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THE GREEK POETS PRAISE "THE BRITANNIC MUSE"*

Lord Byron's personality, ardent philhellenism, and romantic poetry—in that order—have fascinated the Greek intelligentsia ever since the turbulent 1820s. The celebration of the sesquicentennial of his death at Missolonghi gave new impetus to the production of Byron-related publications in Greece in 1974, as the observance of the centennial of the same event had given back in 1924. There is, however, a marked difference in the nature of Greek Byroniana produced in and around 1924 and those of half a century later.

Editors, critics, and translators honoring Byron's memory in 1974 concentrated their efforts primarily on the publication of scholarly studies of his texts, biographical works, and literary translations of his major poems¹. In the 1920s, however, tributes to Byron were paid primarily by creative artists who had composed elegant verse honoring the man and writer that Andreas Kalvos had once generously addressed as "The Britannic Muse"².

This cultural phenomenon may perhaps be attributed to two factors: the development of English scholarship in Greece after the end of the Second World War³; and the fact that contemporary Greek creative artists refrain from writing literature inspired by romantic or exotic personalities and events, and, like their colleagues in the Western World, are attracted to more socially

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1. For instance whole issues of literary magazines, such as *Nea Hestia* (1127) and *Aiolika Grammata* (20), were dedicated to Lord Byron scholarship. Verse translations of some Byron texts were made by Lila Karanikola, *Manfred* (Athens, 1973), and Maria Kesis, *Λ. Βύρωνος: Ποιητικά έργα* [Lord Byron's Poetical Works] and *Childe Harold* (Athens, 1974). A study was included in Demetrios Tournakis's *Ἑλληνολάτραι Ἕλληνοι ποιηταὶ καὶ πεζογράφοι* [English Poets and Prose Writers Who Worshipped Greece] (Athens, 1974).

2. «Ἡ Βρεταννικὴ Μούσα», *Λυρικά* (Paris, 1826)

3. The universities of Athens and Thessaloniki founded Departments of English in 1951-2. Recent enrollment in English Studies exceeds 2,000 students. A number of graduates earned advanced degrees in U.S.A., Canada, and England. A few even became professors of English in English-speaking universities.

controversial, sophisticated, psychological, and esoteric issues and themes.

Though competent dramatists and prose writers have contributed to Greek Byroniana⁴, their share is meager by comparison to that of poets. The focus of this study will then be on the Greek poetic response to Byron's personality, life, and work. To achieve this goal, I will survey and present chronologically the Byron-inspired Greek verse over one hundred years, and will attempt to evaluate it as a whole. In the process I will be discussing poems by Dionysios Solomos, Andreas Kalvos, Alexander Soutsos, Achilleus Paraschos, Philip Ioannou, Aristomenes Provelenghios, Yannis Vlachoyannis, Miltiades Malakasis, Kostas Karyotakis, John Gryparis, George Drosinis, George Athanas, Sotiris Skipis, Kostas Palamas, Anghelos Vlachos, John Polemis, Marinus Sigouros and a few others. Casual or minor references to Byron in verse on other topics and themes will only be mentioned *en passant*.

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When Lamartine, Victor Hugo, Carlyle, Tennyson and other European intellectuals were shocked at the realization that Lord Byron—the celebrated poet and one of the “men of the century”—was no more⁵, the Greeks were shocked much more profoundly, for they knew that their greatest and most influential Western-European supporter and champion, and almost the only factor of unity and perseverance in the cause of their national emancipation, was gone for ever. Genuine sorrow overcame then courageous Greek warriors, patriotic statesmen, intellectuals, and artists who lived in the war-torn territories of Greece, or in various European countries.

The late British Byzantinologist and Neo-Hellenist, Sir Romilly Jenkins, reported that the young man who was then becoming the National Poet of Modern Greece, the Zantiot Count Dionysios Solomos (1798-1857), was with friends in Zante when the sad news of Byron's death reached him. The idealistic patriot turned pale, experiencing a feeling of personal loss, extemporised a quatrain therein expressing his emotion, and left his company in mute grief⁶. That stanza—

4. Alekos Lidorikis published a play *Λόρδος Βύρων* (1934). Manolis Skouloudis did another *Ἡ τραγωδία τοῦ Λ. Βύρωνος* [Lord Byron's Tragedy] (1964). Stephen Xenos wrote a short story, «Ὁ Βρεταννικὸς ἀστὴρ», and Demetrios Kambouroglou did another. This is only a partial list. Biographies and historical studies are numerous. See *Nea Hestia*, 1127 (June, 1974) for bibliographical data.

5. Emmanuel Kriaras, *Διονύσιος Σολωμός* (Athens: Hestia, 1969), p. 50.

6. Romilly Jenkins, *Dionysius Solomos* (Cambridge University Press, 1940), p. 87.

Λευθεριά, γιά λίγο πάψε
νά κτυπάς μέ τὸ σπαθί·
Τώρα σίμωσε καί κλάψε
εἰς τοῦ Μπάϊρον τὸ κορμί·

Liberty, cease for a moment
Striking hard with your sword;
Now approach here to lament
By the body of this noble lord⁷;

—was the first poetic outburst inspired in a Greek by his admiration for Byron, and was soon to be followed by a similarly-inspired ode, composed by another Zantiot.

In a matter of a few months in 1824 Solomos had committed to paper close to two hundred rhyming quatrains of his long "Lyrical Poem on the Death of Lord Byron"⁸. This early and eloquent tribute to the British poet was never published while Solomos was alive. Over the years, however, he worked on it again and again, revising and substituting new stanzas for old. This lyric later on became a very popular patriotic anthem when the musician Nicholas Mantzaros, a close friend of Solomos, composed for it a solemn and elegiac melody. Solomos's Byron poem, in its final form, consists of one hundred and sixty-six quatrains which form seven groups unequal in length. A general idea of its "argument" and plot may be inferred from the following summary:

Quatrains 1-5 are the introduction. In it Liberty is asked to stop the fighting and lament Byron's death. The British poet is then associated with the Suliot Greeks whom he nominally commanded, and with their previous heroic leader, Markos Botsaris, who had been killed in the war. Stanzas 6-18 are a kind of appraisal of Byron as an artist, a liberal, and an idealist. In this passage Solomos grasps the opportunity to mention America as well and to call her the land of freedom.

Quatrains 19-32 glorify Greek freedom, Byron, and the warriors, while the poet curses those who oppose it. Byron's fame has moved ahead of him, and the various Greek parties wonder which one will attract the new ally. Byron's choice is wise and symbolic: Missolonghi (stanzas 31-51). Solomos uses the supernatural element imaginatively in describing Byron's welcoming by the war dead, headed by the Orthodox Patriarch whom the Turks had

7. See the Linos Politis edition of Dionysios Solomos's *Ποιητικά έργα*, I [Poetical Works] (Athens: Ikaros, 1961), I, 101-32.

8. «Εἰς τὸ θάνατο τοῦ Λόρδ Μπάϊρον—Ποίημα λυρικό».

hanged in 1821. Byron then meditates, while watching Greece rejoice at his arrival, and feels pain for what their disunity has cost the brave warriors. The poet, acting as a political seer, warns his compatriots to avoid the trouble of Erinys, because they will wind up either under a foreign ruler or will be exterminated by the Moslems (quatrains 52-82).

Stanzas 83-106 make up a long digression in which Solomos examines the historical decline of Greece, which he attributes to the results of discord, mentioning or alluding to historians and to Byron himself who had complained, in "The Isles of Greece" and in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, about the deplorable condition of contemporary Greeks. Solomos then castigates England as a haughty oppressor—a couple of years later he changed feelings—praises Lord Byron for his liberalism, and moves on to the description of the most dramatic episode of the Suliot war against the tyrant Ali Pasha—the suicide of the Suliot women at the Zalongo cliff. In stanzas 107-133 we see Byron spending the night by the graves of two war heroes, Markos Botsaris and Kyriakoulis Mavromichalis, and thinking about the future. His pilgrimage to the hallowed ground of Greece inspires him to fight for her. He also thinks of Aeschylus and Sophocles as fighters for freedom, and of children inspired to fight under the influence of patriotic songs. Byron then remembers his daughter in England, asking him to return home to her mother as a respected war hero. But the ship sailing home carries only his dead body.

Quatrains 134-160 echo the lament of Greece for Byron, whom Solomos imagines as having visions of Liberty and of his child, like Napoleon while dying. The poet then contrasts to the sympathy of Byron and of Napoleon—who had once expressed the desire to become the liberator of Hellas—the pettiness of some Frenchmen in Smyrna who had rejoiced when the Greek island Psara was conquered and rased. Alas, these men are alive, but Byron is in Hades.

The last group of stanzas, 161-166, describes the ghosts of the war dead welcoming Byron among them and asking him questions about their beloved country. Byron observes their wounds and their suppliant faces, feels great empathy, and urges them to achieve freedom and glory by forgetting their petty differences.

As the reader can see, Solomos's several digressions into relevant topics and themes (Freedom, Greece, discord, moral issues etc.) at times make the poem seem poorly organized and without proper focus. The truth is, of course, that a poem of such length, and with so many specific allusions, is bound to tax the patience and comprehension of many a careless reader. Lord Byron, however, is directly mentioned in the following numerous stanzas: 6, 12-19,

30-38, 45-49, 58-61, 81-82, 96-97, 106, 109-120, 125-143, and 161-166. The most interesting of these melodious trochaic tetrametres, alternating with seven-syllable lines, have been rendered into English by me as follows:

6. Ἀναθράφηκε ὁ γενναῖος
Στῶν ἀρμάτων τὴν κλαγγή·
Τοῦτον ἔμπνευσε, ὄντας νέος,
Μιά θεὰ μελωδική.
12. Ψάλλε, Μπαίρον, τοῦ λαλοῦσε,
Ἵσες βλέπεις ὁμορφιές·
Καὶ ἴκειός, ποῦ ἐκρυφαγοικοῦσε
Ἐνταπόκριση μ' αὐτές,
13. Βάνεται, τές τραγουδάει
Μ' ἓνα χεῖλο ἀρμονικό,
Καὶ τὰ πάθη ἔτσι σοῦ ἴγγιαι,
Ποῦ τραγοῦδι πλέον ἴψηλό.
45. Στὴν Ἑλλάδα χαροκόπι·
Γιατὶ ἴκεινον, ποῦ ζητεῖ,
Βλέπει νᾶρχεται, καὶ οἱ τόποι
Ποῦ ἢ σκλαβιά καταπατεῖ,
81. Καὶ τοὺς φάναξε: «Φευγαῖτε
Τοῦ Ἐρινώας τὴν τρικυμιά·
Ἵ! τί κάνετε; Ποῦ πάτε;
Γιὰ φερθῆτε εἰρηνικά!»
106. Γιατὶ, ἀλίμονο! γυρίζοντας
Τοῦ ἠῶρε ὁ Μπαίρον σκυθρωπούς;
Ἐγυρεύανε δακρύζοντας
Τὸν πλέον ἔνδοξο ἀπ' αὐτούς.
115. Πές μου, ἄνδρεῖε, τί μελετοῦνε
Οἱ γενναῖοι σου στοχασμοί,
Ποῦ πολλήωρα ἀργοποροῦνε
Εἰς τοῦ Μάρκου τὴν ταφή;
131. «Κάμε Ἐσὺ μὲ τὴν μητέρα
Τὴ γλυκειά μου νὰ ἐνωθῆ·
Ἐλα γλήγορα, πατέρα,
Ἵλη ἢ Ἐγγλία σὲ καρτερεῖ.»
134. Ποιὸς ἀλίμονον! μᾶς δίνει
Μιὰν ἀρχὴ παρηγοριάς;

- 'Απ' αὐτόν δὲ θεὸς νὰ μείνη
Μήτε ἢ στάχτη του μὲ μᾶς·
165. 'Κειὸς σεβάσμια προχωρώντας
Καὶ μὲ ἀνήσυχες ματιές,
Τὰ προσώπατα κοιτώντας,
Καὶ κοιτώντας τὶς πληγές:
166. «'Η Διχόνοια κατατρέχει
Τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἂν νικηθῆ,
ΜΑ ΤΟΝ ΚΟΣΜΟ ΠΟΥ ΜΑΣ ΕΧΕΙ,
Τ' ὄνομά σας ξαναζῆ.»
6. Valiant Byron was raised
Amid clanging arms in use;
While still young he was graced
By the one melodic Muse.
12. "Sing, oh Byron", she cried,
"All the beauties you can see!"
And readily he replied,
Having heard her honest plea.
13. In response he sang sweetly
In his most melodious rime,
Human passions touching deeply
With his poems most sublime.
45. In Greece now people rejoice,
For the Man she was seeking
Is seen coming, and his voice
Like a war drum is beating.
81. Byron to them did declare:
"Quit Erinys, side with Greece!
What are you doing? Where?
Let among you all be peace!"
106. Alas! Why Byron returning
Found these brave men crestfallen?
Weeping they were and yearning:
Their most glorious man had fallen.
115. Tell me, valiant, what direction
Do your daring thoughts crave,
While for long, with discretion,
Linger by Markos's grave?

131. "God, make him our home to find
And live with my dearest mother;
Come quickly father, be kind,
England awaits none other."
134. Alas! Who will ever give us
A little early consolation?
Byron won't remain among us,
Nor his ashes for protection.
165. Byron full of respect paces
And looks restlessly with care,
At the wounds and at the faces,
Thus addressing those there:
166. "Discord in Greece again reigns,
If the two of them you can sever,
BY THE WORLD THAT ALL CONTAINS
Your name shall live forever!"

Greek critics, in general, praised this poem⁹. Instances of adverse criticism, however, tend to concentrate on weaknesses in Solomos's diction, careless overall organisation, too numerous allusions and echoes of works by Milton, Gray, Byron, plus the sentimental—almost pathetic—mention of the poet's little daughter, Ada. Solomos, at any rate, was writing a verse eulogy, and in it he had to show familiarity with the life and achievement of the deceased English bard. The fact that he chose to mention little Augusta waiting for her father back home, brings an aura of domesticity to a poem which otherwise might have turned into a cold and rhetorical apostrophe uttered from too great a distance. Similarly, the references to Greek and English men and women of heroic behaviour—Botsaris, the other heroes, the Suliot women at Zalongo, and the Bard of Thomas Gray facing the Conway river—are in harmony with Solomos's intention of presenting Lord Byron as a champion of freedom—a hero who, like Solomos himself, had fought for Greece's independence wielding the same weapon, his pen¹⁰.

9. Some philologists and pedants made much of Solomos's hand-written critical comments on the manuscript of his own poem (e.g., "skatá", "óxo", "xanapláse" etc.) and proclaim the poem bad. We know, however, that the perfectionist Solomos was notoriously insecure and unduly severe with his own compositions. If he had thought this poem to be bad, Solomos would not have saved its text until his death, nor would he have given it to musician N. Mantzaros to compose music for it in the 1840s. For Solomos's comments see the L. Politis edition, I, 342-4.

10. M. Byron Raizis, *Dionysios Solomos* (New York: Twayne, 1972), pp. 77-8.

The other Greek poet and scholar from the Ionian Islands, Andreas Kalvos (1792-1869), was even farther away from Missolonghi and Greece's embattled soil. He had been in Geneva, Switzerland, from 1822 to 1826, having been deported from Italy (on account of his republicanism and alleged contacts with the Carbonari) one month after the outbreak of the Greek Revolution in March 1821¹¹.

Far from his country, and unable to travel to Greece and join the revolutionary forces—for political and other reasons which also probably prevented Solomos from becoming a soldier¹²—the young Kalvos must have composed his ode to Byron during his stay in Geneva. In that city of democratic traditions *The Lyre*, his first collection of ten idealistic odes, was published in 1824. There, removed from the influence of contemporary war songs and hymns composed in demotic (vernacular) Greek, Kalvos was inspired by the same epic events, although his poetic medium, style, and manner were influenced by his own classical Greek scholarship and the rather artificial neo-classic eloquence and technique of most contemporary European writers and philhellènes.

It is not known whether these two Zantiot contemporaries had ever met, or had read each other's patriotic poems. It is not likely that they had for their poems are diametrically different in verbal expression, tone, and structure. Solomos's poetry followed the tradition of the Greek popular balladry, with modifications stemming from his training in liberal Italy and his absorption of the principles of the European Enlightenment. Kalvos's poetic effusion was, in a sense, an honest attempt at resuscitation of Pindar's classic grandeur¹³. The first wrote in the living language of the people, not unlike Wordsworth. The second wrote in the elevated and almost bombastic language of pedantic scholars. Yet Kalvos's poetic genius helped him to overcome the barriers imposed by his linguistic predilection, and secured for him a place in the poetic Pantheon of Modern Greece.

Kalvos's ode to Byron, "The Britannic Muse", was included in *Lyrics*, his second and last book of Greek verse, published in Paris (1826). This collection was accompanied by a French translation (by Pierre de Cesnay) and poems of Athanasios Christopoulos. Thus, the *Lyrics* attracted the attention of many

11. Bertrand Bouvier, "Kalvos in Geneva", *Modern Greek Writers*, ed. by E. Keeley and P. Bien (Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 72.

12. Raizis, pp. 27-8. Also, M. Meraklis, 'Ανδρέα Κάλβου Ὠδές, Ἑρμηνευτικὴ Ἐκδόση [Andreas Kalvos's Odes: Interpretive Edition] (Athens: Hestia, n.d.), pp. 24-7; and G. Zoras, «Ἄνδρέας Κάλβος», *Nea Hestia*, vol. 68 (Sept., 1960), 42-3.

13. G. Panthier, *Helléniennes* (Paris: F. M. Maurice, 1825), pp. 29-30.

pro-Greek reviewers in Europe. In Greece herself, however, they were largely ignored by Kalvos's compatriots and the immediately following generations¹⁴. Only as late as the 1880s and the 1920s was his work "discovered" and properly appreciated by larger numbers of Greek critics and readers¹⁵. There is no doubt, though, that "The Britannic Muse" must have been written very soon after the event of Byron's death in April 1824. But unlike Solomos's poetry, which was "on the lips of all people" long before his death in 1857¹⁶, Kalvos's quasi-neoclassic verse did not become part of the popular Greek culture¹⁷.

This ode to Byron consists of twenty-six five-line unrhyming stanzas of four seven-syllable lines, plus one with five syllables, as Kalvos explains in his "End Note" (Episemeiosis). The first seven quintets dwell on the image of a sailor sailing away. The poet perhaps identifies with this sailor, since, like him, he is far from home and experiences similar emotions. Kalvos then addresses Byron directly. At this point one must appreciate the poet's logical transition from his nameless mariner to Lord Byron, "The Pilgrim of Eternity" as John Drinkwater aptly called him¹⁸, for Byron was often involved in sea travel:

8. ὦ Βύρων, ὃ θεσπέσιον
πνεῦμα τῶν Βρεττανίδων,
τέκνον Μουσῶν καὶ φίλε
ἄμοιρε τῆς Ἑλλάδος
καλλιστεφάνου!

8. Oh Byron, exquisite spirit,
Offspring of the Britannic
Muses and unfortunate
Friend of glorious
Greece!

14. Zoras, p. 45.

15. Kostas Palamas published his well-known essay on Kalvos in *Τὰ πρῶτα κριτικά* [The First Critical Works] in 1888, and included a poem on him in his *Ἰαμβοὶ καὶ Ἀνάπαιστοι* [Iambos and Anapaests] (1897). The poets S. Skipis, K. Karyotakis, A. Sikelianos, K. Pasayannis, and G. Theotokas started composing lyrics praising Kalvos in the 1920s. By the 1950s his works were taught in universities and schools in Greece.

16. Jenkins, p. 53.

17. Kalvos's straddling posture between the neoclassic and the romantic tempers is lucidly explained by Philip Sherrard: "In other words, the climate of Kalvos' inner world was closer to that of the Romantic poets than it was to that of the eighteenth-century poets in whose idiom and according to whose values he was trying to write his poetry". In "Andreas Kalvos and the Eighteenth-Century Ethos", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, I, 1 (1975), 189.

18. Cf John Drinkwater, *The Pilgrim of Eternity; Byron—A Conflict* (New York: D.H. Doran, 1925).

Stanzas 9-13 describe and praise the English poet in solemn and elevated tones, and express the universal sorrow over his death. Quintets 14-18 refer to the admiration that the Greeks and the civilized nations had for the deceased poet, and extol his everlasting fame. Stanzas 19 and 20 bring Byron and Greece together:

19. Σὲ ἡ Ἑλλάς εὐγνώμων,
ὡς φίλον μεγαλόψυχον
ζητεῖ νὰ στεφανώσῃ
ὡς παρηγορητὴν τῆς,
ὡς εὐεργέτην.
20. Σηκώσου, ὦ Βύρων... φίλε,
σηκώσου... λάβε, ὦ μέγα,
λάβε τὸ δῶρον, ὕμνησον
τοῦ Σταυροῦ τοὺς θριάμβους
καὶ τῆς Ἑλλάδος.
19. Greece in gratitude
Is seeking to crown you
As a noble friend
As her comforter,
Her benefactor.
20. Rise, oh dear Byron,
Rise, oh great man,
Accept this gift, and praise
The triumph of the Cross
And of Greece.

The stanzas that follow again express sorrow, since the poet cannot rise. The emotional pitch, however, is carefully controlled and does not exceed the limits of Kalvos's classic sense of decorum. Quintet 22 compares the young lord to a flower, to a lily. This simile may be indicative of Kalvos's idealization of Byron whom he seems to consider as a basically "innocent" and "immaculate" being—a notion that most Greeks entertain to this day:

22. Ὁ Βύρων κεῖται ὡς κρίνος
ὕπὸ τὸ βαρὺ κάλυμμα
ἀθλίᾳς νυκτός· ἢ αἰώνιος,
ὦ λύπη! τὸν ἐσκέπασε
μοῖρα θανάτου.

22. Byron lies like a lily
 Under the heavy cover
 Of a miserable night. Oh sorrow,
 The eternal fate of death
 Has hidden him.

The remaining four stanzas are rather didactic, as were several in Solomos's composition. Kalvos concludes his elegiac lyric stating that man's sorrow finds relief in lamentation, and that examples like Byron's deeds and death guide mankind to high aspirations¹⁹.

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Lord Byron's death inspired some Greek poetesses as well. Angelica Palli published her six puristic rhyming quatrains in the *Ephemeris ton Athenon* (1824). In the technically correct lines of "To the Death of Lord Byron" Palli refers to Tyrtaios and Mount Parnassos. The fifth stanza of her threnody voices the opinion that Byron belongs to, and should be buried in, Greece:

Ἑλλάς! Ἐάν τὸ σῶμα του ἢ Ἀγγλία
 Νὰ φέρ' εἰς μνήμα ζητεῖ πατρικόν,
 Εἰπέ, ὦ Μουσῶν μητέρα γλυκεῖα,
 «Εἶναι τέκνον μου ὁ υἱὸς τῶν Μουσῶν!»

Greece! If to a paternal grave
 England his body seeks to bring,
 Say you, who birth to Muses gave,
 "He is my son, the Muses' offspring!"

From a letter of Adamantios Korais to Iakovos Rotas mentioning this poem, we learn that the poetess was "Angelica Bartoloméo, née Palli" and resided in Italy at that time²⁰.

In an erudite essay of his Robin Fletcher, soon after mentioning Palli, writes that, "Probably it was also from outside Greece that Thomas Moore received at about the same time a modern Greek song upon Byron's death (with music), 'Ode to Lord Byron'". He then adds—quoting the Irish poet—

19. An admirer of Kalvos, Robin Fletcher, writes about this ode: "The best of the commemorative poems [on Byron] comes from the Greek who had been with [Ugo] Foscolo in England" that is, Kalvos. See R. Fletcher, "Byron in Nineteenth-Century Greek Literature", *The Struggle for Greek Independence: Essays to Mark the 150th Anniversary of the Greek War of Independence*, ed. by Richard Clogg (London: The MacMillan Press, 1973), p. 237.

20. See, George Valetas, ed., *Κορραῖς* (Athens, 1965), II, ii, 407; as cited by R. Fletcher, p. 236.

that Moore and Hallam had translated the words between them and found them unimpressive²¹.

Mention of a poem on Byron's death, written by a Greek lady, which was published in *Hellenika Chronika* (14 December 1824), is also made by Mr. Fletcher. Though this lyric was written by "a girl born far from Greece and brought up in another nation's language", it cannot be the one that Palli had written because, unlike Palli's, it associated Byron's death with that of Markos Botsaris—as Solomos had done²². Assuming that the *Hellenika Chronika* poem is the same as the one sent to Moore, we have at least two Greek lyrics by women honoring Byron's memory. If our assumption is wrong—we do not have the text of the poem sent to Moore—then probably three Greek ladies lamented Byron's passing away in 1824.

Mr. Fletcher also made the following correct observation about the Greek lyrics inspired by Byron's death: they seem to echo the tone, details, and points that Spyridon Trikoupiis was the first to establish in his prose eulogy of Byron, printed in the *Hellenika Chronika* on April 7, 1824²³. Indeed, much nationalistic and idealistic poetry in the Romantic Age was inspired by oratory, public addresses, and political editorials. The pro-Greek poems of the American philhellenes of the 1820s were often based on the wording of the declaration of Greek Independence by the Messenian Senate (1821), on the proclamation of Prince Alexander Ypsilanti, and on other such texts of noble intent and public purport²⁴.

A generation after Byron's death, which had inspired these memorial pieces, Greek intellectuals started writing commemorative lyrics about the philhellenic Englishman and his importance to them and to Greece. This second wave of Greek Byroniana differs from the funeral pieces—to name them so—in that emotion in it is more subdued, and the expression of sorrow is replaced by a proud declaration of unqualified admiration. Moreover, poets of the second wave seem to be more familiar with Byron's achievements, and allusions to his works and deeds are less superficial; often they are accompanied by specific details.

21. Fletcher, p. 237; Thomas Moore's diary entry for 30 December 1824, in *Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence of Thomas Moore* (London, 1853), p. 264.

22. Fletcher, p. 237.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 232-3.

24. See, M. B. Raizis and A. Papas, *American Poets and the Greek Revolution, 1821-1828: A Study in Byronic Philhellenism* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1972); and M. B. Raizis and A. Papas, eds., *Greek Revolution and the American Muse: A Collection of Philhellenic Poetry, 1821-1828*: (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1973), *passim*.

John Karasoutsas (1824-73), a competent and gifted poet who is now forgotten on account of his use of the strict or archaic *katharévoussa*, was inspired a meditative lyric while musing at the ruins of the Capucine Convent by the Lysicrates monument, at the foothill of the Acropolis of Athens, where the young Byron had spent several months during his first visit to Greece. The fourteen sestets (rhyming a,a,b,c,c,b) of Karasoutsas's "The Capucine Convent by the Lysicrates Monument, or Stanzas to Byron" constitute a profoundly thought-out and carefully executed composition. The sight of the ruins of the old shrine triggers the poet's memory to recall the "immortal Muse" that once had dwelled within its now broken walls. In other words, Karasoutsas begins his contemplation in true romantic—perhaps even Wordsworthian—fashion. To the ephemeral quality of the building the poet juxtaposes the everlasting fame of the British Bard. The poem abounds in allusions to Phoebus, Pallas Athene, Thrasyboulus, Greece, Missolonghi, Sappho, England etc. The fifth stanza—alluding to Byron's indignation at the servility of the prerevolutionary Greeks—shows that Karasoutsas knew, or was aware of, the contents of Byron poems like "The Isles of Greece", *Childe Harold* etc. The concluding sestet implies that time has not brought oblivion to the Bard. On the contrary, the lapse of time has improved the quality and impact of his voice:

Τῆς τυφλωθείσης ἀηδόνος
 ρέει γλυκύτερος ὁ στόνος,
 εὐστροφωτέρα ἢ φωνή της.
 Ἄπο δεινὸν δ' ὄστρεου πάθος
 εἰς τοῦ Ὠκεανοῦ τὸ βάθος
 ἐκφύεται ὁ μαργαρίτης²⁵.

A blinded nightingale's sigh
 more melodiously flows by,
 its voice supple and more agile.
 From a shell's fervor to create
 in Oceanic depths so great
 a pearl is born in a while.

The nightingale and pearl metaphors aptly attest to John Karasoutsas's skill and taste as a lyricist.

Around the middle of the century, Anghelos Vlachos (1838-1920)—

25. Ἰωάννου Καρασοῦτσα, «Ἡ παρὰ τὸ μνημεῖον τοῦ Λυσικράτους Μονὴ τῶν Καπουκίνων, ἢ Στροφαι εἰς τὸν Βύρων», *Ποιηταὶ τοῦ 19^{ου} αἰῶνα*. Νεοελληνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη, ἄρ. 12, ed. by C. Th. Dimaras (Athens: Aetos, 1954), pp. 143-4.

scholar, journalist, and statesman—wrote his two-stanza “Apostrophe to Byron” (1858), in the purist language of officialdom. Its six-line stanzas (rhyming a,a,b,c,c,b) do not differ much from Karasoutsas’s versification. The content, however, is but a pompous address to “the sun of our new poetic age”, who had excelled as a sword-bearing freedom martyr as well as a follower of Cleio and Erato, the mythic Muses. Vlachos then dedicates his humble poetic effusion to Byron’s “Temple of Fame”, thus associating his talent to the immortality of the Briton:

Ἐν καλλονῶν τ' ἀνάθημα κριθῆ παρ' ἄλλων στεῖρον,
εἰς τὸν ναόν σου πλὴν ἐγὼ τὸ ἀναρτῶ, ὦ Βύρων
ἄν εἰμαρται νὰ μαρανθῆ, ὦ! κἂν ὅς μαρανθῆ ἐκεῖ²⁶.

If the offering of beauties is judged by others vain,
in spite of them, Byron, I'll hang it in your fane;
if its fate is to wither, then let it wither there.

The foremost purist of the “Old Athenian School” of poetry, Alexander Soutsos (1803-63), composed his rhyming couplets of his eloquent apostrophe “To Byron”, much earlier than the other mid-nineteenth-century poets. Soutsos had also alluded briefly to Byron in a passage of “England”, which was included in his *Poetic Memoirs of the Eastern War* (1854)²⁷, a kind of equivalent to John Dryden’s poems on “affairs of state”, and Byron’s socio-political satires like “Carmen Seculare and Annus Haud Mirabilis”. Soutsos’s piece begins

Καθὼς τοῦ ἀνατέλλοντος ἡλίου του τὸν δίσκον
ὁ Πέρσης προσευχόμενος μὲ ὄμμα βλέπει θρησκον,
πρὸς σέ ὁ νοῦς μου στρέφεται, ὦ Μπαῖρον, ὦ νέε
τῆς ἀθανάτου πόλης μας ἀθάνατε Τυρταε!

As to the orb of his sun that rises bright
the Persian in prayer fixes his worshipful sight,
so my mind turns to you Byron, to you new bard
undying Tyrtaios of our undying struggle that’s hard.

26. Anghelos Vlachos, «Προσφώνησις», *Ποιήματα Λυρικά* [Lyrical (Poems)] (Athens Perri Bros., 1875), p. 13.

27. «Εἰς τὸν Βύρων», «Ἀγγλία», *Ἀπομνημονεύματα Ποιητικά τοῦ Ἀνατολικοῦ Πολέμου Ἀλεξάνδρου Σούτσου Ἄπαντα* [Complete Works] ed. by N. Kountromichalis (Athens 1963), p. 440.

Soutsos then mentions Byron's rejection of the classic rules of composition and his opening of new horizons in the art of poetry. Like many Greeks, Soutsos ignores the satirical and humorous veins in Byron's work and characterises his Muse as funereal and melancholic:

ἡ Μοῦσα σου δὲ πένθιμος καὶ μεγαλείου τόσου
ὕψάνεται ὡς πυραμὶς ἐπὶ τοῦ μνήματός σου.

Your Muse is mournful, your sublime lament
lofty like a pyramid rises on your monument.

After this grandiose metaphor of the pyramid, Soutsos likens Byron's greatness to that of Napoleon, and concludes the poem in his easily heroic and patriotic rhetoric:

ὁμοίως τῆς ποιήσεως καὶ σὺ ὁ Ναπολέων
τὸ ἀγαλμὰ σου ἔστησες ἐπάνω τῶν τροπαίων,
κι' ἐπὶ τοῦ θριαμβεύοντος ἑλληνικοῦ ἐδάφους
τὸν τάφον σου συνήνωσες μὲ ἡμιθέων τάφους.

Thus also you in poetry Napoleon victorious
your statue have erected on feats most glorious,
and on the triumphant and sacred Greek ground
your own tomb with those of demigods have bound.

The use of sculpture and monument imagery in these nationalistic lines is quite appropriate since Soutsos's purpose was to suggest Byron's everlasting fame, durable as the marble masterpieces of antiquity. However, the erection of statues and monuments honoring Byron at Missolonghi (1881) and in Athens (1896) inspired—apart from heated controversies among art critics—several poets and poetasters who wrote "occasional pieces" commemorating those events.

The unveiling of Byron's statue at Missolonghi was hailed by the popular versifier Achilleus Paraschos. His "The Phoenix at Missolonghi"²⁸ was written in competent demotic. Its versification, imagery, and references to melancholy and sorrow, however, hardly add any new breath, or poetic feeling, to what Soutsos had achieved half a century earlier in *katharevousa*. Its final lines sound like a variation of the purist poet's themes (heroism, liberalism, poetic uniqueness) and manner of expression:

28. «'Ο Φοῖβιξ ἐν Μεσολογγίῳ», *Nea Hestia*, 1127, p. 934.

Καλῶς τῆ λύρα πού κανεῖς δὲν ἔπιασεν ἀκόμα!
 Τῆς λευτεριάς τὸ ἀέρισμα, τῆς δάφνης τὸ λουλούδι·
 καλῶς τὴν ἀφθαρτὴ καρδιά, τὸ πικραμένο στόμα,
 πού ἔβγαζε τὸ στεναγμὸ μαζὶ μὲ τὸ τραγοῦδι·
 καλῶς τὰ μάτια ποὺ κλείσαν τὰ δάκρυα κι ὄχι μνήμα,
 τὸ θυμωμένο πέλαγος μὲ τὸ ἀσημένιο κύμα!

Welcome lyre that untouched by man you have remained!
 The breath of freedom, fragrant laurel tree in bloom;
 Welcome, you undying heart, bitter mouth enflamed,
 Breathing a song together with sighs of gloom;
 Welcome, you eyes shut by tears, not by the grave,
 The open sea in turbulence with its silver wave!

Similarly, the unveiling of the impressive Byron and Hellas monument at the edge of the Zappeion park in Athens (1896) caused a number of versifiers and poetasters to compose hortatory and stylised pieces addressed to the English poet or his marble effigy. Though practically all of them were written in *katharevousa*, or even in classical Greek, the only one deserving to be called a poem by today's standards was composed in vivid demotic by the prose writer and historian Yannis Vlachoyannis. The rhyming couplets of his lyric, "Byron's Statue"²⁹, are superior—at any rate in terms of diction, technique, and dramatic impact—to the verse of Paraschos who was, in his time, a professional and fashionable poet. A few lines from the beginning and conclusion of Vlachoyannis's poem will help the reader decide for himself:

Ἦ, πρόσχαρος πού σ' ἔκραζεν ὁ τόπος γιὰ θρονὶ σου!
 Ὁραῖε, τὰ μάτια γύρισε κι ἰδέσ κι ἀναθυμήσου·
 γλαρὸ τὸ πέλαγο κι ἡ γῆ πανέμορφη γιὰ σένα,
 θὰ στείλουν δῶρα ἐρωτικὰ στὰ πόδια σου στρωμένα,

.....

Ποιὸ ἀκόμα οὐράνιο μάγεμα καὶ ποιά χαρὰ τῆς πλάσης
 ποθεῖς, ψυχὴ ἀνεμόδαρτη, γιὰ πάντα ν' ἀγκαλιάσεις;

Oh how joyful this land called you to be your throne!
 Handsome, your eyes turn look and recall alone;
 the languid ocean and the land of beauty for you yearning,
 will spread gifts by your feet for love in them is burning,

.....
 What more celestial charm and what nature's joy
 you crave, soul of storm, to hold forever to enjoy?

29. «Τὸ ἄγαλμα τοῦ Μπάϊρον», *Ibid.*, pp. 1017-8.

The only poem in stony, rigid *katharevousa* composed for that event, which has survived oblivion, was written by Professor Christopher Samartzides of the Great School of the Nation (Ἡ Μεγάλη τοῦ Γένους Σχολή), who had come from Turkey to recite it at the unveiling. King George I of the Hellenes, who was present at the ceremonies, had no patience with the poetic effusions of his enthused subjects—long speeches by politicians were adequate for the occasion—so, at his request, his majesty and the audience were spared. Samartzides's lines, however, were published the following day (20 February 1896) in *Hestia*³⁰. Its first stanza reads:

Δὲν ἀφανίζει ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν τὴν μνήμην λήθη,
 διαιωνίζουσιν αὐτῶν τὴν δόξαν καὶ οἱ λίθοι,
 μνημεῖα, στυλοὶ φθέγγονται, λαλοῦσι καὶ οἱ τάφοι,
 ἐν οἷς φθαρτὸν περίβλημα πνευμάτων κατετάφη.
 Καὶ τοῦτο τὸ μαρμάρινον μνημεῖον λέγει ὅσα
 νὰ εἶπῃ μόλις δύναται στόμα θνητοῦ ἢ γλῶσσα.
 Ἐλάξευσε τὸ μάρμαρον ἀριστοτέχνου σμίλη
 καὶ τρεῖς ἀνέδειξε μορφάς ἐν τῇ ἀμόρφῳ ὕλῃ.
 Ἐν τῇ ἀγκάλῃ τῆς μητρὸς Ἑλλάδος ἔθνους ἄδων
 ὁ Βύρων γέρας παρ' αὐτῆς λαμβάνει δάφνης κλάδον
 καὶ νέος Ἑλλήν εὐσταλῆς καὶ ἄριστος τὸ εἶδος
 βλέπει τὴν θάλασσαν πρηνῆς εἰς βράχον μετ' ἐλπίδος.

Oblivion can't destroy memories of men of virtue,
 their glory make perennial many a rock and statue,
 columns, monuments witness; and tombstones stories tell,
 in which hides their spirit's the corruptible mortal shell.
 And this monument of stone stories so many a feat
 that a mortal person's tongue hardly can it repeat.
 The marble was aptly chiseled by an artist stone cutter
 and three figures were shaped out of the amorphous matter.
 In motherly Greece's bosom, singing with inspiration
 Byron receives his prize, glorious laurel's coronation;
 and a young man tall and handsome, the very Grecian perfection,
 looks at the ocean from a rock with hopeful expectation.

Several others vied with Samartzides, composing pieces in ancient Greek, like a certain P. Psaras, whose poem was published in *Nea Ephemeris* (19th February 1896)³¹. Anthologists and editors have ignored them, though, as

30. Ἐστία, Athens, 20 February 1896.

31. Νέα Ἐφημερίς, Athens, 19 February 1896.

they have forgotten other Byroniana in verse by John Karasoutsas, Anghelos Vlachos, and Demetrios Paparrigopoulos (in his “Phaedra”), and other romantic souls.

A long requiem composition of 138 lines in unrhyming and faultless Homeric Greek was composed by the scholar Philip Ioannou in 1824, according to Professor E. Skouvaras (who has rendered it in demotic and poetic Greek). This impressive lyric has survived probably because of its command of Homer’s diction and dactylic versification. Its contents consist of rhetorical apostrophes to the deceased poet, historical and mythological allusions, the mention of Byron’s first visit to Greece, his disappointment then (1811) and his change of heart later (1821) after the start of the Revolution. Ioannou makes a factual error—perhaps a deliberate one of “poetic license”—in lines 57ff where he places Byron in “far off and fog-covered Albion” hearing of the outbreak of war in Greece and hastening to leave and join the fighting Greeks. Didn’t Ioannou know that Byron had left England in 1816 and was in Italy till 1823? This detail, however, hardly affects the beauty of the lengthy poem, a sample of which may give us an idea of what those ἔπεα πτερόεντα sounded like in their marmoreal and affected eloquence³²:

Δὴ τότε Ἀχαιῶν υἱες ἀχαιῖάδες τ’ ἐπέτειοι
ἐρχόμενοι Βύρωνος ἐπ’ ἥριον ὕδατι παιδρῶ
Κασταλίας ρανέουσι νεκροῦ κόνιν, ἥδὲ κλάδοισι
δάφνης ἐξ ἱερῆς στήλην στέψουσι ἄοιδου.

And Grecian youths and maidens returning every year
where Byron lies, will cool, with crystalline water
from Castalia, his ashes, and will crown the bard’s
memorial column with branches of sacred laurel.

Texts like the above would undoubtedly have pleased the nineteenth-century academic establishment in Athens, whose linguistic predilections, sense of aesthetic decorum, and antiquarian biases are well known.

Before ending this part of our survey we should perhaps mention Panayotis Soutsos’s—Alexander’s brother—reference to the Byronic qualities of his wayfarer-hero, in the prologue to the lengthy and *bona fide* Byronic *Ὀδοιπόρος*—a popular book in its time, modelled on *Childe Harold* and on what Soutsos thought was a Byronic hero and plot.

32. Philippos Ioannou, *Φιλολογικὰ Πάρεργα* [Philological Minor Works] (Ἀθήνησιν, 1874) Β’ Ἔκδοσις, σελ. 511 κ.έφ. Ἐπίσης Βαγγέλη Σκουβαρά, «Ἐνα Ὀμηρικό μοιρολόγι στὸ Λόρδο Βύρων», *Θεσσαλία* (25 Μαρτίου 1954).

The last nineteenth-century Byron poem is a juvenile ode of numerous stanzas titled "To Lord Byron", written by Aristomenes Provelenghios before 1896³³. Provelenghios's thirty rhyming quatrains, in fifteen-syllable demotic lines, attest to his scholarly attitude—he was offered the Chair of Modern Greek at the University later on—and to his genuine admiration for the young Englishman. Allusions to Leibach, Moses, Aeschylus, and Markos Botsaris indicate that Provelenghios was familiar with Byron's habit of references to various historic personalities in his *Childe Harold* and other texts, as well as with Solomos's association of Byron with the Suliot hero, and the mention of the Hebrew Patriarch in his own eulogy. The opening stanza asks a rhetorical question:

Ἄστρον ὅπου ἀνέτειλες στὴν πάχνη καὶ στά χιόνια
 κ' ἔφωτοβόλησες λαμπρὸ κατὰ τὴν Οἰκουμένη,
 σὰν ποιά συγγένεια κρυφὴ, ἀγάπη μαγεμένη
 πρὸς τὴν Ἑλλάδα σ' ἔσυρε ἀπ' τὰ μικρά σου χρόνια;

Oh star that against snow and mist did appear
 and have cast light brightly toward the whole world,
 what sort of enchanted feeling, what sort of secret hold
 has drawn you toward Greece since your earliest year?

Further down, again like Solomos, Provelenghios insists that Byron should have been able to live in his "immortal country"—implying Greece—when England had "renounced" him, thus identifying the poet with the hero in *Don Juan*, or reading literally the poem Byron had composed while at Misolonghi:

Ἐδῶ ν' ἀράξης ἔπρεπε! αὐτὸ καὶ σὺ ποθοῦσες.
 Στὸ ὕστερνὸ τραγουδι σου, αὐτὸ ἔτραγουδοῦσες.
 Σ' ἀρνήθηκε ἡ πατρίδα σου, μὰ τὴ στερνὴ πνοή σου,
 ἐδέχτηκε ἡ παντοτεινὴ, ἀθάνατη πατρίς σου.

You should have come to harbor here! As you had desired.
 In your very last song you sang of it never tired.
 Your home has renounced you, but with your last breath,
 your eternal and hospitable has accepted Grecian earth.

The poem ends with the popular motif in Greek Byroniana: if your reputation as an artist dissipates, your memory as a champion of Greek freedom will be eternal:

33. «Εἰς τὸν Λόρδον Βύρων», *Ποιήματα παλαιὰ καὶ νέα* [Old and New Poems] (Athens: Hestia, 1896), pp. 240-6.

Τοῦ τραγουδιοῦ σου ἂν ποτὲ ἡ δύναμη γεράση,
καὶ σβύσῃ μέσ' τῇ θάλασσα τῶν χρόνων καὶ περάση,
ἡ μνήμη τοῦ ἀγωνιστοῦ τῆς λευθεριᾶς θά μένη
μέσ' τῶν Ἑλλήνων τῆς καρδιαῖς αἰώνια γραμμένη.

If the force of your singing in the future does expire,
and is drowned in the ocean of the years that transpire,
the memory of the fighter for freedom shall remain
in Grecian hearts indelibly engraved with pain.

* * *

Modern Greek poets left Lord Byron and his reputation to rest for a generation or so before the observance of the centennial of his death (1924) rekindled the fires of inspiration in a number of distinguished poets of the twentieth century. Following the example of Solomos and the revived demotic tradition, the newer Byron-inspired artists composed lyrics of remarkable beauty, whose thematic sophistication and psychological depth are a far cry from the ornamental and often bombastic rhetoric of all but a few of the poetic Byroniana of the previous era.

The demotic was now fully grown and established in the realm of poetry. Stanzaic forms, metrical patterns, and rhyme schemes had been liberated and enriched; thematic concerns had been broadened. The heroic couplet and the decapentasyllabic line had ceased to be the main vehicles of poetic composition. Sentimentality, patriotic pride, lofty idealism, religious fervour were toned down and expressed in more carefully-controlled degrees. The volume of lyrical oratory had diminished substantially, and where it was retained—as in the case of Palamas, Malakasis, or Athanas—it was realistically made to suit the dimension of the subject, and its quality was refined with good taste and skill.

Kostas Palamas was the reigning monarch in the realm of Neo-Hellenic verse in the 1920s. He and most of his contemporaries were certainly affected by Byron's aura as a man and an artist. Byron and Byronism, however, had by then acquired the necessary "aesthetic distance" between the creative artists and themselves. True, they had become part of Neo-Hellenic culture, but they had ceased to be sensational news, social novelties, or literary mannerisms. Greek poets were now able to consider them from a certain perspective rather than plunge indiscriminately into the waves of their sentimental implications. In the intellectual climate of Greece after the Balkan Wars, the First World War, and the 1922 Asia Minor disaster, there was no mood for a new *Wanderer*, or for a new "Maid of Athens". Byron could be seen more clearly

for what he had been and what he had achieved, without the interfering distorting lenses of the emotionally-involved and momentarily-moved spectator poet.

The earliest of these poems must have been Miltiades Malakasis's "Byron", which was included in the 1920 collection *Batarias, Taki Ploumas, Byron*³⁴. Malakasis (1869-1943), born the year Kalvos died, was a close friend of the writer John Papadiamantopoulos, better known as Jean Moréas, an important figure in the French "symboliste cénacle" whose *Manifesto* (1886) he had authored. The Greek poets of the 1920s, however, though eyeing with interest the poetic creations of the Parisian "Symbolistes" were still engaged in composing verse much more akin to that of the "Parnassian School" in Paris. In other words, their creative efforts aimed at linguistic perfection and beauty—often at the expense of thought and content—and faultless versification. Thus, their use of symbols, for instance, was far from what can be termed "esoteric"; as a matter of fact, their symbolic and allegorical features tended to be easily recognisable and even commonplace.

Like the French Parnassians, the Greek poets of that period were still subject to some romantic, or quasi-romantic, biases and practices. Malakasis was a Missolonghiot and an admirer of the vigor, beauty, and prowess of young manhood (*levendiá*). His seven-stanza "Byron" and the whole book contain idealised portraits of certain romantically attractive local types of Missolonghi's heroic milieu. Unlike the romantic Solomos and the neo-classic Kalvos, Malakasis composed his Byron poem in the aftermath of Greece's victorious participation in the Balkan Wars (1912-13) and the First World War. His contact with contemporary, or recent, French poetry and, of course, his friendship with Jean Moréas, enabled him to compose a melodious, impressionistic lyric akin in style and technique to those of the Parisian Parnassian poets, though its spirit and atmosphere are genuinely Greek. Malakasis's "Byron" consists of seven rhyming quatrains of the demotic tradition (long lines). Most stanzas describe the interior of the house where Byron lived in Missolonghi, and the Missolonghiot, Suliot, and European friends and philhellenes who had come to greet the Englishman.

As is inferred from one quatrain, it is the day of Byron's last birthday, since Malakasis seems to refer, indirectly, to Byron's poem "On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year". Lord Byron is never mentioned by name:

34. Μπαταριάς, *Τάκη Πλούμας, Μπάδρον* (Athens, 1920).

Μά Κεῖνος, πρὶ νὰ δῶσ' ἡ ἀγῆ μὲ τὸ φτερὸ κοντόλι,
 σὰν ἀπὸ χὰδι ἢ κρούσιμο στὸν ὕπνο μὴνυμένος,
 ριμάρει ἀκόμα τὸν καημὸ τοῦ ὕστερνοῦ του Ἀπρίλη,
 δοξάζοντας πάλε καὶ σέ, κατατρεγμένο Γένος!

But He, long before dawn, with his winged pencil,
 As if by a caress or call inspired while resting,
 Turned into verse the sorrow of his ultimate April,
 Your glory praising, poor Greece! His love again expressing.

The poet then explains that he himself had experienced the excitement of meeting Byron in person, because he was “a drop of blood” in the strong body of one of his Missolonghiot ancestors who was physically present there and then! After this rather Freudian twist, Malakasis closes his poem with a “tableau”: Byron exchanging handshakes with his worthy visitors—

Ποῖός ξέρει, σέ τί στρόφιλο νὰ πόντισα ἀξαφνα, ὄντας
 ἀνοιξε ἡ θύρα κι ἔτριξαν βαριά τὰ σκαλοπάτια
 κι ἐστάθη στοὺς ἀρματωλοὺς μπροστὰ χαμογελώντας,
 κι ἔδωσε ἀράδα τὸ δεξί, θωρώντας τους στὰ μάτια...

Who knows into what maëlstrom I sank all of a sudden
 When the door opened ajar, the steps of the stairs creaked,
 And He came before the warriors, a smile on his face,
 And firmly shook their right hands, looking them in the eyes...

Nostalgia for Byron and his heroic age dominate Malakasis's beautiful poem. There is no trace of sorrow, as was the case with those who wrote requiem lyrics. The lapse of time has offered a new perspective, has created a salutary aesthetic distance between Malakasis and the, by now, legendary Lord Byron, the warrior-poet.

Along with Malakasis's lyric one should perhaps mention the verse eulogy of another Rumeliot, George Athanas, who later on was to become one of the “immortals” of the National Academy of Athens.

In his address of 23^d April 1974 to the plenary session of the Academy, in observance of the sesquicentennial of Byron's death this time, the now aged statesman and poet George Athanasiades-Novas (Athanas), after a detailed and well-informed survey of the Englishman's life and work—under the title “The Fighter and Poet”—concluded his speech by reciting a poem he had composed half a century before: “Upon the First Century Since Byron's Death-Salutation from Epachtos”³⁵. Mr. Athanas also explained that the poem had

35. «'Ο ποιητής καὶ ὁ ἀγωνιστής». «Στὸν πρῶτο αἰῶνα τῆς θανῆς τοῦ Βύρωνα - Χαιρετισμὸς τοῦ Ἐπάχτου». *Nea Hestia*, 1127, pp. 1016-7.

never been published since 1924, and that it had been written while he was in Nafpaktos (or Epachtos) the same year and learned of a campaign that Byron had been contemplating soon before his death—to lead his crack Suliot brigade and capture the impregnable fortress of Nafpaktos (Lepanto).

The poem consists of eight meticulously-rhyming sestets (a,b,a,b,c,c) whose content, however, is but a factual and descriptive apostrophe to Byron's memory. Athanas's language is the kind of demotic that reminds one of Solomos, Malakasis, and Palamas simultaneously—and so do his allusions. For instance, like Solomos, Mr. Athanas mentions Byron's daughter Ada, and uses the word *θανή*; he also remembers Scotland (Lady Byron's home) and, of course, Missolonghi and Athens plus Byron's thirty-sixth-year poem which Provelenghios, Malakasis, and others had also remembered. The fresh detail in the subject matter is the information about the fortress of Epachtos and Byron's noble desire to capture it. Athanas concludes his fast-moving eulogy by associating himself with the commemoration of the anniversary of Byron's death, and by making the paradoxical—but quite true—statement that Lord Byron has not died:

Τὸ στερνὸ σου τραγοῦδι τάφο ἀντρείου ζητοῦσε,
 μὰ στοῦ Ἐπάχτου τὸ Κάστρο τὸν ἀρνήθηκε ἡ Μοῖρα.
 Κι ἂν ἀμάραντη δάφνη ἐκεῖ πάνω θ' ἀνθοῦσε
 ἴσως νάηταν ἐτούτη, ποὺ κλαδιά τῆς ἐπῆρα
 καὶ τὰ φέρνω στὸν τόπο τῆς θανῆς σου στεφάνι
 πρῶτον σήμερα αἰῶνα ποὺ δὲν ἔχεις πεθάνει!

Your last song asked for a brave warrior's grave,
 but in the Castle of Lepanto, Fate never to you gave.
 And if a laurel tree verdant has remained there
 perhaps it was this one whose fresh branches with care
 I bring to wreath the place of your very last breath
 on the first one-hundred years since your immortal death!

* * * *

Kostas Palamas (1859-1943) was not only an ardent admirer of Byron: he knew and understood Byronism and the Byronic Hero perfectly well. His address to the audience of the Parnassos Literary Society, on the occasion of the centennial of Byron's death (April 1924), is actually an essay in comparative literature which impresses us with its erudition and insights even by recent standards. Palamas, however, had composed his first Byron poem long before that anniversary. In his 1912 collection *The Sorrows of the Lagoon* we find his

modernist lyric “Pegasus”³⁶. I consider this “Pegasus” a modern poem, by contrast to other more tradition-bound Palamas compositions, on account of its rather *avant-garde* form, for its time at least. Its form is dramatic; and its seventy-five metrical lines have been arranged into three uneven parts, or poetic paragraphs, without any conventional stanzaic forms, and with its lines ranging from four to fifteen and even eighteen syllables. The rhyme pattern, similarly, represents an honest and successful attempt at innovation as it consists of rhyming couplets surrounded by clusters of lines with half-rhymes (e.g., δεντροῦ, ἀδελφοῦ), or alternating rhymes, or no rhyme at all. The use of the central symbol, however, is traditional. The mythical winged horse represents what it has always represented since the Greek and Roman classics: poetic inspiration, imagination, and creativity.

The speaker in the poem—Palamas—meets Pegasus in a Roumeli wilderness (κακοτοπιᾶ) and is quite surprised when the supernatural mount tells him that it has been waiting there for a rider ever since the time its illustrious horseman, Lord Byron, passed away. In the ensuing dialogue we see how intelligently the masterful poet relates Byron to the art of poetry, to the Greek soil, and to himself—since he is of the same soil and a poet to boot. Palamas makes a few well-chosen allusions to the Homeric and heroic Achilles and his own talking (supernatural) horse, Xanthos; and to the Rhine river and the “Swiss lake”—that is, Leman—as well as to Harold, Manfred, and Lara—details that attest to his familiarity with *Childe Harold*, the eponymous drama, the Oriental tale, and other Byronic texts. The allusion to the historic Missolonghi is doubly relevant: Palamas was in part a Missolonghiot; moreover, Byron’s fame as a champion of Greek freedom became crystallised, in time and memory, in that unattractive town of Roumeli.

The poem has a happy, and predictable, ending: the Greek poet is now a proper successor of the philhellenic Briton, and a suitable rider for Pegasus. Full of confidence and ethnic pride Palamas does not hesitate to command the flying horse to fly him high, higher even than Byron, as he concludes this charming lyric:

Κ' ἐγὼ εἶμαι καβαλάρης, Ἐλα,
 στῆ διαμαντένια σου τῆ σέλλα
 γνωρίζω πῶς νά κρατηθῶ.
 Μόνο μ' ἐσένα τὸ ταξίδι τ' ἀγαπῶ.
 Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἀπὸ τὸ γένος τὸ μεγάλο

36. «Ὁ Πήγασος», *Οἱ καιροὶ τῆς Λιμνοθάλασσης, Ἔπαντα* [Complete Works] (Athens: Biris, n.d.), V, 224-6.

πὸν πρωτοανάθρεψε κ' ἐσέ.
 Γιὰ πάρε με καὶ φέρε με, ὑποταχτικέ,
 ψηλότερα κι ἀπὸ τὸν ἄλλο!

Come, I am a horseman myself too,
 on this stone-studded saddle like you
 I know how to ride erect.
 You make this trip for me perfect.
 I belong to that great race
 that brought you up, too, from the start.
 Now, serve me and bring me, as you depart,
 higher than that other ace!

Palamas's second verse tribute to Byron, "Byronworship", actually prefaced the already mentioned lecture to the audience of the Parnassos. This eleven-stanza poem, like most Byron lyrics composed by Greeks in 1924, is an "occasion piece" inspired by the enthusiastic atmosphere prevailing then. Significantly, Palamas did not include "Byronworship" in any of his subsequent books of lyrics. He considered it, as it were, an integral part of—or a suitable introduction to—his brilliant essay-lecture³⁷.

"Byronworship" is a fine ample of Palamas's celebrated poetic eloquence. Its rhetorical outbursts are kept within acceptable limits by means of telling allusions to events from Byron's life (e.g., his notorious love affairs hinted at in tactful poetic diction) and to heroines from his tales, plays, and satires (Parisina, Medora, Haidee, Ines, Lara's slave, even Astarte). Male heroes are ignored, probably because Palamas had mentioned some in "Pegasos". A smart innovation is Palamas's free paraphrase of Byron's charming lyric "Stanzas for Music"—"There be none of Beauty's daughters"—whose melodious rhythm and ethereal imagery the Greek artist incorporated into his composition, in an ottava rhyming a,b,b,c,d,a,d. By doing this, Palamas juxtaposed the Byronic echo in the ottava to the nine quatrains (rhyming a,b,b,a or a,b,a,b) of his own utterance. The concluding stanza (a sestet) fuses the two "voices" in this lyric, as it expresses Palamas's view rendered, however, by means of the imagery and diction Byron had used in "Stanzas for Music"—quite a clever poetic device, splendidly underscoring Palamas's mastery of his *métier*:

ὦ! σοῦ ταίριαζε νὰ εἶσαι ἡ διαλεχτὴ
 τῆς ρόδινης ὑγείας καὶ τῆς δροσιᾶς·
 Τώρα χιματροθρέφτες πυρετοὶ

37. «Βυρωνολατρεία», *Πεζοὶ δρόμοι Β'*, "Απαντα, X, 185-6 and 187-220.

σὲ καίνε· μὲ τὸν Ἴσκιο τὸν ποιητῆ
 τῆς ἀγωνίας καὶ τῆς ἀπελπισιᾶς
 τὸν ἀθάνατο δένεσαι ἢ θνητῆ.

Oh! you deserved to be the chosen one
 of rosy health and freshness;
 Now fevers that chimaeras feed
 burn you; to the immortal poet-shadow, indeed,
 of anguish and of sadness
 you too are bound mortal one.

For the sake of continuity I must mention that in his “Byronworship” Palamas makes a brief reference to “the Corsican”—that is, Napoleon—as Solomos, Soutsos, and others had done in their nineteenth-century Byroniana; and to John Milton’s Satan, who had been mentioned by Solomos in one note of his Byron lyric. Palamas’s appellation of Byron as “Stepson of the Miltonian Satan” would, undoubtedly, have won the approval of all those critics who, like John Dryden and William Blake before them, were attracted or intrigued by Milton’s handling of Satan. These intellectuals were impressed by the amorality and existential courage of Lord Byron and his rebellious *alter egos*, the various Byronic Heroes.

Inspired, enthusiastic, and prolific Kostas Palamas allowed the Byronic Muse to move him once more. The result, another “occasion piece”, was “Byron (1824-1924)”, a poem of nineteen quatrains of long demotic lines with easy, alternating rhymes (a,b,a,b) also composed for the centennial of Byron’s death³⁸.

Again for the sake of continuity in the Byroniana tradition, we must mention that Palamas’s tone in this poem echoes Malakasis’s in his own and earlier “Byron”. The Greek once more addresses the Briton by referring to Lara, Manfred, Astarte, Harold, Don Juan, and the Giaour—from among his creations—and to Goethe, “the Sage”, who had modelled his symbolic Euphorion (in *Faust*, Part II) on the fascinating Englishman. Ancient Greek poets—Archilochos, Sappho, Tyrtaios, and the Zoiloi—are then marshalled for the sake of comparison: the embittered ones, like Archilochos, envy him; the fervent ones, like Sappho, adore him; and like Tyrtaios, Byron sings and inspires the Greeks to gallantry and victory. Palamas concludes his eloquent centennial eulogy by stating that Byron’s visit to Greece was not an act of blind fate because he had lived like a Dionysos but had expired as a Messiah. But let us allow the Missolonghiot say it in his own fluid language:

38. «Μπάϋρον (1824-1924)», *Δειλοί καὶ σκληροὶ στίχοι*, “*Απαντα*, IX, 23-5.

Ὅχι, δὲν σ' ἔσπρωξε σ' ἐμᾶς τυφλῆ τῆς τύχης ὄρα,
 πελάου, πού χύνοντ' ἐμπρός, μὰ φεύγουν τὰ νερά,
 στὰ χέρια της κρατώντας σὲ νέα χάρη τροπαιοφόρα
 πρὸς ριζικά ἀπροσδόκητα σοῦ ἀνοίγει νέα φτερά.

Δὲν ἦρθες μὲ τοῦ τραγουδιοῦ σου τὸν ὄρατο θυμὸ
 ἦρθες τὴν ἴδια σου ζωὴ στῆς ἱερῆς θυσίας
 νὰ φέρεις τὸ βωμό,
 κι ἂν ἐζήσεις Διόνυσος, ξεψύχησες Μεσσίας.

Ἐκατὸ χρόνια πέρασαν. Δὲν πέρασες. Καὶ ζεῖς
 μὲ τῶν αἰτῶν τὸ πέταγμα καὶ τῶν ἀγριῶν κρινῶν
 τὴν εὐωδιά, στὸ λυρισμὸ, στὴ σκέψη, στῆς ψυχῆς
 τὰ πάθη, καὶ στὴ δόξα τῶν Ἑλλήνων.

No, it isn't blind fate's hour that brought you to us here,
 the waves of an ocean as tide and ebb go by,
 carrying you in her arms a new grace, glorious, dear,
 toward unexpected destinies spreads your wings to fly.

You haven't come with your song's attractive ire;
 you came bringing your life to a holy sacrifice
 in the altar fire;
 if you lived like a Dionysios, you passed as a Messiah.

One hundred years gone. You aren't. You are alive
 in lofty flights of eagles and in wild lilies' scent,
 in the lyricism, thought, soul passions that survive
 and in the glory of the Greeks you are unspent.

Another poet who subsequently was elected to the National Academy, like Palamas, and who composed a Byron commemorative lyric in 1924, is the French-educated Sotiris Skipis (1879-1952). In his collection *Flowers of Solitude, 1925-1926* we find the twelve competent quatrains of "To Lord Byron"³⁹. In the opening stanzas of his tribute, Skipis not only follows the practice of Malakasis, Palamas, and others—echoing their motifs in the process—but outdoes them, in terms of poetic chauvinism, as he considers handsome Byron to be the son of an... "exiled Greek god and a mortal woman" who, we must assume, had met in England! Skipis then refers to Byron's return to Greece, only to find her enslaved and suffering. The struggle for Greek

39. «Στὸ Λόρδο Βύρων», *Λουλουῖδια τῆς μοναξιᾶς* (1927), ἢ «Ὑμνος στὸ Λόρδο Βύρων», *Κασταλία Κρήνη - Ἐκλογή (1900-1950)* [The Castalian Fountain - Selection] pp. 9-10.

Independence and Byron's compassion and contribution are mentioned—with the necessary allusions to Missolonghi, the battle of Alamana, and the poet Tyrtaios. After a few jubilant lines about Greece's national Resurrection, Skipis laments the poet's untimely death and establishes him as an eternal symbol of sacrifice for freedom:

Και τῆς θυσίας τῆς πιδ ἀψηλῆς ἐγίνηκες τὸ σύμβολο
 κι ὁ θρύλος τῆς ἀντρείας
 κι αἰώνια θὰ μοσκοβολάει, Βύρων προφήτη, ὁ τάφος σου
 ἀπ' ἄνθη ἐλευθερίας.

Ἐκατὸ χρόνια πέρασαν καὶ μοιάζει χτὲς πῶς εἶτανε,
 στὰ χίλια ἔτσι θενάναι,
 καὶ καθὼς σήμερα οἱ Ἕλληνες, ἔτσι καὶ τότε, ὦ ἀθάνατε,
 θενὰ σὲ τραγουδᾶνε.

Legend you became, prophet Byron, and symbol
 of sublime sacrifice;
 and eternally is fragrant, from freedom flowers,
 the tomb where your body lies.

One hundred years passed as if it were yesterday,
 after one thousand it will be the same;
 and the Greeks, immortal bard, then like today,
 will be singing of your fame.

* * * * *

Superior to Skipis's verse, and perhaps more original than even Palamas's, are the three excellent sonnets composed in 1924 by Kostas Karyotakis, John Gryparis, and George Drosinis. Karyotakis's "Byron", in particular, is an astonishing composition—an artistic rarity in the poetic tradition of any nation: an epigram in sonnet form. For the sake of our readers I quote it in its entirety, and even provide my own (already published) translation into English:

«Μπάϋρον»

Ἐνοιωσεν ὅτι
 τοῦ ἦσαν οἱ στίχοι
 ἄχαρη τύχη
 καὶ ματαιότη.

Μὰ ποιὰ λαμπρότη
 ἐκεῖ στὰ τείχη
 καὶ ποιὰ στὰ ρήχη
 ἐνδοξη νιότη!

«Byron»

He became aware
 That verse was to him
 Sad fate's whim
 And vanity's fair.

Splendour so great
 Up the city's walls
 And brave youth falls
 By lagoon and gate!

Γίνονται οί γέροι
γαῦροι· θά ὀρμήσει
ἀνδρῶν λουλούδι,

κι ὁ Μπάυρον ξέρει
πῶς νά τὸ ζήσει
τὸ θεῖο τραγούδι⁴⁰.

Old age grows
Bold; valiant men
Will storm out strong,

And Byron knows
To live and pen
The divine song⁴¹.

The impact of Karyotakis's (1896-1928) lyric is decisively enhanced by the absence of facile oratory—which haunts most Greek Byroniana—and the substitution of a few but crucial details—sad fate, heroic and exemplary death when young at the ramparts, artistic excellence—which create the appropriately elegiac tone in most commendable brevity. Following the French symbolists' dictum, "To name is to destroy, to suggest is to create" (Stéphane Mallarmé), the reserved and pessimistic Karyotakis avoids naming Missolonghi, or any of the heroic defenders, or titles of Lord Byron's poems. Karyotakis suggests, hints at, intimates but he tells us nothing in prosaic, factual fashion, and provides no repetitive and dull catalogues and lists.

By contrast to Karyotakis's, Gryparis's sonnet (1870-1942) follows the impressionistic technique of focusing on specific images—rather than providing an all-encompassing survey—whose vague, dream-like description will evoke the desired emotional response. In his "Childe Harold" John Gryparis mythologises Byron, so to speak, by blending the memory of the deceased poet with the legend of Harold—one of his assumed *personae*—and other traditional motifs⁴². To be sure, Gryparis's lyric does not betray any knowledge of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, or of any other Byron text for that matter. The described scene is a poetic "translation"—in Hegelian terms—of the long and forced funeral that Byron's remains had while being transported by ship from Greece to England. The prosaic or even morbid details of this event are completely ignored—unlike the practice of Solomos in his own Byron elegy—and the crossing of the Mediterranean aboard the *Florida* is metamorphosed into a short trip by barque, at night and by moonlight, and the arrival at a "secret port" while, far away, a lonely Mermaid laments the lost bard. Again, following the symbolist poetic formula, the Greek poet does not explain who the Mermaid, or Nymph, is. She may be orphaned Greece, or the bereft Muse of poetry, or even the personification of suffering Liberty. Similarly,

40. «Μπάυρον», *Aiolika Grammata*, 20 (April, 1974), 89.

41. M. Byron Raizis, «Byron-inspired Greek Poems: A Sonnet by Karyotakis», *The Byron Society Newsletter*, II, 1 (1974), 10.

42. «Τσίλιδ Χάρολδ», *Nea Hestia*, 1127, p. 1018.

Gryparis does not use names—not even Byron’s—nor any specific details. Everything is properly clad in misty veils of dark colours; movements are slow and funereal, sounds are soft and subdued. The prevailing atmosphere is exquisitely serene and suggestively melancholic. Even in translation Gryparis’s “Childe Harold” is a good sonnet, and its overall effect has something of the refined, delicate aura of Paul Verlaine’s “Claire de lune”:

Σὰν φάντασμα στὰ κύματα γλιστρᾶ ἡ βάρκα· ραίνει
 μέ στεῖρο φῶς τὸ δρόμο της πεντάρφανη ἡ Σελήνη
 καὶ τοῦ λειψάνου ἡ συνοδιὰ μαῦρες σκεπὲς ντυμένη,
 βουβή, μὴδ' ἓνα στεναγμό, μὴδ' ἓνα δάκρυ χύνει.

Νά... ξαπλωμένος ὁ νεκρὸς τραγουδιστὴς πηγαίνει...
 μέτωπο ξέσκεπο... ἀνοιχτὰ τὰ μάτια... σὰ νὰ πίνει
 τοῦ φεγγαριοῦ τ' ἀπόφεγγα... σὰ νὰ γροικᾷε ποῦ βγαίνει
 στερνὴ ἄρμονία ἀπ' τὴ συρμὴ τῆς πρύμης ποῦ ἀργοσβήνει.

Μὰ τί βογγᾷε στὸ ἀλαργινό, ποῦ χάνεται ἀκρογιάλι;
 θεὸ νάναι ἡ Νύφη, ἡ ἄρρωστη Νεράιδα, ποῦ σπαράζει
 ζητώντας μέ τὸν πόνο της καὶ τὴν ψυχὴ νὰ βγάλει...

Ὅστόσο, ἡ βάρκα στὸ κρυφὸ τὸ ἀραξοβόλι ἀράζει,
 ἐνῶ τὰ κύματα σκιαχτὰ μιὰ ἔρχονται μιὰ πᾶνε
 καὶ στὰ πλευρὰ της σὰ ζεστὸ παράπονο χτυπᾶνε...

On the waves sliding the boat seemed unreal and spectral;
 the orphan Moon cast barren light upon her lone way,
 clad in black veils the mourners at the funeral
 neither sighed, nor shed tears, nor a word did say.

Lo... the Bard, lying dead, is going homebound...
 forehead uncovered, eyes open... as if he was drinking
 the faint glow of the Moon... hearing the soft sound
 of the stern's final harmony that was slowly sinking.

But who is groaning afar, in the ever distant shore?
 the Nymph must be, the ailing Mermaid in her pain
 asking an end to life and sorrow she can bear no more...

Meanwhile, the boat silently its secret port did gain,
 while the waves timidly in constant undulation
 its sides touched with warmth as if in lamentation...

George Drosinis’s sonnet “The Death of the Swan”⁴³ combines some of the merits of the previous poem with some of the commonplace practices of

43. «Ὁ θάνατος τοῦ Κύκνου», *Ibid.*, pp. 1016-7.

Kostas Palamas and the other members of the "New Athenian School" of poetry—namely, verbose apostrophes, obvious symbols, and identified allegorical figures. For instance, Drosinis (1859-1951) mentions a "lagoon Mermaid", then immediately explains that she is Liberty (or Freedom), thus destroying the suggestiveness of this personification for the sake of unwarranted clarity—another sacrifice to the altar of classical composition and oratory. His title, "The Death of the Swan", is quite appropriate, though. Swan imagery had been associated with Lord Byron by John Keats, Victor Hugo, and Andreas Kalvos—the last one in his own elegiac tribute, as we saw. The symbol of the swan connotes both beauty and majesty as well as the fact that the bird dies after he has sung for the first time. In this respect, Byron died after he had achieved his really first and greatest song: the praise of Greek freedom. The sonnet by Drosinis is not unsuccessful, but, in my view, it lacks the economy and power of "Byron" by Karyotakis, and the evocative suggestiveness of Gryparis's "Childe Harold". In my simple version "The Death of the Swan" reads as follows:

Ἐκεῖ ποῦ ἡ μαύρη φαλαρίδα κι ἡ ἄγρια πάπια
χειμαδιὸ βρίσκουν στήν προσηλιακὴ στεριά,
στῆς λιμνοθάλασσας τ' ἀκρόνερα τὰ σάπια
τί ἦρθες ζητώντας, λευκὲ Κύκνε, τοῦ βοριά;

Τὸν Κύκνο κοσμοπλάνευτη πλάνευε κάποια
τῆς λιμνοθάλασσας νεράϊδα, ἡ Λευτεριά·
Παλάτι στεριανὸ τοῦ κάστρου εἶχε τὴν τάπια,
κι ἀντὶ στολίδια νύφης, ἄρματα βαριά.

Ἄϊτὸς ὁ λευκὸς κύκνος θέλησε νὰ γίνεῖ,
κι ἀητοῦ φτερά καὶ νύχια τάνυσε γιὰ κείνη·
μὰ ἦταν θανάσιμη ἡ παράτολμῆ του ὁρμή...
Καὶ τὰ μαγιάπριλα ὅταν γύριζαν καὶ πάλι
τὰ νεροπούλια πρὸς τὸ βοριανὸ ἀκρογιάλι,
συνοδιὰ γίνηκαν στοῦ Κύκνου τὸ κορμί...

Where the black coot and the wild duck
find a wintering place upon the sunny land,
White Swan of the north, what did you seek to pluck
by the lagoon's decaying wateredge and sand?

The world-seducing Swan, by a lagoon Mermaid
had been seduced—Freedom she was called;
For her palace on earth the battery had made,
bedecked not like a bride but in a panoply bold.

The White Swan then tried an eagle's form to take,
 eagle-like wings and talons stretching for her sake;
 but his foolhardy attempt proved to be fatal...
 And when, in mid spring, the waterfowl flew forth
 returning to the far distant shore of the north,
 and escort they became to the Swan's funeral...

Very beautiful and carefully thought-out are the nine quatrains of Marinos Sigouros's (1885-1961) "Byron at Missolonghi (29 March 1824)", which were also composed a couple of years later (1926) to commemorate two anniversaries: Byron's death, and the heroic defense of Missolonghi, one century before. Sigouros, the last of the "Heptanesian School" of poets, was a scholarly and serious writer. His erudition is betrayed by the historic details and literary echoes in his Parnasian poem. Diction, versification, style, and tone are akin to those in Malakasis's "Byron", and I dare say that Sigouros's excellent lyric could be read as a companion piece to that of the refined Rumeliot artist. The stanzas eloquently describe the milieu and atmosphere of Missolonghi, which had gained symbolic significance and immortal glory with the heroic breakout (exodus) of its exhausted defenders in the Spring of 1826, exactly two years after Byron's death there had given it the aura of a shrine of freedom. Unlike amateurish writers, Sigouros avoids specific details, thus securing the suggestive, mysterious, and dream-like quality that a contemplative lyric demands. The poem ends with the image of a hawk killed by a bullet, which "falls... as its secret hope had fallen". This metaphor stands for the noble efforts of Byron as a warrior, as the concluding stanza explains:

Ἔτσι κι' ἀφτόν ἡ Λεφτεριά τόν ἔχει σημαδέψει·
 ἡ Μοῖρα ἐδιάλεξε καλά τόν τόπο, τόν καιρό.
 Τὸ Μεσολόγγι στέκει ὀρθό καί μ' ἀντρειωμένη σκέψη
 χτυπιέται ὡς πού, ἀνυπόταχτο, νάβρει τὸ λυτρωμό⁴⁴.

Thus on him also Liberty has placed her mark;
 Fate has chosen carefully the time and the place.
 Brave-in-spirit Missolonghi stands like a bulwark
 resisting blows till, unvanquished, redemption shall grace.

* * * * *

This brings to an end our survey of the poetic Byroniana that were produced in Greece in the course of one century. As we saw, some of the poems were directly inspired by Lord Byron's contemporary death (Solomos, Ioannou, Kalvos, Palli, *et al.*); several were composed to be recited at various

44. Marinos Sigouros, «Ὁ Μπάβρον στὸ Μεσολόγγι (29 Μάρτη 1824)», Ἐπιπέρωμα Βύρωνος *Hellenike Demourgia*, VII, 77 (1951).

ceremonies and unveilings of monuments—the “occasional pieces” of Paraschos, Vlachoyannis, Samartzides, *et. al.*); a few were done on the spur of the moment, so to speak (Soutsos, Vlachos, Karasoutsas, Provelenghios, Malakasis); and the majority were written to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of his death in 1924. The sesquicentennial, though elaborately and generously observed throughout Greece, failed to inspire any of the major Greek poets of today to sing of Byron’s *geste*, poetry, and death⁴⁵. There is no doubt that ours are unheroic, antiromantic, cynical, and hard times. Thus, we do not have Byron lyrics by, say, Yannis Ritsos, Odysseus Elytis, or George Seferis. Still, all the major poets of the Greek Pantheon for a whole century immortalized George Noel Gordon-Lord Byron in honest, eloquent, and, occasionally, exquisite verse.

I would like to end this cultural excursus, and personal tribute of mine to the British philhellene, by quoting here the simple and moving lines of John Polemis’s memorial “Epigram” to Lord Byron (1924)⁴⁶:

Τὴ Δόξα, ποὺ μὲ χέρια ἀγνά, χέρια καθάρια
καὶ μὲ δρεπάνι ἀμόλυντο, ἱερὸ δρεπάνι,
ἔκοψε δάφνης δελφικῆς χλωρὰ κλωνάρια
κ’ ἔπλεξε βιαστικά τὸ ἀμάραντο στεφάνι
γιὰ νὰ σὲ στεφανώσῃ στὴ στερνὴ σου κλίνη,
ὁ θάνατός σου τὴ στεφάνωσε κ’ ἐκείνη.

Glory—that with innocent hands, with hands purified
and with an immaculate blade, a blade holy and clean
cut fresh branches of Delphic laurel tree and tied
them in haste making a wreath for ever green
to crown you in your last bed since you fell,
—death has crowned her as well.

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45. N. Cheliotis, *Λόγδος Βύρων. Ἑλεγεία* (Athens, 1974)—a 46-page lyric by a not yet established writer.

46. «Ἐπίγραμμα», *Ἑλλὰς καὶ Βύρων. Ἀναμνηστικὸν Ἀπάνθισμα διὰ τὴν Ἑκατονταετηρίδα τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ Ποιητοῦ, 1824-1924* [Commemorative Anthology of the Centennial of the Poet’s Death] (Athens: I. Sideris, 1924). This 92-page collection features poems on Byron by Solomos, Kalvos, Soutsos, Polemis, Paraschos, Palamas, Malakasis, Gryparis, Vlachoyannis, Drosinis, and Ioannou. Most of them were included in the *Nea Hestia* Homage to Byron. Demotic songs and *moirologia* on Byron by anonymous and talented folk singers of the 1820s will be discussed in another study. For three such ballads see James A. Notopoulos, “New Sources on Lord Byron at Missolonghi”, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, IV (Winter, 1955), 31-45; especially, 39-41.