



Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame

Benita Eisler

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Benita Eisler's **Byron** is a masterful portrait of the poet who dazzled an era and pre-figured the modern age of celebrity--an absorbing, illuminating, and wonderfully entertaining account of Lord Byron's spectacular life, monumental work, and lasting heroic legacy.

Drawing on previously unavailable material--including family papers only recently brought to light--Eisler offers us a more complex vision of Byron than any we've had before: a man who rose from the depths of poverty and the humiliation of childhood lameness to a pinnacle of success and fame unlike anything the world had ever seen, and whose bravura identity as renegade aristocrat, political revolutionary, mythic lover, and Romanticism's galvanizing hero and antihero was surpassed in brilliance only by his poetic genius.

With grace, erudition, and insight, Eisler captures the passions and obsessions that consumed Byron, the fierce devotions and the outsized ego that fired his work, and the despair and self-loathing that plagued his short life. Eisler gives us a richly detailed drama of a childhood of abandonment and shame; of Byron's early days at Harrow and Cambridge; of his humiliating entry into the House of Lords at eighteen; of his adventures in the East, where he consorted with pashas and prostitutes; of his relationships with his contemporaries, among them the twenty-four-year-old Shelley and his wife, Mary; of the instant celebrity that attended the publication of the first cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; and of the almost vengeful determination with which Byron recast himself as the elegant figure that glided through Regency drawing rooms, plotted with Italian Carbonari, loved men and women, and drew sensation to him like a cloak until his death, alone and in exile, at the age of thirty-six.

Here also are the first in-depth portraits of the women--and men--Byron loved: his guilty relations with John Edleston, a young Cambridge chorister; his tempestuous affair with Lady Caroline Lamb, who was driven to madness by her love for him; his catastrophic marriage to the lovely Annabella Milbanke; his passionate incestuous relationship with his half sister, Augusta, and the tormented menage a trois they shared with his young wife; and the gentler love of his later life, Teresa Guiccioli, whom he abandoned for his life's last adventure in Missolonghi. Throughout, Eisler offers incisive analysis of Byron's poetry in the context of his extraordinary life--as hero and martyr, aristocratic aesthete and dandy, transgressive rebel fueled by forbidden substances and exiled for forbidden passions--examining in detail the stanzas that inspired his own and succeeding generations as no other writer has since Shakespeare.

A magnificent record of a towering figure, sure to stand as the definitive biography for years to come.

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