

The general public image of Lord Byron (in)famously amounts to a set of gilded platitudes - the Romantic sex-symbol, the lover of women, men, wine and freedom, the revolutionary suffering the premature death of a true hero - all adding up to constitute the notorious notion of a celebrity, anchored in the melodrama of an exotic life with a tragic end. In short, ever since the phenomenal success of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in 1812, the poet has been distilled into a rather appetizing cocktail of hyperbole, originating in the theretofore unprecedented cult of personality epitomized by sheer stylishness and daunting eroticism. Thus in the long run, as far as the laity is concerned, we inevitably see Lord Byron join the catalogue of ill-famed idols featuring the disparate likes of John Wilmot or James Dean.

Moreover, the scandalous momentum of the poet's life has continuously been pushing the oeuvre into a shameful shade, the consequence of which being that Byron's work is largely perceived as merely echoing, in fateful chimes, the biographical bane of incest, debauchery, intolerable cruelty in matrimony etcetera - the allegedly numerous moral trespasses eventually resulting in a dramatic fall from grace and exile. Stereotypes conjured out of the bog of Byron's life stifle the voices of the various lyrical subjects whenever they attempt to speak to us across the abyss of time - rather than appreciating the poetry per se, we are chasing away the spectres of the ever-haunted and nonchalantly bored aristocrat, the tom hero of the turbulent Romantic era and his hallmark Byronism full of conflicting desires and inclinations, the apostate never reconciled with the world, damned, yet worshipped.