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Byron, George Gordon Byron, Baron, 1788-1824

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Lord George Gordon Byron (1788-1824), English poet, was born on 22 January 1788, the son of the nephew of the fifth Baron Byron of Rochdale, Captain John 'Mad Jack' Byron, and his second wife, Catherine Gordon of Gight, an impoverished Scots heiress. George Byron had a half-sister, Augusta, who was Jack Byron's daughter by his first marriage to Lady Amelia Carmathen. Augusta's mother had died at the age of twenty-nine. Her death has been attributed variously to a number of factors, including consumption, fever, and a suspected 'ill-usage' at the hands of her husband. George Byron was born with a caul, a transparent birth sac shrouding the upper extremities of the newborn which was traditionally held to confer luck and immunity from drowning, and a club-foot, something which, it is commonly speculated, had an important effect on his personality, and of which Mary Shelley wrote: 'No action of Lord Byron's life -- scarce a line he has written -- but was influenced by his personal defect.' Byron would later refer to himself as 'le diable boiteux', the lame devil.

In September 1790, having squandered his second wife's fortune, much as he did that of his first wife, Jack Byron deserted his wife and son in Aberdeen where the family had gone to live. George's mother devoted herself to rearing her high-spirited son whom she sometimes called her 'little lame brat'. On 2 August 1791, the debt-ridden Jack Byron died in France of tuberculosis, aged thirty-six, leaving his widow and son in precarious financial circumstances. He bequeathed nothing to his wife, leaving her and her young son with the responsibility for paying off his debts. Byron's later words on his father were to prove portentous of Byron's own fate: 'He seemed born for his own ruin and that of the other sex.'

In the autumn of 1792, Byron's mother sent him to a mixed school at nearby Long Acre. In late summer 1794, on the death of his father's nephew, Byron became heir presumptive to the title and estates of the fifth Lord Byron, at the age of six and a half. It was necessary that, as a future peer, Byron receive a 'proper' education. In January 1795, shortly before his seventh birthday, Byron entered the second year at Aberdeen grammar school. Byron's mother was an avid reader of novels, and Byron later calculated that he had read four thousand works of fiction. As well as a lifelong love of the Bible, his favourites were Don Quixote, the Arabian Nights, and the works of Smollett and Scott. In May 1798, the 'Wicked' fifth Lord Byron died, and Byron, aged nine, became the sixth Baron Byron of Rochdale. Byron's mother was landed with 'Wicked' Lord Byron's debts, which she duly settled, to the further impoverishment of herself and her son. The young Byron, however, learnt to enjoy the deference which, at that time, a title inspired. He acquired a sense of personal consequence which he never lost.

In 1798, Byron and his mother returned to England, and Byron's ramshackle family inheritance of Newstead Abbey, in Nottinghamshire. A valuable property, the estate was nonetheless burdened with debt. In 1799, Byron was sent to Dr Glennie's preparatory school in Dulwich. In 1800, Byron fell in love with his first cousin, Margaret Parker, and in 1803, with Mary Chaworth of nearby Annesley Hall. Both these attachments inspired Byron's early attempts at writing poetry, his unrequited passion for Mary finding expression in 'Hills of Annesley', written in 1805, 'The Adieu', written in 1807, 'Stanzas to a Lady on Leaving England', written in 1809, and 'The Dream', written in 1816. In 1804, Byron began an intimate correspondence with his half-sister Augusta, whom he had probably met for the first time in 1802. His increasing bond with his sister coincided with a growing distance between himself and his mother who now stigmatised Byron with being

his father's son.

From 1801 to 1805, Byron attended Harrow school, and from October 1805 until July 1808 Trinity College, Cambridge. Despite having attended, by the end of his course, scarcely three of the nine terms of residence required, and worried that consequently he would not receive his degree, Byron was awarded his M.A. from Cambridge. In 1806, Byron published his first volume of poetry, *Fugitive Pieces*. Whilst this consisted mostly of juvenilia, it did establish one of the defining elements of Byron's work, that of poetry as autobiography. That same year, whilst at Trinity, he formed what was to be a lifelong friendship with John Cam Hobhouse, who stirred his interest in liberal Whiggism. In January 1807, he published the new collection *Poems on Various Occasions*, consisting of an expansion of his previous volume from thirty-eight to sixty-six poems, and essentially comprising, as Byron wrote, 'all my juvenilia'. In June of the same year, *Hours of Idleness* was published. This, being Byron's first volume to be commercially published, was his public literary debut. Having received a good review from the *Monthly Literary Recreations* in July 1807, it was ridiculed by Henry Brougham in the *Edinburgh Review* in early 1808. In March 1809, Byron took literary comfort in satirical response, publishing *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* in which his main target was the critics, 'harpies that must be fed'.

In March 1809, having attained his majority, Byron took his seat as a Whig in the House of Lords. That year, Byron left England with Hobhouse for a tour of the Mediterranean. Between 1809 and 1811, Byron visited Portugal, Spain, Malta, Greece, Albania, and Turkey. In March 1810, Byron wrote the poem 'Maid of Athens, Ere we Part', which concludes with the verse:

Maid of Athens! I am gone:  
Think of me, sweet! when alone.  
Though I fly to Istambol,  
Athens holds my heart and soul:  
Can I cease to love thee? No!  
Zoe mou, sas agapo.

In March 1811, Byron wrote *The Curse of Minerva*, which attacked Lord Elgin for pillaging Greece's heritage; as Byron put it, the poem was intended 'to immolate' Elgin 'with gusto'. Together, these two poems show the full extent of Byron's sympathy for Greece, and his strong desire to see the country freed from Turkish rule.

Byron arrived back in England in July 1811, to suffer a devastating series of bereavements. On 1 August 1811, Byron's mother died, aged forty-six, of an unspecified illness, possibly, in view of rumours about her drunkenness, as Benita Eisler speculates in her book *Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame*, of 'renal, liver, circulatory, or heart failure'. Byron's relationship with his mother had been stormy, but he knew well the irreplaceability of her love. On 2 August, he was told that his and Hobhouse's friend, Charles Skinner Matthews, had drowned in the River Cam. Then, on 10 August, Byron received news that his close friend from his Harrow schooldays, John Wingfield, had died of fever in the Peninsular War. Finally, in October, a letter arrived telling Byron that John Edleston, the former chorister of Trinity College, who had, as Byron remarked, been Byron's protégé and to whom Byron had been both father figure and lover, had died in May, aged twenty-one. Deeply affected by Edleston's death, Byron wrote both the lines 'To Thyrsa', and additional verses lamenting the poet's emotional destitution and the end of love, which were to provide a new conclusion to Canto II of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

In October 1809, Byron began the long poem in Spenserian stanzas that was to make his literary reputation, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-18). The poem's first two cantos appeared in 1812,

Canto III in 1816, and Canto IV, the final canto, in 1818. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage describes the travels and reflections of a pilgrim, Childe Harold, whose life and journeyings correspond to Byron's own. Canto III bears evidence of Percy Shelley's enthusiasm at the time for Wordsworth, with which, Byron recalled, Shelley dosed him 'even to nausea'. In Canto IV, the device of the pilgrim is abandoned, and the poet speaks directly in a long meditation on time and history, concluding with a passage on the eternal symbolism of the sea and on the poet's farewell to his work. In Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Byron teases his readers with suggestions of sex and blasphemy. Childe Harold himself is no innocent, rather 'Childe' is an archaic title denoting the scion of a noble house, and, as we are told: 'Few earthly things found favour in his sight / Save concubines and carnal companie'. He is the first 'Byronic' hero, and the writing of the poem, in fits and starts across a number of years, afforded Byron both a degree of escapist distraction, personal self-examination, and public justification.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage enjoyed immense success, a mark of which was its satirisation by Thomas Love Peacock in *Nightmare Abbey*. Mary Shelley was an enthusiast of Byron's poem and, as Eisler remarks, 'together, Victor Frankenstein and his creature mirror the Byronic double: the poet and his avenging fate'. Byron himself came to dislike Childe Harold's Pilgrimage as being written in 'the false exaggerated style of youth'.

In 1812, Byron resumed his seat in the House of Lords. Having at first decided to speak in favour of Catholic Emancipation, he changed his mind, choosing instead a no less explosive issue and speaking, in February, against the proposed Frame Work Bill which was directed at rioting Nottinghamshire weavers and which sought to make the destruction of machinery punishable by death. In April, Byron spoke in favour of Catholic Emancipation. Later on in the year, with Newstead Abbey unmanaged and fast disintegrating, Byron agreed to sell the property to Thomas Claughton, a lawyer from Lancashire, for £140,000. Claughton did everything he could to delay payment, defaulting in July 1814. Shortly afterwards, Claughton agreed to an indemnity of £25,000, with the abbey to revert to Byron's possession. In December 1817, Newstead Abbey was at last sold to Colonel Thomas Wildman, a former classmate of Byron at Harrow, for £94,500.

In the spring of 1812, Byron met the impulsive, self-destructive Lady Caroline Lamb, the wife of William Lamb the son and heir of Lord Melbourne and Byron's confidante Elizabeth Milbanke Lamb, Lady Melbourne. It was Caroline Lamb who judged Byron 'mad-bad-and dangerous to know'; whilst the attraction of her for him appears to have resided in the fact that, as Eisler remarks, 'she resembled, to an astonishing degree, the poet's own description of John Edleston'. Another of Byron's mistresses during this period was Lady Jane Scott Oxford, the brilliant, beautiful and idealistic clergyman's daughter, a patroness of the Reform Movement and generally renowned for her radical political commitments, who was then aged forty. In October 1812 Annabella Milbanke, the niece of Lady Melbourne, rejected Byron's proposal of marriage, initially made, no doubt in part, to facilitate his escape from the net of Caroline Lamb's obsessive importunity. In 1813, Byron began an affair with his half-sister, Augusta, now married to George Leigh, and the mother of a growing family which, on 15 April 1814, came to include Elizabeth Medora, believed to have been Byron's daughter.

In 1813, Byron published *The Giaour*, eight versions of which were to appear that year. Concerning a female slave, Leila, who, as a consequence of her love for a 'Byronic' hero, a mysterious young Venetian nobleman, the Giaour, is killed by being thrown in a sack into the sea, and later avenged by the Giaour, the poem has its seeds in an incident which Byron claimed to have witnessed in 1810 in Piraeus. There he saw a young slave woman writhing in a sack and

being taken to be tossed into the sea in fulfilment of the traditional Turkish punishment for a perceived sexual misdemeanour. The poem's seemingly unprounceable title is a Turkish insult directed at non-Moslems, especially Christians, whose meaning embraces both 'infidel' and 'cur'. The Giaour 's popularity made Byron fear that he was pandering to a mass audience.

Also in 1813, Byron wrote *The Bride of Abydos: A Turkish Tale* (1813) completing the first draft in one week, and *The Corsair* (1814) in around ten days, between December 1813 and January 1814. Set exotically on the Asian side of the Hellespont, *The Bride of Abydos* concerns the love between Zuleika, the daughter of the despot Giaffir, and her brother Selim. In the course of the poem, Selim reveals to Zuleika that he is not her brother, but her cousin. Nonetheless the thematic concern with incest and the social taboo against it, inevitably had inferences for Byron's relationship with Augusta, an analogy which is confirmed in Byron's original intention to make Selim and Zuleika biological brother and sister.

Published in 1814, *The Corsair* is the third of Byron's Oriental tales and the most autobiographical of his poems. Set, as Byron remarked, in a 'pirate's isle peopled with my own creatures', *The Corsair* tells the story of Conrad, the corsair, pirate, intellectual, and 'Byronic' character of both vices and virtue, with a 'glance of fire'. *The Corsair* is haunted by two women, the blonde Medora, and the dark slave Gulnare, who together mirror Conrad's divided self. Unprecedentedly, *The Corsair* sold ten thousand copies on the first day of publication. Such was its popularity that, also in 1814, Byron wrote the last and longest of his Oriental tales, the poem *Lara*, a sequel to *The Corsair*, in which Conrad, now rechristianed Lord Lara, has abandoned piracy and returned to his ancestral castle.

On 2 January 1815, having been again rejected by her during the previous year, Byron married Annabella Milbanke in a private ceremony at Seaham where she lived. At the time, the new Lady Byron ominously remarked: 'If I am not happy, it will be my own fault.' The couple passed their 'treacle-moon' at nearby Halnaby Hall, during which Byron woke at night believing himself, according to Washington Irving, to be dead and damned, 'fairly in hell with Proserpine lying beside me!' (Irving had been allowed to read Byron's autobiographical memoir, which was later burned.) Byron was assisted in his composition of his collection of short poems entitled *Hebrew Melodies*, published that year, by Annabella taking on the task of copyist. During this period, financial problems and consequent heavy drinking drove Byron into rages and unpredictable behaviour. On 10 December 1815, Byron's and Annabella's daughter, Augusta Ada, was born, as Byron smashed bottles in the room below. Eisler narrates how, according to the sworn testimony of Annabella's maid and the wife of Byron's valet, Byron locked himself in with Annabella immediately after she had given birth, and attempted to rape her (Byron later denied everything). Following the ensuing uproar and Byron's angry departure, in January 1816, Annabella Byron received a letter from her husband ordering both her and the four-week-old baby out of his house. Shortly afterwards, Annabella left London with her baby, to travel northwards to Seaham. Byron would never see either of them again. That year, Byron's wife asked for a legal separation to which he eventually agreed.

In 1816, Byron published both *The Siege of Corinth*, his poem of betrayal, set against the background of the Ottoman assault on the Venetian occupied Greek city in 1715, and *Parisina*, the last of his Oriental poems. In April 1816, Byron left England, in the company of Dr John William Polidori, an unsuitably humourless travelling companion. Byron was, as it transpired, never to return. The two travelled through Belgium and up the Rhine to Switzerland where they settled at Villa Diodati on Lake Geneva. There they spent the summer in the company of Percy

Shelley, Mary Shelley, and Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont, who had become pregnant by Byron in a brief encounter in London that March, and who was intent on pressing her claim on him. In January 1817, Claire gave birth to a daughter, Alba, or, as she became, Allegra, who was to die in April 1822. In November 1816, Byron settled in Venice where he began an affair with his landlady at Casa Segati, Marianna Segati.

During the summer of 1816, Byron and Shelley visited the Château de Chillon, the dungeons of which revealed floors striated by the dragged chains of centuries of prisoners. There they heard of the incarceration in the sixteenth century of the Swiss patriot, François Bonivard, around whose story Byron was inspired to write his poem *The Prisoner of Chillon*, published later that year in *The Prisoner of Chillon, and Other Poems*. The narrative of *The Prisoner of Chillon* is a monologue, and, significantly, Byron's François Bonivard is both credible and un-'Byronic'. The poem's close affirms Byron's increasing skill at creating psychologically complex characters. As François Bonivard reflects on his release, the reader is made finally to wonder if Bonivard has emerged triumphant from his trials, or if he is instead a broken man fit only for lifelong imprisonment:

At last men came to set me free;  
I asked not why, and recked not where;  
It was at length the same to me,  
Fettered or fetterless to be,  
I learned to love despair.  
And thus when they appeared at last,  
And all my bonds aside were cast,  
These heavy walls to me had grown  
A hermitage -- and all my own!  
And half I felt as they were come  
To tear me from a second home:  
With spiders I had friendship made,  
And watched them in their sullen trade,  
Had seen the mice by moonlight play,  
And why should I feel less than they?  
We were all inmates of one place,  
And I, the monarch of each race,  
Had power to kill -- yet, strange to tell!  
In quiet we had learned to dwell;  
My very chains and I grew friends,  
So much a long communion tends  
To make us what we are: -- even I  
Regained my freedom with a sigh.

*Manfred, A Dramatic Poem* (1817) is set in a castle in the Alps, which Byron visited in September 1816, and where the poem's outcast Manfred lives alone; the protagonist owes obvious debts to, amongst others, Faust and Hamlet. Both Goethe's *Faust* and *Manfred* are metaphysical dramas, and Byron himself described his poem in terms which evoke the second act of Goethe's *Faust*: 'it is all in the Alps & the other world -- and as mad as Bedlam -- [. . .] the persons are all magicians -- ghosts -- & the evil principle -- with a mixed mythology of my own.' *Manfred*, like *Faust*, is a seeker of knowledge, and is destroyed, characteristically for Byron, by incest. He fully recognises the resemblance between himself and the sister, Astarte, whom he has killed by mingling their blood in a forbidden act:

She was like me in lineaments -- her eyes --

Her hair -- her features -- all, to the very tone  
Even of her voice, they said were like to mine;  
But softened all, and tempered into beauty:  
She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,  
The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind  
To comprehend the Universe: nor these  
Alone, but with them gentler powers than mine,  
Pity, and smiles, and tears -- which I had not;  
And tenderness -- but that I had for her;  
Humility -- and that I never had.  
Her faults were mine---her virtues were her own --  
I loved her, and destroyed her!

Frustrated in his attempt at suicide, Manfred descends to the underworld where he encounters the unforgiving phantom of Astarte who promises him death. Another woman, the Annabella to Astarte's Augusta, reveals her presence. Byron had written of his wife to Augusta: 'She has destroyed your brother, but woe unto her -- the wretchedness she has brought upon the man to whom she has been everything evil [. . .] will flow back into its fountain'. In Manfred Byron reputedly cursed his wife:

By the cold breast and serpent smile,  
By thy unfathomed gulfs of guile,  
By that most seeming virtuous eye,  
By thy shut soul's hypocrisy;  
By the perfection of thine art  
Which passed for human thine own heart;  
[. . .]

I call upon thee! and compel  
Thyself to be thy proper Hell!

When, in Act III, infernal spirits rise up to claim him, Manfred banishes them with the spirited self-sufficiency of Milton's Satan:

-- Back to thy hell!

Thou hast no power upon me, that I feel;  
Thou never shalt possess me, that I know:  
What I have done is done; I bear within  
A torture which could nothing gain from thine.  
When the spirits vanish, Manfred dies.

Published in June 1817, Manfred revived the dormant scandal of the poet's relationship with his sister, one reviewer expressing shock that Byron was willing artistically to exploit 'vice of the most horrid and appalling form'. Subsequently, both Schumann and Tchaikovsky were to compose music based on Manfred .

In 1817, Byron leased Villa Foscari on the Brenta at La Mira. He toured Rome with Hobhouse, visiting the cell where the poet Torquato Tasso had been confined for madness. The visit inspired Byron to write his poem *The Lament of Tasso* , which he composed in a single day in Bologna, and in which he writes of the conflict between artistic genius and despotic power. Byron's Tasso mourns his unjust imprisonment, the completion of his epic *Jerusalem Delivered* , and his unrequited love for Leonora. Like *The Prisoner of Chillon* , *The Lament of Tasso* is particularly significant for its movement away from the 'Byronic' hero. As Eisler observes, the poem focuses no longer on the man of action, but on the committed artist 'freed from the prison of the self by

the act of creation'.

In February 1818, Byron published *Beppo: a Venetian Story*, written in 1817. Byron's earlier satires tended to be written in rhyming couplets, but *Beppo*, and the two key later works, *Don Juan*, and *A Vision of Judgement*, were written in the Italian form of ottava rima (8 lines -- abababcc), originally introduced into English by Thomas Wyatt. It was only with Byron that the ottava rima realised its full force. The story of the return, after many years absence, of Beppo, short for Guiseppe, to confront his wife and her cavaliere servante (a chivalric role which the cant-hating Byron found ridiculous) at a Venetian carnival, *Beppo* is Byron's first venture into the comic. Its outcome is reconciliation and civilised acceptance. Byron had immersed himself fully in Venetian life, and *Beppo* progresses both through the city's topography, and its convivial amorality. The year in Venice, during which he leased Palazzo Mocenigo on the Grand Canal, where he kept a menagerie of exotic animals, brought him what Peter W. Graham in *Lord Byron*, quoting Byron's boast, calls 'an epic catalog of mistresses noble, middling, and low-born, "at least 200 of them"'.

Part fictional autobiography, Byron's unfinished epic satire in ottava rima, *Don Juan* (1819-24), asserts the poet's emphatic mastery of the form. Canto II, in particular, manages to be funny, pathetic, and sad, its wide emotional range dramatically and movingly signalling Byron's mastery. Concerning a young man from Seville, *Don Juan*, and his affairs with the beautiful women he meets, the poem is a picaresque, literary burlesque, directed at social, sexual, and religious hypocrisies, and at sentimentality. As Byron remarked in 1823, 'there are but two sentiments to which I am constant -- a strong love of liberty, and a detestation of cant'. Eisler comments that *Don Juan*'s last seven cantos 'have been described as his Remembrance of Things Past' with Byron confronting, through the person of *Don Juan*, the ghosts of his past. A certain preference in Byron, for sense as against sensibility, marks him, by disposition, as an anti-Romantic poet, and *Don Juan* is rightly considered a great anti-Romantic poem.

Having been at first labelled 'filthy and impious', *Don Juan* gradually became successful. At first, Shelley was virtually alone in recognising *Don Juan*'s worth, calling it the 'greatest long poem in English since *Paradise Lost*'; later he was plunged into despairing jealousy on hearing Byron read Canto V, remarking nonetheless that it was 'astonishingly fine'.

Also in 1819, Byron published the poem *Mazeppa* which he had written in Venice the previous summer, and which sees him moving from romantic to colloquial styles. Byron's *Don Giovannism* apparently now came to an end when he formed the most sustained relationship of his life, with Teresa Guiccioli, the convent-bred nineteen-year-old bride of a fifty-eight-year-old count. That year Byron followed the Guicciolis to Ravenna, and then on to Bologna, returning to Ravenna, ironically to become Teresa's cavalier servante.

Byron's time at Ravenna and Pisa, from 1819 to 1822, was a period of intense creativity. In 1820, he wrote the poetic drama, *Cain: A Mystery* (1821). Since his childhood, when he had been read to by a succession of scripture-reading nurses, Byron had loved the Bible and been especially fascinated by the conflict of Cain and Abel with its play on oppositional identities. Eisler locates the root of the story's appeal for Byron in the burden of his physical impairment, writing that through the story 'he could elevate his own deformity to the grandeur of a curse -- the mirror image of a sense of election'. Cain's rejection of orthodox belief finds Byron liberated, through the character of Cain, to express his cosmic doubt. Byron's Cain becomes a willing pupil of Lucifer who through his teaching reveals the injustice at the heart of God's treatment of man,

confirming Cain in his revolt. In a prediction, in part, of twentieth-century existentialist thinking, Byron's Cain expresses the Byron's own dilemma with religious faith, namely how to accept a God who defines knowledge and truth as evil and sin:

The snake spoke truth; it was the Tree of Knowledge;

It was the Tree of Life: knowledge is good,

And Life is good; and how can both be evil?

Cain aroused intense criticism, and Cain 's challenge to scripture, coupled with outrage over parts of Don Juan , saw Byron's publisher, John Murray, threatened with prosecution.

In 1820, as well as Cain , and his continuing work on Don Juan , Byron wrote a Venetian tragedy, Marino Faliero , and The Prophecy of Dante , his homage both to Teresa, 'my own bright Beatrice', and to the great poet himself, whose tomb is in Ravenna. In 1821, Teresa obtained a papal separation from her husband, leaving him for Byron. Turning his attention to drama, Byron wrote two plays on historical subjects, Sardanapalus and The Two Foscari , and Heaven and Earth: A Mystery , which like Cain written in the same year, is based on biblical sources. Also in 1821, Byron left Ravenna to join Shelley and his circle in Pisa.

In 1822, Byron published The Vision of Judgement , his devastating response to the poet laureate Southey 's poems A Vision of Judgement , which was a ridiculous eulogy to the recently deceased George III. Southey 's poem depicts both the dead king's triumphal entry into heaven and his enemies' damnation, while Southey s preface attacks Byron's writings as 'those monstrous combinations of horrors and mockery, lewdness and impiety'. In his poem, Byron stresses the stupidity of George III and presents a vivid portrait of Southey as a bad poet. The Vision of Judgement is written in ottava rima, which, lending itself to forced rhyme and thus to comic effect, enabled Byron to perfect his satire. The Vision of Judgement , like Don Juan , sees Byron manifesting a tremendous vitality through which he conveys the insights of a disillusioned, though not misanthropic, man. The Vision of Judgement is, in effect, Byron's practical illustration of what bad art and good art mean. For the more classical Byron, 'that poor insane creature' Southey is the supreme Romantic dunce. Byron's poem, particularly Cantos II and III, is brilliant farce, and the comedy of the poem's action is reflected in its perfectly pitched style.

Byron's satire in The Vision of Judgement is threefold: literary, political, and theological. That a political motivation was prominent in Byron's mind is evident in the magnificent response he made to the predictable outcry with which the publication of his poem was met, suggesting something of the artist's inspirationally defiant 'non serviam' which Byron would, in time, bequeath, among others, notably to James Joyce :

As to myself, I shall not be deterred by an outcry. They hate me, and I detest them, I mean your present public, but they shall not interrupt the march of my mind, nor prevent me from telling the tyrants who are attempting to trample upon all thought, that their thrones will yet be rocked to their foundation.

The Vision of Judgement saw an end of Byron's partnership with his long-standing publisher John Murray. Weary of Murray's caution, Byron gave his poem to the radical John Hunt, brother of Leigh Hunt , to publish.

On 13 July 1822, Shelley , Edward Ellerker Williams and their boatboy were drowned whilst sailing Shelley 's boat the Don Juan . Byron, deciding that his anti-Christian friend should have a proper pagan ceremony for the cremation, had the bodies exhumed from the Protestant Cemetery in Rome where they had been buried, and cremated on the seashore on 15 August.



From 1822 to 1823, Byron wrote *Werner: A Tragedy*, his unfinished drama *The Deformed Transformed*, *The Age of Bronze*, a satirical poem on the Congress of Verona, and *The Island*, a poem based on the mutiny of HMS *Bounty*.

Byron had, however, never fully considered poetry to be his true, or at least his only, calling, and on 6 January 1824, determined to devote his efforts and prestige to the Greek struggle for independence, crossed to the besieged mainland town of Missolonghi. Prior to his departure, Byron had remarked to Marguerite Power, Lady Blessington: 'I have a presentiment I shall die in Greece.' Leaving Missolonghi in February, with the aim of capturing the Turkish occupied fortress of Lepanto, Byron's health deteriorated and he caught a fever. Threatened with the loss of his sanity if he refused his doctors' request to bleed him, Byron acceded. Lord George Gordon Byron died on 19 April 1824, the immediate cause of his death probably being uraemia abetted by bleedings. His final words were 'Io lascio qualche cosa di caro nel mondo' -- I leave something dear to the world. Despite his deathbed request 'let not my body be hacked, or be sent to England', his body was interred in the vault of the Byron family church, St. Mary Magdalene, Hucknall Torkard, Nottinghamshire, on 16 July 1824. It was not until 1969, that the British establishment decided that Byron's stature entitled him to a tablet in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner.

Byron's reputation declined in the morally censorious climate of Victorian Britain. Tennyson himself, who took Byron's place as the most celebrated poet of his age took pains to disavow his boyhood hero. Later, as literary criticism became fully able to accommodate artistic breadth, Aldous Huxley in his essay 'Tragedy and the Whole Truth' challenged the seventeenth-century view that tragedy must be all tragic. Byron's work, wherein even the comic poetry includes the tragic, bears this out. T.S. Eliot acknowledged the consummate depth of Byron's artistic self-invention, remarking of Byron that 'it is only the self that he invented that he understood perfectly'.

Byron was an indefatigable letter writer, and the twelve volumes of Byron's *Letters and Journals*, edited by Leslie A. Marchand, were published from 1973. Benita Eisler's biography *Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame* (1999) is an excellent, comprehensive appraisal of the poet's life and work. Peter W. Graham's *Lord Byron* (1998) provides a good critical guide to Byron. Malcolm Kelsall's *Byron's Politics* (1987) is of notable interest, as is Andrew Rutherford's *Byron: The Critical Heritage* (1970).

Byron's manuscripts and letters are held in a number of locations, including Newstead Abbey, Nottingham. The Lovelace papers, and the Egerton Papers, along with papers relating to Byron's divorce in 1816, are all held at the British Library. The John Murray Archive, at 50 Albemarle Street, London, holds a number of Byron's papers; others were kept in Aberdeen Grammar School's library, but were lost in the fire that destroyed the building's interior in the late 1980s.

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