her body to England and wrote an inscription for her gravestone that read : " In memory of Allegra , daughter of G.G. , Lord Byron , who died at Bagna Cavallo in Italy , 20 April 1822 , Aged Five Years and Three Months , - ' I shall go to her , but she shall not return to me . ' -2 Samuel , xii , 23 " Byron felt guilty about his neglect of the child after her death , he told Marguerite , Countess of Blessington , a few months afterwards :

Let the object of affection be snatched away by death , and how is all the pain ever inflicted upon them avenged ! The same imagination that led us to slight or overlook their sufferings , now that they are forever lost to us , magnifies their estimable qualities ... How did I feel this when my daughter , Allegra , died ! While she lived , her existence never seemed necessary to my happiness ; but no sooner did I lose her , than it appeared to me as if I could not live without her .

The memory of Allegra haunted Shelley and her mother . Before his own death by drowning in July 1822 , Shelley had a vision of the dead child in which she rose naked from the sea , laughed , clapped her hands , and beckoned to him . Claire Clairmont furiously accused Byron of murdering Allegra . She demanded that Byron send her a portrait of Allegra , a lock of the child 's hair , and that she be placed in charge of the funeral arrangements . In the end , though , Claire could not bear to see Allegra 's coffin or to hold a funeral service for her daughter . She blamed Byron for the rest of her life for Allegra 's death .

Scandalized by Byron 's reputation and the child 's illegitimacy , the rector of St. Mary 's Parish Church in Harrow , Middlesex , England , refused to place a plaque on Allegra 's grave and permitted her only to be buried at the entrance of the church without a marker . When Byron died two years later , the rector also refused to bury him at St. Mary 's Parish Church in Harrow . He was also denied burial at Westminster . He was ultimately buried at St. Mary Magdalens ' Church in Hucknall Torkard , Nottinghamshire , England .

In 1980 , The Byron Society placed a memorial plaque for Allegra at Harrow , inscribed with words from a letter Byron wrote to Shelley after her death : " I suppose that Time will do his usual work ... ? Death has done his . "