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BIOGRAPHY

Byron, George Gordon Noel, 6th Baron Byron (1788-1824), known as Lord Byron, English poet, who was one of the most important and versatile writers of the romantic movement. Byron was born in London on January 22, 1788, and educated at Harrow School and the University of Cambridge. He succeeded to the title and estates of his granduncle William, 5th Baron Byron, upon William's death in 1798. Lord Byron adopted the name Noel as his third given name in 1822, in order to receive an inheritance from his mother-in-law. In 1807 a volume of Byron's poems, Hours of Idleness, was published. An adverse review of this work in the Edinburgh Review prompted a satirical reply from Byron in heroic couplets, entitled English Bards and Scotch Reviewers (1809). In 1809 Byron took his seat in the House of Lords. Also in 1809 he began two years of travel in Portugal, Spain, and Greece. The publication in 1812 of the first two cantos of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, a poem narrating travels in Europe, brought Byron fame. The hero of the poem, Childe Harold, was the first example of what came to be known as the Byronic hero, the young man of stormy emotions who shuns humanity and wanders through life weighed down by a sense of guilt for mysterious sins of his past. The Byronic hero is, to some extent, modeled on the life and personality of Byron himself. The type recurs in his narrative poems of the following two years, which include The Giaour (1813), The Bride of Abydos (1813), The Corsair (1814), and Lara (1814). In 1815 his Hebrew Melodies was published, and in the same year Byron was married to Anna Isabella Milbanke. After giving birth to a daughter, Augusta Ada, Byron's only legitimate child, Lady Byron left her husband. In 1816, Byron agreed to legal separation from his wife. Rumors about his incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta and doubts about his sanity led to his being ostracized by society. Deeply embittered, Byron left England in 1816 and never returned. In Geneva, Byron wrote the third canto of Childe Harold and the narrative poem The Prisoner of Chillon (1816). He next established residence in Venice, where in the three years from 1816 to 1819 he produced, among other works, the verse drama Manfred (1817), the first two cantos of Don Juan (1818-19), and the fourth and final canto of Childe Harold (1818). For two years Byron traveled around Italy, settling in Pisa in 1821. He wrote the verse dramas Cain and Sardanapalus and the narrative poems Mazeppa and The Island during these years. In 1822, with the poets Percy Bysshe Shelley and Leigh Hunt, he started at Pisa a journal called The Liberal, but Shelley's death that year and a quarrel with Hunt put an end to this venture after only three issues had been printed. Don Juan, a mock epic in 16 cantos, encompasses a brilliant satire on contemporary English society. Often regarded as Byron's greatest work, it was completed in 1823. At the news of the revolt of the Greeks against the Ottoman Empire Byron, disregarding his weakened physical condition, in July 1823 joined the Greek insurgents at Mesolóngion (Missolonghi). He not only recruited a regiment for the cause of Greek independence but contributed large sums of money to it. The Greeks made him commander in chief of their forces in January 1824. The poet died at Mesolóngion three months later.

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