

# Poet who was mad, bad and dangerous to know

22 April 2024

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*Living large:* As a student at Cambridge, Byron was famous for keeping a pet bear.

**Can a villain also be a hero? Two hundred years after his death, Byron is remembered as a great writer who was far from perfect in private.**

## What's happening?

On the morning of 3 March 1812, 24-year-old Lord Byron had little idea what awaited him. The first part of his poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* had just been **published**, he had no great hopes for it. But in fact, he became famous straight away.

## Find out more

Byron was a great poet. But he is also famous due to his **scandalous** and heroic life.

George Gordon Byron had a difficult childhood. He was born with a **club foot**, and was mistreated by his nurse.

But at 10 George unexpectedly became Lord Byron. He went to Cambridge University where he was popular but known for his wild life.

As his fame grew, terrible **rumours** about him started to spread. He had lots of affairs and was **accused** of mistreating his wife Annabella. He also had huge **debts**. In 1816 he felt forced to leave England, and he never returned.

A cause which he cared deeply about was **independence** for Greece. The country had been part of the **Ottoman Empire** for nearly 400 years. In 1823 Byron set off to join the Greek freedom

fighters, only to die of fever a few months later.

In Greece he is remembered as a hero, with many streets named after him.

Can a villain also be a hero?

## Some say

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Yes! Almost everyone has two sides to them, one heroic and the other less so. Byron's scandalous love life does not make his poetry or his support for Greek independence any less heroic.

## Others think

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No! A hero is someone who leads a moral life and who others can look up to as an example. Byron's shameful treatment of women means that he cannot be a good role model.

## Some people say

*"Always laugh when you can; it is cheap medicine. Merriment is a philosophy not well understood."*

Lord Byron (1788 – 1824), English poet

Empty heading

*What do you think?*

## Six steps to discovery

### 1. Connect

**How do you feel about this story?** - Do you like poetry? Have you written any?

### 2. Wonder

**What questions do you have?** - For example: What was life like for Byron growing up?

### 3. Investigate

**What are the facts?** - Pick out one thing we know for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure about this story.

### 4. Construct

**What is your point of view?** - You are asked to organise a day in celebration of Byron. Think about what you would say.

### 5. Express

**What do others believe?** - What would be the good and bad things about being famous? Talk about it with your classmates.

### 6. Reflect

**What might happen next?** - Imagine you are asked to write a poem about a hero. Write one about someone you admire.

## Glossary

**Published** - Made available for people to buy or read.

**Scandalous** - Something that will cause public outrage, and make people shocked and upset.

**Club foot** - When a baby is born with a foot or feet that turn inwards.

**Rumours** - A story that is being told, but nobody knows if it is really true or not. Gossip.

**Accused** - Claim that someone has done something wrong.

**Debts** - Money that you owe to other people or banks.

**Independence** - Being able to make your own decisions and free from others' control.

**Ottoman Empire** - Also known as the Turkish empire, a huge empire that spanned southeast Europe, West Asia and north Africa from the 14th to early 20th Centuries.