

GEORGE GORDON BYRON (1788-1824)

LIFE

Unexpected title

Born with a club foot - at 10 became the 6th Baron Byron – had a prestigious education.

Travels & fame

A 2-year tour with Hobhouse - fame overnight - affairs & scandals - marriage & separation.

Disinterested patriotism

Self-exiled - at Villa Diodati – to Greece to help the insurgents against the Ottoman empire.

TRAVELS

In Switzerland

Fostered the creation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* & John Polidori's *The Vampyre*.

In Italy

Venice, Rome, Ravenna, Pisa – at Viareggio (for P.B. Shelley's beachside cremation) - Genoa

In Greece

Huge efforts and money for the revolution – became a national hero – a statue in Athens.

KEY POINTS

The Byronic hero

A literary avatar for Byron himself: *rebellious, arrogant, overconfident, self-destructive and very, talented - a darkly glamorous figure characterized by charisma, moodiness, and mysterious past*

Love for animals

Kept a fox, monkeys, a parrot, cats, an eagle, a crow, a crocodile, a falcon, peacocks, guinea hens, an Egyptian crane, a badger, geese, and a heron... Walking about the house!!!

Ada Lovelace

Byron's only legitimate daughter – she would become the first computer programmer.

CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE (1812-1818)

STRUCTURE & THEMES

Structure / Language

A lengthy poem divided into four sections or *Cantos* – use of an archaic language.

Content

The travels and reflections of a young man disillusioned with a life of pleasure and revelry.

Themes

Melancholy and disillusionment after the Napoleonic wars – the vanity of ambition
the transitory nature of pleasure – the futility of the search for perfection.

THE CANTOS

Childe Harold

Childe : a medieval title for a noble young man preparing for knighthood - *Childe Harold*:
Byron himself reduced to his own poetic perception & attempting to escape his own past.

His travels

From Portugal to Greece, from Switzerland to Italy, emphasizing the importance of travel to
the development and growth of the self as well as lamenting the decay of ancient civilisations

Message

The work of human hands and that of human political institutions are ephemeral: only in
Nature can permanence be found.

FEATURES

Spenserian stanzas

8 iambic pentameters + an alexandrine, i.e. a 12-syllable iambic line rhyming *ABABBCBCC*.

Vision of Nature

Greater than the poet who celebrates her: poetry is our trivial human way of recording our
experience of nature which is all in all.

Apostrophe to the Ocean

The Sublime: the ocean is NOT under man's control – it is a source of fear but also delight.