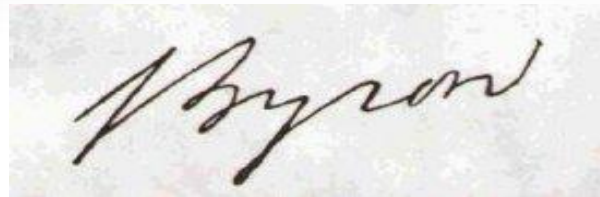


GEORGE GORDON BYRON

(1788 – 1824)

A handwritten signature of George Gordon Byron in cursive script, written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

**George
Gordon
BYRON**

*“...I will teach, if possible, the stones to rise against
earth`s tyrants...”*

From “Don Juan”



*“...He who loves
not his country,
can love
nothing...”*

Byron

*“And I will war, at least in words, with all who war
With Thought; and of Thought`s foes by far most rude,
Tyrants and sycophants have been and are...”*

From “Don Juan”

Lord Byron



1788-1824
online-literature.com

The poet was a real fighter; he struggled against despotism with both pen and sword. Freedom was the cause that he served all his life.

Like all the romantic writers of his time, Byron was disappointed with the results of the French Revolution; but unlike the Lake Poets who condemned their former beliefs and tried to escape from reality into the world of dreams and mysticism, he remained true to the ideas of

Liberty and equality. Byron hated wars and the rising power of capital. He sympathized with the oppressed people and seemed to understand their role in the future battles for freedom.

However, definite limitations of the poet's world outlook caused deep contradictions on his works. Though Byron believed in the final triumph of good over evil, he could not foretell the paths the class struggle would take in the future, and many of his verses are touched with disappointed and scepticism. The philosophy of "world sorrow" becomes the leading theme of his works.

The poet's attention is drawn to the individual and he dwells on the valour of the, romantic hero, fighting for his own personal liberty.

Romantic individualism and a pessimistic attitude to life combine in Byron's art with his firm belief in reason: realistic tendencies prevail in his works of the later period.

In spite of his pessimism, Byron's verse embodies the aspirations of the English workers, Irish peasants, Spanish partisans, Italian Carbonary, Albanian and Greek patriots, and encouraged the struggle against the social evils of the time.

Byron's flaming characters, his beautiful pictures of nature and his brilliant satirical power, coupled with his rich and melodious verse, appeal to us and, no doubt, will be admired by many generations to come.

HIS CHILDHOOD

George Gordon Byron was born in London, on January 22, 1788, in an impoverished aristocratic family. His mother, Catherine Gordon, was a Scottish lady of honorable birth, and respectable fortune, his father, an army officer, died when the future poet was only 3 years old.

George was very lonely from early childhood. His mother was a woman of quick feelings and strong passions. Now she kissed him, now she scolded him. In one of her fits of passion she called him “a lame brat”, and the boy could not bring himself to forgive her this insult.



EDUCATION

George was lame from birth and was sensitive about it all his life, thanks to his strong and regular training, he became an excellent rider, a champion swimmer, a boxer and took part in athletic exercises.



Byron spent the first 10 years of his life in Scotland. He was found of the rocky coast and mountains of the country. He attended grammar school in Aberdeen. The boy 'devoured' books of travel. These books greatly influenced his poetical development. In 1798 George's grand-uncle died and the boy inherited the title of baron. Together with his mother and nurse the boy moved to Newstead, from where he was sent to Harrow School.



*Byron's
house in
Newstead*



*of
Harrow School*

*At the age of seventeen he
Cambridge University.*



EDUCATION

While a student, Byron published his first collection of poems "Hours of Idleness" (1807). It was mercilessly attacked by a well-known critic in the magazine "Edinburgh Review". Wounded to the quick, Byron decided to take his revenge; a whole year was spent in preparation of a reply, which was published in 1809 under the title of "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers". In this satirical poem, which is really criticism in verse, Byron makes a wide survey of contemporary literary life.

In the spring of 1808 Byron graduated from the University and received his M. A. (Master of Arts) degree, and next year took his hereditary seat in the House of Lords.

LOVE



George was sixteen when he fell in love with his distant relative Mary Chaworth, the ideal of womanly perfection for him. She did not return his affection. But the memory of his first love clung to Byron throughout his life, and colored much of his writing.

In the first canto of “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” the poet says that Mary was the one whom he really loved..

LOVE



In 1815 Byron married Miss Isabella Milbanke. She was a religious woman, cold and pedantic. It was an unlucky match.

Though Byron was fond of their only child Augusta Ada, and did not want to break up the family, separation was inevitable. The scandal around the divorce was enormous.

TRAVEL

In 1809 he left England on a long journey, which took 2 years. He visited Portugal, Spain, Albania, Greece, and Turkey, and during his travels wrote the first 2 cantos of “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage”. After an absence of 2 years the poet returned to England.

In 1817 Byron left for Italy. He visited Venice, Ravenna, Pisa, and Genoa. The political situation in Italy at this period was such as to rouse his indignation.

The Italian period(1817-1823), influenced revolutionary ideas, may be considered to be the summit of Hyron’s poetical career. Such works as “Beppo”(1818), a humorous poem in a Venetian setting and his greatest work “Don Juan” are the most realistic works written by the poet.



AT THE AGE OF 36..



The defeat of the Carbonari uprising (1822) was a heavy blow to Byron. The war of Greece against the Turks, which had been going on for 2 years, attracted his attention. Byron longed for action, and went to Greece to take part in the struggle for national independence. Soon after his arrival he was seized

With fever and died at Missolonghi on the 18th of April, 1824, at the age of 36. The Greeks desired that his remains should be buried in the country which he had loved not less than his own, but his friends wanted him to be buried in Westminster Abbey.





← *Westminster Abbey*

However, this was refused by the English authorities, and the poet's body, already transported from Greece to England, was buried in the family vault near Newstead.





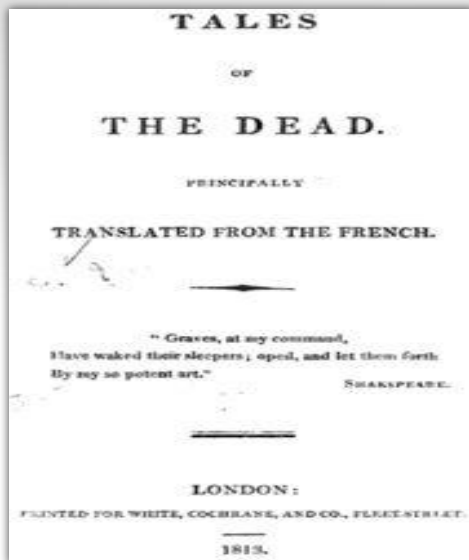
*BYRON lying on deathbed by
Joseph-Dinis Odevaere*

HIS WORK

On February 27, 1812, Byron made his first speech in House of Lords. He spoke passionately in defense of the English proletariat and blamed the government for the unbearable conditions of the life of the workers.

In 1812 the first 2 cantos of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" were published. They were received with a burst of enthusiasm by his contemporaries and Byron became one of the most popular men in London.

Between 1813 and 1816 Byron composed his "Oriental Tales".



"The Giaour", "The Corsair", "Lara" and others. These tales embody the poet's romantic individualism.



House of Lords



WORK



BYRON by
Marie Louise
Vigée-Lebrun

While in Switzerland, Byron wrote the third canto of “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage”(1816), “The Prisoner of Chillon” (1816), the dramatic poem “Manfred”(1817), and many lyrics.

The other notable works of the period are the fourth canto of “Child Harold’s Pilgrimage””(1818); “The Prophecy of Dante”(1821), where, speaking in the person of the great Italian poet Dante, Byron calls upon the Italians to fight for their independence; and dramas “Marino Faliero”(1820) and “Cain”(1821). During the same period he wrote his satirical masterpieces, “The Vision of Judgment”(1822)and “The Age of Bronze”(1823). These 2 poems from the peak of Byron’s achievements in satire, a genre in which he was most powerful.

“THE CORSAIR”

“The Corsair” (1814) has all the features typical of Byron’s early romantic poems. It consists of disconnected episodes, and the reader has to use his imagination in order to supply the parts.

The struggle between Conrad, a pirate, and Seyd, the Turkish Pasha, motivates the plot of the poem, but the main interest lies in character of Conrad. Thomas Macaulay defined a hero of this type as “a man proud, moody, cynical, with defiance of his brow, and misery in his heart, a scorner of his kind, implacable in revenge. Other characters, including, the gentle Medora, and the fiery-tempered slave-girl Gulnare are touched upon slightly.

In describing Conrad, Byron puts forth a concept of human character popular among the Progressive Romantics; at a time when bourgeois way of life, the romantics saw great value in men whose souls were ruled by some strong passion. The capacity to experience an intense emotion was looked upon as a means of protest against the hateful, everyday life.

“Childe Harold`s Pilgrimage”



“Childe Harold`s Pilgrimage” is a huge poem. Byron himself speaks of it as the most thoughtful and the most comprehensive of his compositions. The poem was written during different periods of Byron`s life. As a whole it makes rather difficult reading: its composition seems chaotic, there is no really “story” in it, the hero, Harold, is very often absent from the pages of the poem.

It is more a travelling dairy of Byron himself.

The hero at the poem is the first one of this type to appear in world literature. A young aristocrat, disappointed in life, satiated with pleasures, he goes travelling, and hopes to find happiness among people who are not spoiled by civilization.

Harold`s character expressed the spirit of dissatisfaction , protest against existing reality, and dreams of happiness.

The first canto shows Portugal and Spain. In the Spanish scenes the poet shows the struggle of the people against Napoleon's invasion which the poet witnessed during the journey in Spain in 1809-1810. Byron sympathizes with the Spanish people who were fighting for their freedom and independence and blames the ruling classes, who betray the interests of the country.

The second canto is devoted to Albania and Greece. Byron describes his own adventures in the country. He admires the Albanians for their kindness, generosity and hospitality.

Deep love for the Greeks and concern for their fate sound in the poet's passionate appeal to the people to rise in arms against the oppressors.

Fair Greece! Sad relic of departed worth!
Immortal, though no more; though fallen, great!
Who now shall lead thy scatter'd children forth,
And long accustomed bondage uncreate?
Not such try sons who whilome did await,
The hopeless warriors of a willing doom,
In bleak Thermopyle's sepulchral strait-
Oh, who that gallant spirit shall resume,
Leap from Eurotas banks, and call thee from the tomb?

Albania



The third canto begins and ends with the touching address of Byron to his daughter Ada, whom he was never destined to see again.

My daughter! With thy name this song begun-
My daughter! With thy name thus much shall end-
I see thee not, I hear thee not, - but none
Can be so wrapt in thee;...

The political and biographical sketches which the third canto contains show greater maturity in the poet's outlook.

The fourth canto, which has to do with Italy, is usually regarded as the Finest. It describes people and events in ancient Italian history. Byron regrets the fall of the free states, their high culture and art

I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;
A palace and a prison on each hand:
I saw from out the wave her structure rise
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand: A
thousand years their cloudy wings expand
Around me. And a dying glory smiles...

Byron calls Italy the "Mother of Arts". He hopes that the former glory of the country can be taken as a pledge of her future prosperity.

A great part of the fourth canto is dedicated to the theme of genius and immortality. Byron puts forth the idea that true glory is achieved by creative activity, and not by illustrious birth and power.

Byron exposes the reactionaries of the time and expresses his belief in the final victory of the Italian people in their struggle for liberty.

The merit of “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” is in its revolutionary spirit, in its broad critical survey of contemporary life and vivid pictures of nature, now peaceful and calm, now stormy and violent, that mirror the poet’s own turbulent feelings.

“Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” is really a philosophical treatise on the nature of wars, and Byron leads us to the conclusion that only wars fought for national or social liberation can be called just and praise worthy.



BYRON
by
Jonny Lee
Miller
2003



*Statue of BYRON
At Trinity College,
Cambridge*