Professor MARIOS BYRON RAIZIS
University of Athens

LORD BYRON IN GREEK DRAMA

The death of Lord Byron at Missolonghi, Greece, in April 1824, during the War of Greek Independence, just two years before the heroic sally of its defenders and the holocaust that ensued, established him firmly in the conscience of all Greeks as the foremost foreign champion of their national emancipation. His idiosyncratic personality, fame in life, and personal sacrifice — as the Greeks saw them through their naturally biased view point — inspired many Greek writers who wrote poems, dramas, and stories about Byron's significance to Greece, in general, and about colourful details of his involvement with her, in particular.

I have discussed Greek verse on Lord Byron elsewhere,[1] and his presence in fiction will occupy me in another study, in the future. The purpose of this essay is the examination of Byron as protagonist in two Greek plays by professional and popular dramatists. My presentation will follow this order: 1) The two playwrights, 2) The first performances and their reception by public and critics, 3) The contents of the dramas, and 4) My evaluation of these texts as modern dramatic literature; that is, a discussion of sources, theatrical technique, character interpretation (Byron), and manipulation of historical information to create imaginative literature. I consider these steps necessary for the reader to properly appraise the importance of my topic and of the information therein.

1. The Playwrights

The younger of the two dramatists, Alekos [Alexander] Lidorikis, was born in 1909 to Miltos [Miltiades] Lidorikis, a popular stage artist and writer. He started writing dramas very early in life, and success

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1. For Greek verse on Lord Byron see, M.B. Raizis, «The Greek Poets Praise the Britannic Muse,» *Balkan Studies,* XX, 2 (1979), 275-307.

came early to him with *The Great Moment,* a play produced in 1933. His *Lord Byron*[2] followed within less than a year, and his subsequent and numerous dramas, scenarios, stories, poems, and good journalism enhanced his reputation and established him as a writer and theatre personality. The early recognition of his talent encouraged Alekos Lidorikis to try his chances outside his country as well. He spent fifteen productive years in the United States (1945-60) where he worked for the Twentieth Century Fox Studios and for television channels. His plays *Eddie Dowling* (1950) and *Security Exit* (1957) were produced on the American stage, the latter on Broadway; *Without Gloves* (1957), *No Bou Bou* (1958). and *The Eye of the Cow* (1957) became television shows, the last one earning him an Emmy Award as «the best foreign play of the year»[3].

Lidorikis travelled widely over the world and saw several of his plays staged — in Greek or in translations — in Paris, New York, Budapest, Zagreb, Egypt, and the Sudan for local or Greek community audiences. He became an active member of many Greek and international artists' associations, including the Authors' League of America, the Screen Writers' Guild of America, and the Academia Tiberiana of Rome. Indefatigable and energetic even at an advanced age, he still participates in cultural festivals and professional meetings, in Greece and overseas, his latest Byron-related activities being his presence at the International Byron Seminar in Paris (1984), and the productions of his *Lord Byron* in Athens (1983) and Ithaca (1984), during local festivals.

Undoubtedly, the fact that he was born to, and grew up in, a family of seasoned theatre experts, enabled Lidorikis to start learning his *métier* when he was a receptive and impressionable youth. His good looks, charm, and social interests — in addition to his talent and savvy — helped him secure a place of prominence in the cultural life of Greece. Lidorikis's is a story of success and endurance as a writer for the stage, despite the radical changes in the dramatic arts and in audience expectations that have occurred since the good old days of his first public *début.*

Manolis [Emmanuel] Skouloudis, the older of the two, was born in Crete (1901), his father being George S. Skouloudis, a Commissioner for Justice and Education in the then independent State of Crete. His early academic and artistic interests were in music. After formal studies in

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2. Ἀλέκου Λιδωρίκη, *Λόρδος Βύρων* (Ἀθήνα: Δημητράκος, 1934).

3. All information about Lidorikis's life, work, and criticism is derived from volume I of his collected works *Θέατρο, Α'* (Ἀθήνα: Δοδώνη, 1983), and an interview he gave me in his Athens apartment in April 1984.

conservatories (1924-26), Skouloudis composed, directed, taught, and reviewed music and related activities. In the 1930s he became Music Director for the National Theatre, where he was later succeeded by the great Dimitri Mitropoulos (later on Director of the Metropolitan Opera of New York). In that capacity Skouloudis also composed and directed the music that accompanied the production of Lidorikis's *Lord Byron,* among many other scores.

His literary interests were manifested in *Toward the End* (1935), a collection of stories, and in numerous critiques, editorials, and reviews for prestigious magazines, such as *Neohellenic Letters,* and newspapers, where he often had to combat the spirit in the directives issued by the then dictatorial regime (1936-40). His success as a drama critic led him on to write an original play in verse, *The Crossroads* (1935), which was staged very successfully later on, during more opportune times, and to embark on a career as translator and adaptor of celebrated international and Greek literary texts for stage production.

The list of his achievements in this demanding theatre activity is too long to be recorded here. However, mention must be made of his commendable work on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night, The Tempest, As You Like It, Antony and Cleopatra,* plus *Romeo and Juliet.* Other masterpieces he translated include Dostoyefski's *The Idiot* and *The Possessed,* Tolstoi's *War and Peace,* Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya,* Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* and *Hedda Gabler,* Hugo's *Ruy Blas,* Molière's *Dom Juan,* Obey's *Don Juan,* Strindberg's *Miss Julie,* Calderon's *Life Is a Dream,* Shelley's *Hellas,* Galsworthy's *The Skin Game,* Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind,* and Sartre's *The Prisoners of Altona.* This is only a partial list, not including Greek texts, juvenile, folkloric and 'popular' literature, opera librettos and scenarios.[4]

Among his original plays the successfully-staged (1955) *The Tragedy of Lord Byron* must be mentioned along with his folkloric *Delikanis* («Les tribulations de Manuel», in its French television translation) which was made into a motion picture in Greece (1975). Skouloudis's music, criticism, plays and, above all, translations and adaptations, made him famous in Greece. For several decades since the 1930s he was a prominent

4. All information about Skouloudis's life, work, and criticism derived from the Greek edition of *Η Τραγωδία τοῦ Λόρδου Βύρωνα* (Ἀθήνα, Δίφρος, 1964), and an interview he gave me in his Halandri apartment in April 1984, and from typed biographical notes he handed me then.

personality in the world of Greek theatre, and earned prizes, honours, and distinctions. Unlike Lidorikis, however, Manolis Skouloudis has faded as a public figure in recent years, and lives as a recluse in very old age, still vividly remembering the days of glory that his many talents had brought him a generation or even half a century ago.

2. The First Performances

Lidorikis's *Lord Byron* came in the aftermath of the Greek Independence Centenary celebrations (1930), when pro-British feelings ran high among the Greeks, whose fond memories of Byron as a noble supporter of their national cause had been refreshed by numerous editorials, historical studies, literary publications, and official public addresses during the years 1924-30. As a dashing young man, full of energy, ambition, and romantic idealism the budding dramatist identified with Byron, as he stated to me, thus his eagerness as a Greek patriot to celebrate the great philhellene was strengthened hy his desire to achieve early fame as a writer, just as Lord Byron had done. The times were opportune, and Greece's Olympian gods were on his side.

Upon a favourable recommendation by Academician Gregory Xenopoulos (then a member of the National Theatre board), Lidorikis's play was accepted for production in 1933, soon after it was written. The famous director Photos Politis gave *Lord Byron* an all-star cast. The Poet was played by talented and handsome Nikos Dendramis, Rita Murat was Teresa Guiccioli, Helen Papadaki was Annabella, Vasso Manolidou — just a girl those days — played Theresa Macri, and Katina Paxinou did Augusta's part. These names may mean little to non-Greek readers, apart perhaps from that of Katina Paxinou, who a few years later, impressed international audiences with her very dynamic role as Pilar in the Hollywood version of Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* next to Gary Cooper, Ingrid Bergman, Akim Tamiroff and other stars. All these players have passed away by now — excepting Miss Manolidou, I am happy to say — but theirs was a command performance in March 1934. The costumes by Anthony Phocas, the settings by Cleanth Klonis, and the music by Skouloudis, all contributed to the success of *Lord Bryon* on the most prestigious stage in Greece.

The play had a run of several weeks, the stars performing every night to capacity audiences which applauded play and paywright with enthusiasm. Most press reviewers praised performance and players; some,

though, could not stomach the fact that a twenty-four year old 'novice' had succeeded so fast where influential cronies had taken many years to arrive. New dramatists have a hard time in the beginning of their careers all over the world; Greeks, in addition, have to cope with the traditional envy of Greeks for fellow-Greeks and their ready preference for foreign products — the notorious Greek xenophilia, even xenomania.

Thus, reviewer Leon Koukoulas wrote a mixed critique of drama and performance in the daily *Proia* (15 March 1934). The same day Michael Rodas was more negative in *Eleftheron Vima;* George Nazos, in *Kathimerini,* found the play immature and its dialogue unnatural; and Themistocles Athanasiadis, in *Neos Kosmos,* judged the play naive and the whole production «a cynical failure». One day before, Achilleus Kyrou, in *Hestia,* had complained about the playing down of the patriotic element, whereas he had praised language, characterisation, and honesty of effort of young Lidorikis. But Stephen Stephanou was rather positive, in *Phoni Laou;* and fellow-dramatist Pandelis Horn was almost enthusiastic, in *Vrathyni* (14 March 1934). All of them, however, did not fail to mention the applause and enthusiastic reaction of the public.

If we may criticise the critics, we must certainly emphasize that Kyrou was quite wrong with his nationalistic, almost chauvinistic, bias; while Nazos, Rodas, and Athanasiadis were, obviously, jealous of the younger man's rapid rise as a writer. The two authors, however, who made literary history in Greece — Xenopoulos and Horn — had appreciated *Lord Byron* with the soundness and integrity of their acknowledged status.

Lidorikis's *Lord Byron* had a brief but successful revival in 1983, at the open-air theatre on Lykabettus Hill in the centre of Athens, with handsome Christos Parlas in the lead, Viveta Tsiouni as Augusta, Denie Themeli as Annabella, plus other known stage and television actors. This festival production marked and celebrated Lidorikis's golden anniversary as a playwright. In a shortened version the drama was repeated one summer later at the Ithaca cultural festival. Reviewers, on both occasions, were quite positive, while crowds of Greek and foreign tourists patronised the performances, half a century after its world première.

Skouloudis's *The Tragedy of Lord Byron* had its world première twenty-one years and a World War later (4 November 1955), at the prestigious Municipal Theatre of Piraeus — Greece's largest hall. The 'doyen' of leading men, Manos Katrakis, played Byron, beautiful Daphne Skoura was Annabella, Alice Georgouli acted Augusta's part. The all-star cast was expertly directed by Takis Mouzenidis — known to international

theatre circles from his frequent stagings of Greek classics in the United States and elsewhere — costumes were designed by Marios Angelopoulos, while conductor Totis Karalivanos directed Skouloudis's own music — all celebrated names in their respective fields. Some of them now dead, most of the rest retired, these artists then contributed to a command performance.

But 1955 was not 1934. Skouloudis was at the zenith of his fame as a theatre personality, a man in his middle fifties, not a 'beginner' like Lidorikis in 1934. This difference was manifested in the critics' reactions which were unanimously positive. Novelist Manos Karayatsis, in *Vrathyni* (8 November 1955), was full of paise for drama and production; fellow-novelist, dramatist, and teacher Angelos Terzakis, in *To Vima;* critics Marios Ploritis, in *Eleftheria* (6-11-55); Leon Koukoulas, in *Athinaiki* (12-11-55); Alkis Thrylos, in *Hestia* (15-11-55); and Vassos Varikas, in *Ta Nea* (13-11-55) — all praised play, playwright, and performance, some even declaring it one of the best Greek dramas by a living dramatist. And they were right. Having had the opportunity to attend one of the 1956 performances, right after my senior year as an English major, I remember having enjoyed this drama immensely — especially the great and late Katrakis's interpretation of Byron as a tragic figure. Some twenty-odd years later I had the chance to watch an American TV show on Byron and an English stage version of his later life (Italy and after). In all honesty, I must state that both were inferior to the Greek plays in most all respects, their conspicuous weakness being their directors' insistence on minor idiosyncratic *pecadillos* in Byron's general deportment which demeaned him as a human being and as an historical personality. Emphasis on 'Naturalistic' factors and 'slices of life' was legitimate in literature by Hauptmann, Zola, Sinclair and other Naturalists. It is a dated — although still sensational — method and philosophy of characterisation in our days.

Greek theatre-goers enjoyed and applauded *The Tragedy of Lord Byron* for several months. The play was scheduled for a 'gala' revival in 1974 — at the National Theatre in Athens, this time — to celebrate the Sesquicentennial of the Hero's death for Greece. The then existing political conditions and other anomalies, however, made Skouloudis withdraw his tragedy from consideration by the board of this State theatre. Unfortunately, the venerable dramatist has not had the satisfaction of another production to this day (1985). The enormous cost involved in the staging of an 'historical' play with a very large cast in period costumes

must, undoubtedly, have been one of the practical reasons or considerations mitigating against its production.

3. The Contents of the Dramas

My readers must bear with me in this part of my essay, for I have no other means to convey an idea of the contents of these plays but plot summaries, character lists, and other technical data (names of places, dates of events) utilised by the two playwrights.

Lidorikis's *Lord Byron* has a cast of over thirty major and minor characters. It consists of a Prologue, four Acts, and an Epilogue. The acts are subdivided into two or three scenes *(tableaux)* each. The time scheme spans the years 1794 through 1824. The action development is episodic, though linear, the time and setting of each *tableau* constituting an almost autonomous scene, as it were.

The Prologue (1794) is set in the Aberdeen house of Mrs. Byron (Byron, his Mother, and his Nurse in the action). In it the six-year old Byron is shown to be inquisitive, sensitive, and willful. His Mother's erratic behaviour makes the boy suffer. He declares that he wants to live like his adventurous Father, and believes that he will die like him, when he becomes thirty-six years old. May Grey, his Nurse, reads to him about the passion of Christ, and explains Calvinist dogma about sin, suffering, and predestination. The *tableau* ends with innocent and scared Byron saying: «Wouldn't it be better for me to be crucified like little Christ?» — an intimation of a future life of pain and sacrifice for the sake of others.

Scene i of Act I is set at Newstead Abbey, 1809 (Byron, Hobhouse, Matthews, Murray, and three girls in the action). Ready to leave England for his tour of the Continent, the young Poet gives an orgiastic party to his friends and their insignificant local concubines. He recites his verse epitaph to Botswain and stanzas from «Lines Inscribed Upon a Cup Formed from a Skull», thus introducing an element, or pose, of cynicism. The other characters are rather flat — true to their portrayal by André Maurois — their interactions with the protagonist serving to underscore Byron's dynamic and odd personality.

Scene ii, Act I, is set in Athens, at an open-air bazaar (Byron, Tahir, Fletcher, Hobhouse, Nicholas Sarris, Theresa Macri, several Turks and Greeks in the action). Fletcher's expostulations with the quick-tempered Albanian servant Tahir offer good comedy. The serious happenings show the plight of the Greeks suffering the arrogance and brutality of their op-

pressors. The young Nicholas Sarris expresses his indignation and frustration to Lord Byron, who listens passively despite his anger at the obsequious Turkish Aghas. He still controls his feelings, later on, during a secret but innocent meeting with Theresa Macri who, though attracted to him, refuses to leave home and follow her idol. The scene ends in an appropriately romantic atmosphere as Byron recites his «Maid of Athens». This is a different, milder, and more likable Byron, by contrast to the impression given in the first *tableau*.

Scene i, Act II, takes place in the Byron house, St. James's Square, London, 1812 (Byron, Hobhouse, Fletcher, Caroline Lamb, Lady Melbourne and Lady Bessborough in the action). Worried by Byron's prodigal life, the two elderly Ladies conspire to get him married. Lady Caroline Lamb shows her hysterical character, but the Poet — by now an expert in manipulating women — enjoys sending her away. His honest friend Hobhouse comments on Byrons' dangerous involvements by saying: «Until when, though?... Until when?» — thus intimating forthcoming social disapproval.

Scene ii, Act II, maintains the same atmosphere of a scandalous life while it expands its drama and intensity. It is set in Byron's home on Bennett Street, London, 1814 (Byron, Augusta, and Hobhouse in the action). Hobhouse argues that Augusta must stop living with the Poet. A rather naive and benevolent Augusta agrees that Byron should get married and change life style putting an end to scandal and the gossip it provokes. Much less patient than she, Byron suffers in frustration, and violently attacks Dourgall's libel about «the two lovers of one common parent» who will «breed a generation of cripples», quoting the satiric verse.

Scene i, Act III, is set at the Milbanke estate, Seaham, 1815 (Byron, Annabella, Ralph and Judith Milbanke, and Lady Melbourne in the action). The Poet has married Annabella; all Milbankes are nice and correct to him. The young and patient Lady Byron tries to understand her famous husband and wants to make him happy. But he seems oversensitive, depressed, and nostalgic about his lost freedom and exotic experiences abroad. He recites some melancholic verses to his father-in-law; indirectly, they express his sadness.

Scene ii, Act III — the Byrons' Piccadilly Terrace residence, London, 1816 — (Byron, Annabella, and Judith Milbanke in the action). The fatal and rapid disintegration of the Milbanke 'solution' is shown with skill. Judith listens with horror to her daughter's painful descriptions of Byron's various cruelties to her and suggests separation. Annabella once

more attempts to persuade her husband to alter his behaviour and give their marriage another chance. But a morose and aloof Byron insisists that he wants out, that he must leave England again. His personality has changed; he suffers and makes those who love him suffer. Gone is the cynical pose of old. A way out must be sought and found.

Scene i, Act IV — at the Palazzo Mocenigo, Venice, 1818 (Byron, Shelley, Margarita Cogni, Fletcher, Claire Clairmont, and Italians in the action) — presents Byron in 'search of himself'. Although England and its hostile atmosphere are behind, the superficiality of the festive mood in the Palazzo and his skin deep affair with 'la Fornarina' only amuse Byron while alarming poor Fletcher with her fits of jealousy. He refuses Shelley's honest pleas and Claire's malicious arguments to allow their daughter Allegra go live with her mother. Shelley's role is just functional; his portrait rather flat by comparison to the colourful and dynamic person we find in Elma Dangerfield's *Mad Shelley*.

Scene ii, Act IV, is set at the Guiccioli Palazzo, Ravenna, 1821 (Byron, Fletcher, Teresa Guiccioli, Pietro Gamba in the action). Byron is in a more relaxed and, temporarily, happier mood because of his involvement with Teresa, Gamba's friendship, and faithful Fletcher's care. Byron's political activities, with the Gambas, result in the wounding of Fletcher by enemy agents at night. Byron feels guilty, but his suffering is alleviated by the news of the outbreak of the Greek Revolution — an event he hails with genuine enthusiasm. An aura of contentment and a feeling of anticipation close the *tableau*.

Scene iii, Act IV — the central square of Missolonghi, Greece, 1824 (Byron, Fletcher, Gamba, Dr. Bruno, Mavrocordatos, Christos Maroungas, Capetan Lambros, and other Greeks in the action) — shows a reformed Byron playing his part of a war leader. The Greek Revolution is in its third year. Byron seems to have found a purpose in life despite his failing health: Greece's struggle is his own struggle for a personal 'liberation'. Indifferent to Dr. Bruno's and Fletcher's warnings about his condition, Byron accepts Mavrocordatos's suggestion to help the Greek cause by using his wealth. All Greeks present treat him with genuine love and respect. Pleased with himself, the Poet closes the scene by alluding to his approaching 'crucifixion' (see intimation of this in Prologue) as he realises that his illness will prevent him from seeing his final triumph as the liberator of Greece. His last words are: «Too bad, Pietro... I had thought that *I* could have soared high forever... My God,... why are you crucifying me when I need all my strength?...»

The Epilogue features a Greek Army spokesman addressing the people

in Missolonghi. The Government announcement of Lord Byron's death and a proclamation of national mourning are read. The play ends in a tremendously impressive *tableau:* Byron's body lies in state amid pale lights. Mantzaros's solemn music accompanies voices singing Solomos's elegy on his death, heard in the background, as the curtain slowly falls[5].

The second play, Manolis Skouloudis's *The Tragedy of Lord Byron,* has a cast of thirty-three characters plus extras. It is organised into two Parts, with three and two Acts, respectively. Each Act has one setting *(tableau),* but the events it dramatises occur successively over an unspecified period of time, as the author 'telescopes' action, creating a deceptively diachronic continuum spanning the years 1804 through 1824. The action development is, thus, linear, but dates are not mentioned.

Act I (Prologue) is set in front of the Annesley Manor House (Byron, Mary Chaworth, Jack Musters, Peggy, Johnny, and Lord Grey in the action). Jack Musters flirts with Peggy, the willing daughter of a poor share-cropper, and is bent on seducing her. Byron (aged fifteen), terribly conscious of his lameness, infatuated with Mary Chaworth who plays with his feelings while actually in love with Musters, witnesses a secret meeting of the two amoral neighbours. Shaken and hurt, he exchanges hostile remarks with the arrogant and obnoxious Jack, Later on. Lord Grey, Byron's tenant, tries to calm the boy's passion. Unseen by him, the two lovers kiss, and leave laughing happily, while Byron exclaims in an anguished solo: «My own cloud!... Hell! I am doomed!... A curse! I am Cain! I am Cain!» and exits like a maniac. The playwright thus establishes an impressive motif; Cain's curse, that is, Byron's clubfoot, his Cain stigma, which the immature youth believes to be the reason of his rejection by his idealised Mary.

Act II is set in Byron's large bedroom in Newstead Abbey right after his return from abroad (1812) — (Byron, his Mother, Fletcher, Peggy, Augusta, Hobhouse, Tom Moore, Scrope Davies, a Doctor *et al.* in the action). Peggy, seduced and abandoned by Jack Musters, comes and seeks employment in the Byron household. Attended by her physician, Mrs.

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5. Nicholas Mantzaros, composer of Greece's National Anthem, also wrote music inspired by Dionysios Solomos's long «Lyrical Poem Upon Lord Byron's Death» (1824). Its first stanza reads (in my version):

Liberty, cease for a moment
striking hard with your sword,
come close-by and lament
by the body of this noble Lord.

Byron has a fit when she faces some bills, and expires soon. Byron's friends come to welcome him home, and he soon arrives with Fletcher and Zographos, his Greek servant. He experiences mixed feelings upon his Mother's death; first his friends, then Peggy, console Byron. In a strange, almost hysterical, inspiration, he thinks that the girl is a godsend: an affair with the 'fallen' Peggy may absolve him of his Cain curse. Her remonstrances, though, make him recover from his passing folly, and he lets her go. He remembers his Greek experiences, Mrs. Williams's prophecy that he will die aged thirty-six, sees himself as a Hamlet figure, and remains agitated and sad. The arrival of Augusta Leigh, to welcome and console him, brings relief as he now sees her as a ray of sunshine in his clouded life. Falling into her arms — because of his unsteady stepping — he kisses her passionately, and the scene ends in a note of temporary happiness. The audience easily realise that the author has 'telescoped' in this Act a series of events that, in reality, occurred over a fairly long period or days of weeks, not just a few hours.

Act III is set in Holland House, London, the night after Byron's brilliant oration in the House of Lords defending the Nottingham Frameworkers (Byron, Fletcher, Caroline Lamb, Lady Melbourne, Lord and Lady Holland, Augusta, Annabella Milbanke, Major and Mrs. Musters, Davies, Moore, and Zographos in the action). Despite his triumph as a liberal orator and 'exotic' poet Byron is irritable and frustrated because his affair with Augusta cannot have a desirable conclusion. His friends express admiration and affection. Annabella presents him with an honourable citation publically praising his idealism and political views. Byron tears it up and then has an explosive confrontation with Jack Musters because his former love rival has brutally quelled the labourers' rebellion and even allowed his troopers to club Peggy to death when she spat on him as her rapist. Lady Melbourne and the always obliging Augusta agree that Byron should get married, and tell him so. Disgusted with the hypocrisy and affectation of English society, the Poet rejects their shows of admiration, and expresses his own appreciation of Zographos and his compatriots for their honest and simple way of life and love of freedom. Jealous of his affairs with other women, the hysterical Caroline Lamb creates an episode and electrifies the already charged atmosphere at the Holland reception. These unpleasant confrontations convince Byron to propose to innocent Annabella who accepts with genuine expressions of love, confident that she can reform and «save» this temporarily troubled but deep down angelic young man. Skouloudis's expert manipulation of atmosphere and action in this Act with so many persons

on stage succeeds in forcefully emphasising the fact that Byron remain a sufferer who does not expect a practical and real salvation, since the love and sympathy of Augusta and his friends are neutralised by the open hostility of his enemies in the ruling class, and the 'cant' of aristocratic hypocrites.

Act IV is set in the Piccadilly house of the Byrons a year, or so, later (Byron, Flestcher, Augusta, Annabella, Davies, Moore, Hobhouse, Mrs. Clermont, Zographos, a Doctor, and counsellor Lushington in the action). Restless and unhappy with his marriage, the Poet behaves with coldness, even cruelty (mental, that is) to his wife. The love and concern of Augusta and his friends cannot bring peace to his troubled soul. Annabella, on good terms with Augusta, shows understanding; but she is tormented by the erratic behaviour, the sarcasm and the fits of the sick man, whose mental and physical condition the Doctor cannot cure. Her old governess, the hostile Mrs. Clermont, urges the rather neutral counsellor Lushington to proceed with separation arrangements. Zographos tells Byron that he wishes to return home and take part in the preparations of an uprising against the Turks. Moved, however, by the suffering of his master, he changes his mind and declares that he will remain by Byron's side as a true friend. Byron refuses the Greek's sacrifice of principle and urges him to go do his duty to Greece; they embrace, and Zographos departs[6]. Byron's insistence on separation from Annabella and their new-born baby and his refusal to follow them to Kirkby have caused an angry mob to gather outside the house protesting this 'new scandal'. Davies, Moore, and Hobhouse urge him to leave the country and thus avoid its hostility. Byron decides to leave England for good; Fletcher and his friends finally follow him as he walks with Augusta to brave the hostile crowd and leave. The Milbanke 'solution' has failed miserably, as Skouloudis seems to agree with Lidorikis (and both with Maurois) that a man with Byron's stormy character could never find peace by means of what makes normal, common, persons calm down and accept a domestic life role.

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6. Skouloudis seems to identify this 'Suliot' Zographos with a real warrior by the same name who fought in Attica and environs in several battles since the Spring of 1821. This historical person, however, was not from Suli. His personal papers (in the National Archives) indicate no contact whatsoever with Lord Byron before or after 1821. Skouloudis could not remember if he had consulted any specific source on Zographos back in 1947.

To help my readers visualise how this plawright dramatises events and quotes Byron I am transcribing here the last speech of the Poet just before leaving home never to return:

Oh yes!... Fletcher, fetch my things, quickly (Exit Fletcher). *You, of course, gentlemen, are not in the least obliged to follow* (Enter Fletcher with Byron's outdoor things. Byron takes them). *Good. And now Fletcher, open this door wide!* (As Fletcher does so) *I know, Hobhouse. You're telling yourself I'm an actor. But our theatres sometimes play worse comedies. Look me in the eyes, and believe me: even at this moment there is something hallow within me which will still breathe —even when I've stopped breathing myself* (Byron embraces Hobhouse) *Moore. farewell. Wait a while. The time for our cruise has not yet come* (He embraces Moore). *I have to feel death first in the very marrow of my bones... Eh, Scrope Davies? Look out. Your wine will be watered with those tears. Farewell, my friend* (He embraces Davies) *I shan't forget that you always took my side... Come on, Fletcher. Don't behave like that. I shan't embrace you, because we shall see each other... Fare you all well. Ah!... That was a sigh for the few who may still love me. Ah!... Another for them that hate me. Take my arm, Goose, and hold me firm... That's it... And now, whatever skies lie overhead, let them behold a heart that is ready for any fate!*[7]

The last Act is set in Byron's headquarters at Missolonghi, several years later (Byron, Fletcher, Captain Scott, Captain Parry, Gamba, Baron Frauberg, Hatadge, Kostas Botsaris, Photos, Kitsos, Dr. Millingen and other Greeks in the action. The Prussian Baron and most Greeks are fictitious). It actually is April 1824. The portraits of Ada, Annabella, and Augusta are hanging on the wall facing his desk, above his helmet, sword, and rifle. Captain Scott, who has brought some munitions for Byron's Greek army — but not the eagerly-expected Congreve shells for Parry's artillery — plus letters and newspapers, agrees with practical Fletcher that Greece is a primitive country inhabited by 'madmen' and that Missolonghi has a miserable climate (It is raining). Byron, who has stoically put up with all adversities, chides the two Englishmen. He seems considerably changed. Physically he is in poor condition; but psychologi-

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7. Unpublished translation by David Phillips of Exeter College, Oxford, done after 1955.

cally he seems relaxed as he is totally absorbed in his new role as a military leader. He is genuinely moved when he reads a friendly letter from his estranged wife, and expresses affection for Annabella and Ada. Gamba reads him an article from a newspaper that excites Byron: «Do you know what *The Times* write about you? Here it is; they refer to Napoleon's Statement that 'Greece awaits a liberator to inscribe his name next to Homer's and add that this liberator apparently is 'our great poet Lord Byron who is this very moment honouring the name of Britain in the land of the brave Suliots!'» To Gamba's comment about Byron's importance to Greece, the Poet retorts about Greece's importance to him, implying his psychological 'liberation' and finding of a new purpose in life.

The dramatist shows Byron putting his belief into practice. He gives a fine example of dedication when he starts unloading Scott's cargo by himself, in the rain, despite his condition, since the Suliots had refused to work on Palm Sunday. Byron's action makes them disregard their religious duties, and they soon undertake the unloading of the ship. His skills as a leader are shown when he patches up a quarrel between two philhellenes[8]. His influence on his camp spreads all over freed Greece: Gamba brings letters from formerly disunited Greek chieftains who now declare that they stand together and are eager to follow his leadership. Byron's magnanimity, humanism, and courage are shown when he saves the fourteen-year-old Turkish girl Hatadge, from two drunken Suliots, by threatening to shoot himself if they lay hands on her[9]. Ashamed and remorseful the two warriors desist and repent their unbecoming behaviour. But Byron has been sick. His exertion in the rain and all manner of constant physical and nervous strain take their toll, despite warnings, pleas, and efforts of Dr. Millingen and ever faithful Fletcher. Lying in his bed the Poet recites from his poem «On This Day I Complete My Thirty-sixth Year»:

The land of honorable death
Is here: — up to the field, and give
Away thy breath!

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8. Parry was just a sargeant in the British Army before Byron promoted him to the rank of Captain. The imaginary Frauberg, however, is presented as a Colonel in the Prussian Army, in addition to his nobility title.

9. L.A. Marchand mentions the girl's age as just nine, following a reference of the Poet in one of his letters. See *Byron,* III, 1183-4. By raising the age of the girl to fourteen, Skouloudis added tension since she is, thus, more sexy than a child of 9 or 10.

Seek out — less often sought than found —
A soldier's grave, for thee the best;
Then look around, and choose thy ground,
And take thy rest.

All Greeks around his bed weep and declare that they are «Byron's brothers, Byron's sons». Against the din of rain and howling winds the last words of the Poet are heard: «Oh Greece!... I gave you my time and money... Now take my life as well... Fire!... Follow me! Gamba, come with me!... Oh!... I think I am leaving something to the world... something worth loving!... And now... I want to sleep». Byron expires as a lightning strikes. Fletcher announces: «Gentlemen... Lord Byron... is dead!» But the Greeks exclaim in chorus: «Lord Byron shall never die!» and the curtain falls as funeral music is heard.

4. Evaluation

The main source of data for the characterisations and plots in *Lord Byron* and in *The Tragedy of Lord Byron* was André Maurois's well-known biography of the Poet, *Byron* (1930), in two volumes. Lidorikis and Skouloudis know excellent French, and their pride as Greeks made them peruse the French text on their national liberation Hero. Despite its rather romantic bias and some factual inaccuracies, Maurois's book became very popular in Greece, for quite obvious reasons, and its Greek version remained the chief source of information about Byron as an artist and man in Greece till the late 1950s, when the appearance of Leslie A. Marchand's three-volume *Byron* (1958) helped those Greeks who knew English form a more sound idea of their idol. Till then even Academy members and university professors considered Maurois an authority on the eccentric Englishman.

Both Greek playwrights also considered some of the numerous Greek writings on Byron — some too scholarly and pedantic to be interesting, others too specific and detailed to be inspiring — papers, state documents, letters kept in dusty archives; Lidorikis, who also knew English, consulted Edward J. Trelawny's *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (1858), Thomas Medwin's *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron* (1832), Harold Nicolson's *Byron, The Last Journey* (1924), and other such biographical sources, plus, of course, Byron's own texts. Skouloudis, who knows no English, had to depend on his late wife, who knew the language, for comparable research. These consultations, how-

ever, must have been rather desultory and hasty, for both authors' interests were not those of a historian or a biographer. What they needed as dramatists was basic facts, and such facts were readily available in Maurois's book, so they both stuck to it and to its 'revelations' about Byron.

In all honesty, though, I must admit that neither of them subtitled or presented their Byron dramas as 'historical' plays. Neither claimed to have composed an historical drama like *The Persians* of Aeschylus, *Henry VI* of Shakespeare, or *Capodistrias* by Kazantzakis. To them Byron's history was raw materila perceived through the lapse of time which had offered it the dimensions and dynamics of a legend, a fable, a myth of wide acceptance. The historical truth in the plays is like the eternal truth we find in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, where history and legend combined to merge as raw material, and emerged as 'literary' reality. This is particularly true of Skouloudis's handling of Byron, for his interpretation is based more on psychological understanding and stage savvy, and less on evaluation of facts and historicity. The younger and rather immature writer followed the known facts more closely, the ensuing conception of Byron being a reflection of the French biographer's image of the Poet, done, more or less, in Greek *couleur local*.

Alekos Lidorikis's *Lord Byron* was written in 1933, first published and staged in 1934. It presents a chronological series of important 'moments' in the personal drama of Byron — important in the sense that they helped him, and his audience, understand the true nature of Byron more objectively, more correctly; for the Greek cultural tradition had offered Lidorikis a regular legend, a holy icon of a freedom martyr, not a real Man. «I wanted to understand the identity of the Man called Byron, to come to like him as a tormented, unsatisfied human being rather than as a Greek National Hero», he admitted to me in person, and also wrote in his «Author's Note» to the 1983 Performance Programme. Obviously, then, his concern was psychological, not historical. Thus, chosen highlights in Byron's life drama could become excellent material for a stage chronicle, as it were.

To achieve his goal of an objective understanding of the Man, Lidorikis focused on characteristic events which presented the different moods, poses, attitudes, statements, and actions that help the spectator see a composite, multi-dimensional picture of this Man. Thus, he quoted Byron's poems rather frequently, exploited all manner of love affairs from the 'orgies' in Newstead Abbey to the idyll with Theresa Macri in Athens and on to the affairs with Caroline, Augusta, and later on, the Fornarina

and Teresa Guiccioli. For Byron was a lover, and the idealistic young dramatist saw him also as a Lover, not only as a Poet. By the end of his play Lidorikis started focusing his attention on the 'Greek adventure'. For the sake of his Greek audience he had earlier invented the character of Sarris, an imaginary yet very 'true' spokesman for the collective expression of Greek reaction to Turkish brutality. The other Greek characters, such as Mavrocordatos and the Suliots, are both, functionally necessary and historically real. Through them one more facet of Byron's personality is revealed. The climactic and moving end at Missolonghi is very effective, too. That is where he did die and what he died for: the liberation of Hellas and his own psychological exit from an impass. The human and the heroic were finally combined in a sad but 'economic' conclusion. Lidorikis's successive 'snap-shots', so to speak, of Byron's dynamic stances, masks, and conflicts, do form a composite and fairly accurate portrait. The unfit, unsatisfied Seeker found a fitting end.

Lidorikis's dramatic 'chronicle' technique served him well. The various episodes — seemingly autonomous — do constitute a whole whose organic unity and stage coherence are controlled with skill. Nothing in *Lord Byron* strikes us as superfluous, let alone damaging or far-fetched. The few liberties taken with historical detail are minor, but their use by the writer is artistically felicitous. Lidorikis's interpretation of Byron's personality succeeded in *demythologising* that Man, Poet, Lover, Sufferer, and Paragon of Greek freedom. This is no mean achievement for a new playwright. Even his few instances of youthful sentimentality and idealisation, in passages where lyricism replaces realism of expression and presentation, may be overlooked in view of the then prevailing conditions and tastes.

Skouloudis had finished *The Tragedy of Lord Byron* by 1947, in the aftermath of the horrors of the Second World War. It was staged in 1955, as we saw, and published in 1964. More traditional than Lidorikis's drama in terms of organisation — since it respects the conventional subdivision into five acts — it does feature a new technique in the stage representation of time as Skouloudis expertly 'telescopes' series of happenings, and the time periods they were spread over, into 'dramatic' or 'symbolic' time with an extremely salutary effect on the unity, coherence, and economy of his play as a work for the stage. Skouloudis does not bother to mention dates or lengths of time. The events appear chronologically, in the order of their historical occurrence, but the experienced artist handled time as flexibly and effectively as Aeschylus in the opening scene in *Agamemnon,* where the Watchman sees the beacon fires an-

nouncing the fall of Troy and, hardly after he has had enough time to voice his mixed feelings upon the expected return of victorious Agamemnon, the King arrives in his chariot to meet his doom which, again, occurs in 'dramatic' time, not clock time. The same was done by the Bard in *Macbeth,* where Shakespeare's magic touch made the seventeen years of the Scotchman's 'bloody reign' be telescoped into less than three hours of coherent stage activity.

Like Lidorikis, Skouloudis also identified with Byron, though not in a romantic fashion. A lower-leg deformity caused him a pronounced limping when he was a child. This fact, plus idiosyncratic traits (he is temperamental and more emotional than Lidorikis) made him develop insights to probe the psyche of Byron. Thus, although *The Tragedy of Lord Byron* largely depends on Maurois for plot material, it was Skouloudis's own personality that enabled him to interpret and present Byron's character in the impressive way he did. His is a psychological drama, a portrait of Byron wherein hereditary and inner factors offered motivation for behaviour and attitudes which were inherent and self-centred rather than conditioned by external events. The external happenings merely triggered the reactions, they did not motivate them *de profundis*.

The motif of Byron's clubfoot, and the psychological trauma it inflicted on his soul, is used by Skouloudis more resolutely and skillfully than Lidorikis had used his own motif of Byron's suffering as a victim destined to become a martyr for the benefit of others. Even when Skouloudis shows Byron's humanism and concern for others — e.g., the Peggy episode early in the play, Byron's disregard for his health to motivate his Suliots to work on a holiday, toward the end — this behaviour is not dictated by altruism alone. It is a natural manifestation of his hurt soul which bursts out at the slightest provocation. Thus the firy Cretan dramatist de-emphasised Byron as a lover. The «Maid of Athens» episode and the Guiccioli affair are almost ignored, while Caroline Lamb's emotional explosions are capitalised on to justify tensions which, in their own turn, will act to trigger Byron's spontaneous responses. It is in such a state of emotional provocation that the Poet rails against the double standards of Jack Musters and of his 'noble' friends in the establishment (Act III).

Moreover, Skouloudis uses echoes from Byron's poems less directly than Lidorikis. His achievements in *Childe Harold, Don Juan, Cain,* «Prometheus» and other texts, are emphasized only in terms of their respective heroes' manifestations of various, and often conflicting, aspects of Byron's complex personality whose dynamics make him talk or act, in

turn, as a restless wanderer, a capricious lover, a marked criminal, a rebel against authority, and so on.

Skouloudis's play is a tragedy, indeed, for the Poet dies, ironically when the Man is 'cleansed' of his 'Cain stigma' and restored, as it were, to the universal stature he so much deserved — a stature he had fallen from on account of his tragic flaws and *hubris* (incest, curse, ill temper). A profound sense of Aristotelian *catharsis* is experienced at the end of *The Tragedy of Lord Byron*. Sins and errors are forgotten, excused. Vindication has come, but the price paid is too high — death after his personal liberation but before the liberation of Hellas.

The overall image of Byron that emerges out of Skouloudis's probing and subtle tragedy — that of a 'marked' man doomed from the start — despite its emotional tension, will find many Anglophone readers/spectators in agreement. It almost verges on the hysterical, whereas Lidorikis's almost verges on the romantic. But where can one really draw the line? What is life, and what is imitation of life? Where is the difference between a hysterical person with long periods of great calm and benevolent behaviour, and a normally nice person with occasional outbursts of uncontrollable emotions? Psychiatrists do not agree on the interpretation of symptoms; as for jurists they are at a greater loss when it comes to reaching a verdict on such matters.

Skouloudis's emphasis on these psychological considerations, however, was not due to Naturalistic bias. His instinct as a seasoned modern playwright made him select data and focus his keen eye on what was *theatrical*, dramatic, even sensational in Byron's life, rather than on what was commonplace, normal, or had been turned into legend by popular fancy. By contrast, Lidorikis's *Lord Byron* is more economical, more balanced, more restrained and less sensational. But Skouloudis's play is more sophisticated, more moving perhaps more appealing to an audience of today.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Μ. Β. Ρ α τ ζ η, *Ὁ Λόρδος Βύρων στὸ Ἑλληνικὸ Θέατρο.*

Στὴ μελέτη αὐτὴ ἐξετάζω λεπτομερειακὰ δύο νεοελληνικὰ θεατρικὰ ἔργα μὲ πρωταγωνιστὴ τὸν φιλέλληνα Ἄγγλο ποιητὴ Μπάϋρον: *Λόρδος Βύρων* (1934) τοῦ Ἀλέκου Λιδωρίκη, καὶ *Ἡ Τραγωδία τοῦ Λόρδου Βύρωνα* (1955) τοῦ Μανώλη Σκουλούδη. Ἡ προσέγγισή μου ἀκολουθεῖ τέσσερα μέρη: 1) Οἱ δραματουργοί, 2) Οἱ πρῶτες παραστάσεις, 3) Τὰ περιεχόμενα, καὶ 4) Ἀξιολόγηση.

Στὰ δύο πρῶτα μέρη παρέχω βιογραφικὰ καὶ ἱστορικὰ στοιχεῖα γιὰ τοὺς συγγραφεῖς καὶ τὴ συμβολή τους στὸ χῶρο τοῦ Νεοελληνικοῦ Θεάτρου, στὸν ὁποῖο ἀμφότεροι σημείωσαν σημαντικὲς καλλιτεχνικὲς καὶ ἐμπορικὲς ἐπιτυχίες, καὶ σχολιάζω ἰδιαίτερα τὴν ὑποδοχὴ τῶν δραμάτων τους ἀπὸ τοὺς κριτικοὺς καὶ τὸ κοινὸ ὅταν ἀνεβάστηκαν στὸ Ἐθνικὸ Θέατρο καὶ στὸ Ἑλληνικὸ Λαϊκὸ Θέατρο τοῦ Πειραιᾶ, τὸ 1934 καὶ 1955, ἀντίστοιχα. Ἀναφέρω ὀνόματα ἠθοποιῶν, σκηνοθετῶν, μουσικῶν καὶ ἄλλων παραγόντων ποὺ συντελέσανε στὴ μεγάλη τους ἐπιτυχία (Παξινοῦ, Μανωλίδου, Σκούρα, Κατράκης, Δενδραμῆς, Μουζενίδης, Κλώνης, Ἀγγελόπουλος, Καραλίβανος κ.ἄ.).

Τὸ τρίτο μέρος ἀποτελεῖται ἀπὸ περίληψη τῶν ὑποθέσεων τῶν δύο ἔργων, ποὺ δείχνει πῶς δραματοποιοῦνται καὶ ἐξελίσσονται τὰ γεγονότα ἀπὸ σκηνὴ σὲ σκηνή, ἀπὸ πράξη σὲ πράξη. Ὅσα ἀναφέρω στὰ τρία αὐτὰ μέρη εἶναι ἀπαραίτητα γιὰ τοὺς ἀγγλόφωνους ἀναγνῶστες μου, οἱ ὁποῖοι, φυσικά, δὲν γνωρίζουν τὰ κείμενα, τὰ πρόσωπα, καὶ τὰ πράγματα τοῦ Θεάτρου μας.

Τὸ τέταρτο μέρος εἶναι καὶ τὸ σπουδαιότερο ἀπὸ φιλολογικὴ ἄποψη. Ἀναφέρω τὸ ἔργο *Byron* (1930), τοῦ André Maurois, ὡς κύρια πηγὴ πλοκῆς καὶ χαρακτηρισμοῦ, καθὼς καὶ δευτερεύουσες πηγὲς (Trelawny, Medwin, Nicolson) ἢ λεπτομέρειες ἀπὸ ἑλληνικὰ ἀρχεῖα ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τὴ λαϊκὴ παράδοση. Ἀναλύω καὶ ἐπεξηγῶ τὴ θεατρικὴ τεχνικὴ «χρονικοῦ» ποὺ ἀκολούθησε ὁ νεαρὸς Λιδωρίκης, καθὼς καὶ τὴν πιὸ ἔντεχνη μέθοδο «τηλεσκόπησης» συμβάντων καὶ χρόνου τοῦ ἔμπειρου Σκουλούδη. Ὑποστηρίζω τὴ γνώμη ὅτι καὶ τὰ δύο δράματα εἶναι ψυχολογικὰ μᾶλλον παρὰ ἱστορικά, καὶ δικαιολογῶ τὶς σχετικὰ μικρὲς ἀποκλίσεις τους ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορικὴ πραγματικότητα ὡς στοιχεῖα ποὺ ἐνίσχυσαν τὶς σκηνικὲς ἀρετὲς τῶν ἔργων. Ἀναφέρω τὰ ποιήματα τοῦ Μπάϋρον ποὺ χρησιμοποιοῦν οἱ δραματουργοὶ γιὰ νὰ ἀναδημιουργήσουν τὴν προσωπικότητα τοῦ ποιητῆ, ἢ νὰ ἐπιτύχουν κατάλληλο χρωματισμὸ ἢ φορτισμὸ τῆς ἀτμό-

σφαιρας σὲ διάφορες σκηνές. Συγκρίνω τὸ *Λόρδος Βύρων* καὶ τὴν *Τραγωδία τοῦ Λόρδου Βύρωνα* μὲ πρόσφατα ἀγγλικὰ καὶ ἀμερικανικὰ θεάματα μὲ τὸ ἴδιο θέμα, καὶ διαπιστώνω ὅτι τὸ ἔργο τοῦ Λιδωρίκη κατάφερε νὰ ἀπομυθοποιήσει τὸν "Ηρωά του μὲ ἀντικειμενικότητα, ἐνῶ ἡ ψυχολογικὴ ἑρμηνεία τοῦ Σκουλούδη ἔχει ἀποφύγει τὰ τεχνάσματα καὶ τὶς προκαταλήψεις τῶν Νατουραλιστῶν, ἔτσι τὰ δύο ἑλληνικὰ «πορτραῖτα» τοῦ Byron παρουσιάζονται πειστικὰ καὶ πολὺ κοντὰ στὴν ἀντίληψη περὶ Byron τῶν προσφάτων κριτικῶν στὴν ἀγγλόφωνη βιβλιογραφία.