

37th INTERNATIONAL BYRON CONFERENCE AT VALLADOLID

This was one of the most invigorating Byron conferences in recent years – its theme was both classic and popular – Byron and Latin Culture. There were 51 papers in all, an illustrated lecture and three plenary sessions. Of all the papers, I found Professor Bernard Beatty’s possibly the most exhilarating “The Barbarian at the Gates” always sounds the note of immanent danger and the meaning of culture in any period, particularly in our own time, when we have different and challenging cultural narratives in all kinds of media and we are, in a sense, under siege.

The opening plenary by Professor Eugenia Perojo of the University of Valladolid was grave and all-encompassing, while the paper by Professor Michael O Neill of Durham University neatly capsized all our theories about Byron, leading him from the Romantic era to the 19th century profound abyss and the modern sense of nihilism which he also challenged with great erudition and scholarship. Professor O Neill is Chair of the Advisory Board of the International Byron Society.

My own paper was on Byron’s “Prophecy of Dante” and its form, terza rima, of which I am an advocate and exponent, and it was kindly received. Allan Gregory put forward his engaging thoughts on satire from Juvenal, and Swift, to Byron, which was also well received. Allan chaired the session of the illustrated lecture by Tessa de Loos, whom many of our members remember from their visit to Tirhana in Albania two years ago. I chaired a session of Byron and Latin culture, from three outstanding scholars who contributed much to the growing body of work about Byron which has proven such a fruitful avenue of discourse. What was apparent was the relevance of Byron to our own modern times, to those questions he raised and tried to engage with in his inimitable verse of assumed and humorous, yet somehow tragic, contrarities.

We had an evening visit to the College of Santa Cruz, and to the house of the poet Jozé Zorrila, and a day-long visit to Salamanca, where some of us called by the famous Irish College. It also gave us time to catch up with each other, and our shopping, in what was a wonderful climate with an atmosphere going back to the Middle Ages. We visited a castle, a rustic restaurant, and a fine dining restaurant in the town for the Conference dinner, where all too soon we were making our way home. Our delegation was fourteen in all, which was a strong Irish presence which contributed greatly to the conference and our enjoyment of Spanish culture and hospitality.

I would like to express my thanks to the organisers, Ken Purslow and Allan Gregory, and to the Academic Committee and Advisory Board, especially Dr Peter Cochran, for making this Byron conference such a resounding success.

**Rosemarie Rowley,
President, Irish Byron Society.**