

GEORGE GORDON BYRON

LIFE (1788 - 1824)

Byron became a Lord at the age of ten. He was educated at Harrow, a public school for sons of upper classes, and attended Trinity College Cambridge. In 1809 he travelled across Europe from Portugal to Athens and the Near East. His European journey inspired the first two cantos of his long poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. When they were published in 1812, Byron became a celebrity overnight. In 1815 he married Anne Isabella Milbauke, largely for financial reasons, but his violent conduct made the marriage unbearable. Lady Byron demanded a separation from her husband. There was a great scandal, Byron was ostracized by London society. He left England in 1816 and spent the rest of his life abroad. At first he settled in Switzerland, near Percy e Mary Shelley. Then he went to Italy where he lived above all in Venice. In 1819 he settled in Ravenna where he took part in the Carbonari movement conspiracy against the Austrians. Then Byron lent his support to the cause of the Greek liberation from Turkish oppression. In 1823 he left for Greece but in 1824 he died in Missolonghi.

ACHIEVEMENT

Byron's literary production consists of lyrics, narrative verse, satirical verse. His best-known works are:

- **Hours of Idleness**, a collection of short poems on the theme of love;
- **Oriental tales**, which includes *The Giaour*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*. These tales are all set in Oriental countries and all based on the same plot – love, separation, death and revenge;
- **Manfred**, the best verse drama, partly autobiographical in the portrait of Manfred as a modern Faustian hero;
- **Childe Harold's Pilgrimage**, in four cantos;
- **Don Juan**, a humorous poem, full of wit and brilliance. On the pretext of telling the story of Don Juan's love adventures, Byron attacks the false respectability and social codes current in England at the time.

Byron can be regarded as a romantic in:

- his **life**: he was an aristocratic and handsome, he was a prolific, successful poet, but, in his opinion, misunderstood;
- his **worship of liberty** and his rebellion against any form of oppression;
- his **titanism**, i.e. the exaggeration of all wild passions and emotion;
- his **Satanism**, i.e. his admiration for the fallen rebel;
- his **individualism**, he almost always intrudes his own poetry;
- his **melancholy**, which led him to believe in his predestination to a life of sin and sorrow;
- his interest in **history**;
- his **nationalism**, which led him to join first the Carbonari in Italy and then the Greeks against the Turks;
- his **appreciation of nature**;
- his taste for **exoticism** and **Gothicism**;
- his realization of the so-called **Byronic hero**, the best example of which can be found in *Lara* one of his *Oriental Tales*.

BYRONIC HERO

In his portrait of Lara, Byron also gave a portrait of himself. He was, in fact, the model for all his "heroes" or, alternatively, he perhaps modeled his image on that of his ideal "hero", a character type descended from Milton's Satan: a violent and mysterious man, dark and brooding, who often, in his past life, has had guilty secrets, but is endowed with great courage and finally redeemed by his passion for a woman. He sometimes echoes Shakespeare's great tragic heroes; but while the Shakespearean hero is punished for what he has done, the Byronic hero is crushed by blind fate and feels himself the victim of a will beyond his control. Like Milton's Satan, however, he still maintains a dignity and an indomitable pride of his own, which makes him great even in his defeat.

Notebook