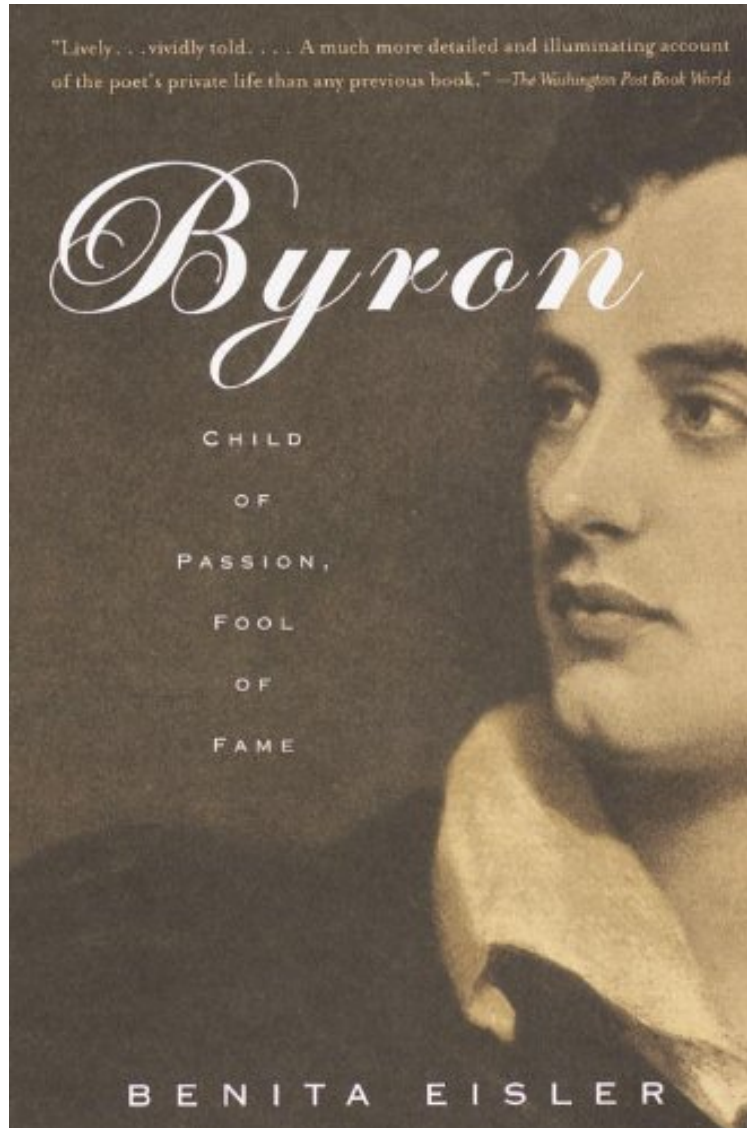


(Library ebook) Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame

Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame

Benita Eisler

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Benita Eisler : Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A man with only one virtue...By eledavf VivianThis lengthy account of Byron's life would persuade almost anyone to despise him. He had so few saving graces. His history was replete with vice, including pederasty and incest. He was a corrupter of both sexes, even children, and though not evil, he was as close to it as he could be without ending up in prison. In his cruelty to his wife, he was actually deranged.This is an excellent biography of a man I used to admire back in the days when biographers withheld so many of the disgusting facts. Of course the incest with his half-sister was by no means omitted back then, but it was related without many of

the grotesque details purveyed in this extremely thorough book. He was neglectful of his sad little illegitimate daughter, Allegra, whose mother he violently loathed. (But then so many of his reactions to people and events were extreme.) Little Allegra's life, though, could have been saved if Shelley had been allowed to rescue her. My lifelong fascination with this deranged nobleman has just about run its course with this candid overview of his weird personality. As a poet, he was sometimes inspired, at other times his works were labored and pointless. I never bothered to read his tedious *Childe Harold* saga, but his shorter poems are wonderful. He is shown here as a man outliving all too soon his handsome features. To control his weight he subsisted on an almost starvation diet and toward the end he became just another wealthy, overweight expatriate drifting around Italy, though writing poetry all the while. One virtue he retained until his dying day: his kindness to animals. His love for his dogs will always be remembered, especially for Boatswain over whose grave he wept. That would get him into heaven if nothing else would. I found this account of Byron interesting or at least tolerable until his Venetian sojourn; then I realized that the chronicle of his life was never going to be anything but sordid and that he was never going to metamorphose into a hero even in his last days with the Greek uprising. As to the author of this study, Benita Eisler, unfortunately she viscerally dislikes another and greater poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley. She cannot mention him without accusing him of being jealous of Byron's talent, fame, and wealth. Her loathing for Mary Shelley, too, is unrelenting. Nevertheless, this biography is to be highly recommended for its style and comprehensiveness.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. *Io Lascio Qualche Cosa Di Caro Nel Mondo* By Akice69A member of the noble class at the tender age of nine. Cultivated by the most prevalent literature of the time. Hopelessly enamored of a half-sister. Wedded into a prominent British family. Tormented by his private thoughts and aspirations. Considered by some to be one of the most brilliant, influential writers of the Romantic era, while by others deemed merely a spoiled member of the privileged elitist society who squandered most of the gifts bestowed upon him. Sounds like a dark soap opera, or maybe a script to some indie flick - but in fact all these events were components of the relatively short life of Lord George Gordon Byron. At last I have finished this book - a long and very meticulously-researched tome spanning Byron's lifetime. It is challenging to post a review for a work of this volume, without giving away too many of the details that made this so enjoyable to read. Nevertheless, I will attempt to do so, right now. Lord Byron was a complex individual who was loaded with stark contradictions. On the surface of things, especially when looked at within the framework of the period in which he lived (Regency England), he appeared to have had everything a person could possibly want, or need. He became a nobleman as a child; he'd had a doting mother who (wisely) introduced him to the worlds of reading and theater during his formative years. He attended Harrow, married into an upstanding English family (his wife, Annabella Milbanke, had been nicknamed 'the Princess of Parallelograms' due to her talents in mathematics), cavorted with the most powerful rakes of his day. The publication of '*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*', which appeared in 1812, whisked him further into the world of fame and prestige. He was sought after by eager, adoring females (not all of them young, or single) pretty much everywhere he went: and despite a brief attempt at being married, he appears to have had the kind of wild, wanton sex life that most men can only dare dream about. He seems to have enjoyed being a risktaker (a trait most likely inherited from the father he never knew, Mad Jack Byron); he liked to live life on the edge, perpetually interested in what was new and unfamiliar to him. Many of his personal relationships, particularly those he developed with women, seem to have been more about his desire (or need) to experiment than they did about love, or any long-lasting ties. But then there is the other side of the coin - those darker, gloomier factors that made this man's life less than idyllic. There were the frequent lapses into self-pity, mainly brought on by the physical deformity (clubfoot) he'd been born with (although, paradoxically, he still became an excellent swimmer). There was the ever-present rivalry between himself and other well-established heavyweight writers, like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats and (Tom) Moore (though this is fairly common to writers in general, not at all exclusive to him). There were the nights of binge drinking, the yo-yo dieting that he did, the speculative bouts of syphilis, the unpredictable plunges into dark moods of despair that sometimes lasted for weeks... and there was that strange, taboo obsession he had with Augusta Leigh, the half-sister who'd married her cousin, Colonel Charles Leigh, and borne him several children (none of which deterred Byron from pursuing intimate relations with her). On top of all this (and especially after word got out that Byron and Augusta were intimates), Byron often found himself a frequent subject of the salon ladies' gossip circles, due to his quirky, offbeat behavior and his most unconventional lifestyle. (For those who think the British press has a habit of baring its teeth to people it doesn't like nowadays, back in Byron's time it also had fangs, claws and a pick and shovel with which to metaphorically bury them). And for all his dabbling in 'personal experimentation', his penchant for throwing caution to the wind had consequences: a disastrous (and highly-publicized) marriage, a bevy of bitter ex-lovers, unresolved paternity issues, an unpleasant splitting off from his publisher of nearly ten years, and a trip to Greece (fuelled by political ambitions) from which he would never return. Now that I have studied the life and times of this 'blackguard' (he was labelled as such at Harrow), it seems as though his biggest crowning glory was the numerous written works he left behind for us to read. I do feel he was intelligent; but, as a personality, he was restless, reckless, prone to self-doubt and self-destruction. Maybe in part because of his many contradictions, the complexity of his character and his apparent inability to ever settle down during his lifetime, his name and works are still around and continue to fascinate people. I got this book almost two years ago, and I recently just finished it. I deliberately took

breaks from reading this, not because I was bored (because in fact I never was), but because I wanted to absorb each section and really understand the material. I purchased this book primarily because I wanted to see what this guy's life had really been like, to separate fact from fiction (films can be interesting, but to me they often pale in comparison to a richly-detailed biography). This text is, in fact, so embellished with detail that at times I did feel as though I were a fly on the wall. Author Benita Eisler did a commendable, respectable job with the research of her subject - and for this reason alone I would recommend it to anyone who wants to know anything (or everything) about the Lord Byron's life. Put another way: Anything you ever wanted to know about Byron but were afraid to ask, you'll probably find the answers somewhere in the pages of this book! While I feel that there are probably many words to describe the kind of life Lord Byron led, 'boring' certainly isn't one of them. In the end, what I find most fascinating about this often-misunderstood man was his desire to resist the parameters of conformity, while at the same time remaining a prisoner to them (as is frequently shown in the style and nuances of his writings). Few people, I think, can live out lives of such extreme duality while still maintaining a sense of identity, the way Byron managed to do. And although he did travel far from his homeland, and adapted to new languages and customs, inside his secret, unseen heart I believe he stayed true to that which, essentially, he was - a Briton.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A VERY GOOD READ.
By Anglophile
This book is great. It's very well written and easy to read, like a novel. I just finished reading O'Brien's book on Byron; and though I enjoyed it, her wording made it a little difficult to understand--which made me feel a little stupid (and I love challenging books). This book helps you to better understand the subject and his life. I found myself shaking my head out of pity and disgust when reading about his family and the long line of rakes and profligates he descended from. This book tells me a lot that I didn't know: I had no idea that he was the same age as his father when he died! I would definitely recommend this book. The reviews are well deserved.

In this masterful portrait of the poet who dazzled an era and prefigured the modern age of celebrity, noted biographer Benita Eisler offers a fuller and more complex vision than we have yet been afforded of George Gordon, Lord Byron. Eisler reexamines his poetic achievement in the context of his extraordinary life: the shameful and traumatic childhood; the swashbuckling adventures in the East; the instant stardom achieved with the publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; his passionate and destructive love affairs, including an incestuous liaison with his half-sister; and finally his tragic death in the cause of Greek independence. This magnificent record of a towering figure is sure to become the new standard biography of Byron. From the Trade Paperback edition.

"Obscured by the freedom fighter, fashion leader, fallen angel, and literary bad boy, Byron the great poet has tended to be forgotten," writes Benita Eisler in the closing chapter of her monumental biography, which goes a long way toward depicting George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824) in a more balanced fashion. Even in his own era, when the first edition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* sold out in three days, whispers of incest, homosexuality, and--far worse in Tory England--political radicalism grew so insistent that they drove Byron out of his homeland. Eisler's comprehensive narrative does ample justice to the impassioned love affairs that made him notorious, from his voluptuous half-sister, Augusta Leigh, to the erratic and vengeful Lady Caroline Lamb, who famously described him as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know." Let's face it, those juicy stories are half the reason we want to read about Byron, but Eisler gives us the other half, too, reminding her readers with lengthy quotes and intelligent exegesis that *Don Juan* is one of the greatest poems in English, and Byron one of the most influential and important poets. Her impeccably researched text is lucid about Byron's beliefs, candid about his faults, and persuasively ardent about his genius.

--Wendy Smith
From Publishers Weekly
On May 17, 1824, one month after George Gordon Lord Byron (b. 1788) caught fever in a Missolonghi rainstorm while fighting for the liberation of Greece, the cautious publisher John Murray, with the blessing of Byron's ex-wife, Annabella, and his beloved half-sister, Augusta, took a match to an unpublished work by the famous poet. The two-volume manuscript that was his memoirs. Perhaps it was this act that opened the flue for Byron biography, for as more and more of the seamy details of the poet's highly dissolute life come to light, the abiding hope remains that the destroyed work contained still more. Eisler's (*O'Keeffe and Stieglitz: An American Romance*) exhaustive biography portrays Byron as a restless, brilliant man in thrall: he is, in her view, the puppet of his own extravagant passions and even in his lifetime was so fictionalized and mythologized by others that he found it hard to maintain his own sense of self. Whereas Phyllis Grosskurth's study of two years ago, *Byron: The Flawed Angel*, used psychoanalytic arguments to show the poet's state of mind and possible manic depression, Eisler is more interested in the interaction between his amorous attachments and his poems. She quotes from his oeuvre liberally and with the good timing of an able literary critic, as she details the romances of the great Romantic, from his childhood crushes, through secret schoolboy encounters, affairs with other men and with the society belles and salonistes like the Ladies Oxford and Lamb, his marriage to Annabella, his incest with Augusta, dalliances with countless other women he would ultimately spurn, and his final, protracted involvement with Teresa Guiccioli. There are moments when Eisler's tight rein on her prose slackens to cliché, as when, having described so many of the beauties Byron bedded, Teresa is given the proverbial "little white teeth like perfectly matched pearls." But in the main, Eisler's lusty enjoyment of her subject's many escapades animates the story she tells in words both elegant and

provocative. The mind-boggling array of quotations, excerpts, and eyewitness and historical accounts she has amassed give face and flesh not only to the poet born under a bad, bright star, but to those whose lives he illuminated briefly. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal If Byron learned poetry from Pope and the classical poets, he learned wickedness from his father, the drunken, incestuous Mad Jack Byron, who died penniless at 36. And although there is no doubt that the poet himself sought "moral suicide," it is also true that his energies were ethereal as well as diabolic. If he was adept at ruining the happiness of others, he was also capable of writing some of the most sublime poetry of his time and ours. With a life like his, the biographer need only stand aside, which Eisler does, for the most part; she psychologizes occasionally but unnecessarily, since Byron hid nothing in his quest to become the hero of his own life. Ultimately, that life upstaged the poetry, as Eisler (author of *O'Keeffe and Stieglitz: An American Romance*, LJ 4/15/91) notes toward the end of this thoroughly engaging study. Byron too died when he was only 36, and his autopsy report noted many signs of disease, including the fact that, "strangest of all, the sutures of the skull had fused together, a sign of immense age." Eisler pays ample attention to Byron's work, making this an excellent complement to Grosskurth's purely biographical *Byron* (LJ 4/15/97). Highly recommended. A David Kirby, Florida State Univ., Tallahassee Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.