

BYRON'S WRITINGS IN GREECE, 1823-4

edited by Peter Cochran



Theodoros Vrizakis: *Welcome of Lord Byron at Missolonghi*



Heroes of the Greek War of Independence: *Constantinos Kanaris, Georgios Karaiskakis, and Theodoros Kolokotronis*

Byron was at once a romantic dreamer, who wanted life to square up to his illusions, and a satirical realist, who saw what was before him with unusual clarity and found its contradictoriness amusing. The clash between the two Byrons is nowhere more noticeable than in his last writings, done on Cephalonia and at Missolonghi during the months before his death. There we see the Greece he dreams of, and the Greece which, in different ways, destroys him.

The historical facts are as follows. Tired of Teresa Guiccioli, his Italian mistress, and looking for an excuse to leave her, Byron succumbed with no great practical enthusiasm to the suggestion of the London Greek Committee (on which his friend Hobhouse sat) that he should represent them on the ground in Greece itself.

With Teresa's brother Pietro Gamba and several servants, including Tita Falcieri and William Fletcher, he left Genoa on July 14th 1823, in a tub called the *Hercules*, and arrived at Argostoli, on Cephalonia, on August 3rd. There he stayed, making one expedition to neighbouring Ithaca from August 11th to 17th, until December 29th, when he left for Missolonghi, landing on January 4th.

The so-called Greek War of Independence against the Turks – in reality a massive and hideous series of what we should call ethnic cleansings – had started in 1821, and it suited Byron's fantasy that this was a movement similar to the supposedly heroic battles which had defeated the Persians, and so on, in ancient Greece. He found the Greeks to be otherwise – as he knew he would. Just as the ancient Greeks had been, they were as interested in fighting one another as they were in fighting the common enemy.

While on Cephalonia Byron had taken in a handsome fifteen-year-old Greek youth called Loukas Chalandritsanos, with whom he had become infatuated, employing him as domestic, dressing him superbly, giving him presents, and so on. Loukas accompanied him to Missolonghi. However, Loukas seems to have been an unworthy dullard who didn't know what was going on, and his wooden indifference was a great agony to Byron, who refers to him in three of the poems below. The pain of such unrequited love was a factor in the depression which led to Byron's death.

On February 15th he had a kind of seizure (see his last diary entry, below) from which he seemed to recover; but in April he went for a ride in the rain against Fletcher's advice, and caught a fever, from which he did not recover, dying on April 19th.

His death shook Europe. Pushkin had a mass said for him. When, in Alfred de Musset's phrase "le prince des proscrits"; in that of Alphonse de Lamartine, "Michel-Ange des vers," he had left for Greece, a huge frisson of awe had gone through the ranks of French, if not English, philhellenes:

Que vois-je? un dieu chez vous arrive!
Exile-toi sur l'autre rive,
Byzance, sauve tes soldats.
Va, la Grèce est ressuscitée:
Les accents du nouveau Tyrtée
Enfant de Léonidas.

[What do I see? A god comes to you! Retreat to the far shore, Byzantium [[i.e. Turkey]], save your armies, go, Greece has awoken, to the strains of the new Tyrtæus, the son of Leonidas.]¹

One needed to have read nothing *by* Byron to feel like this – he was a poet, and was going to save Greece – that sufficed. And when he died trying to do so, the grief in France was far more extensive than it was in England. Alfred de Vigny wrote, with a deliberate Byronic echo:

Poète conquérant, adieu pour cette vie!
Je regarde ta mort et je te porte envie,
Car tu meures à cet âge où le cœur, jeune encor,
De ses illusions conserve le trésor.

Tel aux yeux des marins le soleil des tropiques
Se plonge tout ardent sous les flots pacifiques,
Et sans pâlir descend à son nouveau séjour,
Aussi fort qu'il était dans le milieu du jour.

[Conquering poet, farewell, for this life! I contemplate your death, and I envy you, for you die at that age where the heart, still young, preserves the treasure of its illusions. / So, to the eyes of the

1: Édouard d'Anglemont, *La Grèce*.

sailors, the tropical sun plunges, still radiant, into the waves of the Pacific, and descends without paling to its new home, as strong as it had been at mid-day.]²

Within a month of Byron's death, Victor Hugo wrote an obituary in the last number of *La Muse française*:

Quand on nous a annoncé la mort de ce poëte, il nous a semblé qu'on nous enlevait une part de notre avenir.³

[When the death of this poet was announced, it seemed to us that part of our future had been stolen.]

On May 27th 1824, Heinrich Heine wrote, in a letter to Rudolf Christiani:

Während ich dieses schreibe erfahre ich daß mein Vetter, Lord Byron, zu Missolongi gestorben ist. So hat dieses große Herz aufgehört zu schlagen! Es war groß und ein Herz, kein kleines Eyerstöckchen von Gefühlen. Ja dieser Mann war groß, er hat im Schmerze neue Welten entdeckt, er hat den miserabelen Menschen und ihren noch miserablen Göttern prometheisch getrotzt, der Ruhm seines Namens drang bis zu den Eisbergen Thules und bis in die brennenden Sandwüsten des Morgenlandes. take him al in al, he was a man. Wir werden sobald nicht mehr seines Gleichen sehen.

[Since I started this I have heard that my cousin, Lord Byron, has died at Missolonghi. So that great heart has stopped beating! His was a mighty and singular heart – no tiny little ovary of emotions. Yes, he was a great man – from his pain he created new worlds, Prometheus-like he defied miserable man and his still more miserable gods, the glory of his name echoed from the icebergs of Thule to the burning, sandy deserts of the East. 'He was a man, take him for all in all, we shall not look upon his like again.']⁴

Finally, Sir Walter Scott wrote, in the *Edinburgh Weekly Journal*:

The voice of just blame and that of malignant censure are at once silenced; and we feel almost as if the great luminary of Heaven had suddenly disappeared from the sky, at the moment when every telescope was levelled for the examination of the spots which dimmed his brightness.⁵

Byron's end in Greece was wretched, crucified between his ideals and the reality: but it put the seal on his reputation.

2: *Sur la mort de Lord Byron*, 1824: de Vigny echoes *The Island*, II 360-5.

3: *Sur George Gordon, Lord Byron*, in *La Muse française*, 15th June 1824, 327-39, reprinted in *La Muse française 1823 - 1824*, ed. Jules Marsan, Paris 1909, 297-309.

4: *Werke* 20 163 / *Briefe*, ed F.H.Eisner.

5: *The Prose of Sir Walter Scott* (1834-6) IV 343-4.

CEPHALONIA JOURNAL, June 19th – December 7th 1823

June 19th. 1823

The Dead have been awakened – shall I sleep?
 The World's at war with tyrants – shall I crouch?
 The harvest's ripe – and shall I pause to reap?
 I slumber not; the thorn is in my Couch –
 Each day a trumpet soundeth in mine ear –
 It's Echo in my heart –

Mataxata – Cephalonia – Sept 28.th
 1823

On the sixteenth (I think) of July I sailed from Genoa in the English Brig Hercules – J^{no}. Scott Master. – on the 17th. a Gale of wind occasioning confusion and threatening damage to the horses in the hold – we bore up again for the same port – where we remained four and twenty hours longer and then put to sea – touched at Leghorn – and pursued our voyage by the straits of Messina for Greece – passing within sight of Elba Corsica – the Lipari islands including Stromboli Sicily Italy &^c. – about the 4.th of August we anchored off Argostoli, in the chief harbour of the Island of Cephalonia. –

Here I had some expectation of hearing from Cap^t. B[laquiere].⁶ who was on a mission from the G^k Committee in London to the Provisional Gov.^t of the Morea – but rather to my surprise learned that he was on his way home – though his latest letters to me from the peninsula – after expressing an anxious wish that I should come up without delay – stated further that he intended to remain in the Country for the present. – –

I have since received various letters from him address to Genoa – and forwarded to the Islands – partly explaining the cause of his unexpected return – and also (contrary to his former opinion) <app> requesting me not to proceed to Greece *yet*, for sundry reasons, some of importance. – I sent a boat to Corfu in the hopes of finding him still there – but he had already sailed for Ancona. –

In the island of Cephalonia Colonel Napier⁷ commanded in chief as Resident – and Col. Duffie⁸ the 8th. a King's regiment then forming the Garrison. We were received by both those Gentlemen – and indeed by {all} the Officers as well as the Civilians with the greatest kindness and hospitality – which if we did not deserve – I still hope that we have done nothing to forfeit – and it has continued unabated – even since the Gloss of new Acquaintance has been worn away by frequent intercourse. –

We here learned what has since been fully confirmed – that the Greeks were in a state of political dissention amongst themselves – that Mavrocordato⁹ was dismissed or had resigned (L'Un vaut bien l'autre)¹⁰ and that Colocotroni¹¹ with I know not what or whose party was paramount in the Morea. – The Turks were in force in Acarnania &^c. and the Turkish fleet blockaded the coast from Missolonghi to Chiarenza – and subsequently to Navarino – The Greek Fleet from the want of means or other causes remained in port in Hydra – Ipsara – and Spezia – and for aught that is yet certainly known may be there still. As rather contrary to my expectations I had no advices from Peloponnesus – and had also letters to receive from

6: Edward Blaquiere, emissary of the London Greek Committee. He had first visited B. on April 5th 1823, in Genoa.

7: Colonel Charles Napier, Military Governor of Cephalonia, was sympathetic to philhellenes. Hamilton Browne had advised B. to go to Cephalonia, rather than Zante, because of him..

8: Lieutenant-Colonel John Duffie was a frequent companion of B. on his rides.

9: Alexander Mavrocordatos (1791-1865) was in theory President of free Greece. Though shifty, he was the Greek politician whom B. distrusted least

10: “which is much the same thing”.

11: Theodor Colocotronis (Kolokotronis: 1770-1843) an enemy of Mavrocordatos. C.-in-C. of the Greek forces in the Peloponnesus. Favoured amity with Russia.

England from the Committee I determined to remain for the interim in the Ionian Islands – especially as it was difficult to land on the opposite coast without risking the confiscation of the Vessel and her Contents – which Cap^t. Scott naturally enough declined to do – unless I would ensure to him the full amount of his possible damage. – –

To pass the time we had made a little excursion over the mountains to Saint Eufemia – by worse roads than I ever met in the course of some years of travel in rough places {of many countries}. – At Saint Euphemia we embarked for Ithaca – and made the tour of that beautiful Island – as a proper pendant to the Troad – which I had visited several years before.¹² – The hospitality of Cap^t. Knox (the resident) and his lady¹³ was in no respect inferior to that of our military friends of Cephalonia. – That Gentleman with M^{rs} K. and some of their friends conducted us to the fountain of Arethusa¹⁴ – which alone would be worth the voyage – but the rest of the Island is not inferior in attraction to the admirers of Nature; – the arts and tradition I leave to the Antiquar<y/>ies, – and so well have those Gentlemen contrived to settle such questions – that as the existence of Troy is disputed – so that of Ithaca (as *Homer's Ithaca* <that is> i.e.) is not yet admitted. – –

Though the month was August and we had been cautioned against travelling in the Sun – yet as I had during my former experience never suffered from the heat as long as I continued in *motion* – I was unwilling to lose so many hours of the day on account of a sunbeam more or less – and though our party was rather numerous no one suffered either illness or inconvenience as far as could be observed, though one of the Servants (a Negro)¹⁵ – declared that it was as hot as in the West Indies. – I had left <behind> on board our thermometer – so could not ascertain the precise degree. – We returned to Saint Eufemia and passed over to the monastery of Samos on the opposite part of the bay and proceeded next day to Argostoli by a better road than the path to Saint Eufemia. – The land Journey was made on Mules. – – Some days after our return I heard that there were letters for me at Zante – but a considerable delay took place before the Greek to whom they were consigned had them properly forwarded – and I was at length indebted to Col. Napier for obtaining them for me; – *what* occasioned the demur or delay – was never explained. – I learned by my advices from England – the request of the Committee that I would act as their representative near the G^k Gov.^t and take charge of the proper disposition and delivery of certain Stores, &^c. &^c. expected by a vessel which has not yet arrived up to the present date (Sep^r. 18) – –

Soon after my arrival I took into my own pay a body of forty Suliotes under the Chiefs Photomara – Giavella – and Drako¹⁶ – and would probably have increased the number – but I found them not quite united among themselves in any thing except raising their demands on me although I had given a dollar per man more each month than they could receive from the G.^k Gov.^t and they were destitute at the time I took them of everything. – – I had acceded too to their own demand – and paid them a month in advance. – – But set on probably by some of the trafficking shopkeepers with whom they were in the habit of dealing on credit – they made various attempts at what I thought extortion – so that I called them together stating my view of the case – and declining to take them on with me – but I offered them another month's pay – and the price of their passage to Acarnania – where they could now easily go as the Turkish fleet was gone – and the blockade removed. – This part of them accepted – and they went accordingly. – Some difficulty arose about restoring their arms by the Septinsular Gov.^t¹⁷ but these were at length obtained – and they are now with their compatriots in Etolia or Acarnania. – – – –

I also transferred to the resident in Ithaca – the sum of two hundred and fifty dollars for the refugees there – and I had conveyed to Cephalonia a Moriote family who were in the greatest helplessness – and provided them with a house and decent maintenance under the protection

12: Ithaca, home of the legendary Odysseus.

13: Captain and Mrs Wright Knox. Knox was English Resident at Vathy, the main town of Ithaca.

14: Arethusa's fountain is not traditionally on Ithaca, but on Ortygia; see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, V.

15: Benjamin Lewis. B. had hired him from Trelawny.

16: Photomara, Giavella and Drako otherwise unidentified Suliote chiefs.

17: That is, the English government of the Ionians (the Seven Islands).

of Messrs Corgiale¹⁸ – wealthy merchants of Argostoli – to whom I had been recommended by my Correspondents. – –

I had caused a letter to be written to Marco Bozzari¹⁹ the acting Commander of a body of troops in Acarnania – for whom I had letters of recommended; his answer was probably the last he ever signed or dictated – for he was killed in action the very day after it's date – with the character of a good Soldier – and an honourable man – which are not always found together nor indeed separately. – – I was also invited by Count Metaxa the Governor of Missolonghi²⁰ to go over there – but it was necessary in the present state of parties that I should have some communication with the existing Gov.^l on the subject of their opinion *where* I might be – if not – *most* useful – at any rate *least* obnoxious. – – As I did not come here to join a faction but a nation – and to deal with honest men and not with speculators or peculators – (charges bandied about daily by the Greeks of each other) it will require much circumspection <for me> to avoid the character of a partizan – and I perceive it to be the more difficult – as I have already received invitations from more than one of the contending parties – always under the pretext that *they* are the “real Simon Pure”.²¹ – – After all – one should not despair – though all the foreigners that I have hitherto met with from amongst the Greeks – are going or gone back disgusted. – Whoever goes into Greece at present should do it as M^{rs} Fry went into Newgate²² – not in the expectation of meeting with any especial indication of existing probity – but in the hope that time and better treatment will reclaim the present burglarious²³ and larcenous tendencies which have followed this General Gaol delivery. – When the limbs of the Greeks are a little less stiff from the shackles of four centuries – they will not march so much “as if they had gyves on their legs”.²⁴ – – At present the Chains are broken indeed; but the links are still clanking – and the Saturnalia is still too recent to have converted the Slave into a sober Citizen. – The worst of them is that (to use a coarse but the only expression that will not fall short of the truth) they are such d—d liars; – there never was such an incapacity for veracity shown since Eve lied²⁵ in Paradise.²⁶ – One of them found fault the other day with the English language – because it had so few shades of a Negative – whereas a Greek can so modify a No – to a yes – and vice versa – <that> by the slippery qualities of his language – that prevarication may be carried to any extent and still leave a loop=hole through which perjury may slip without being perceived. – – –

This was the Gentleman's own talk – and is only to be doubted because in the words of the Syllogism – “Now Epimenides was a Cretan”.²⁷ But they may be mended by and bye. –

Sept. 30th

After remaining here some time in expectation of hearing from the G.^k Gov.^l I availed myself of the opportunity of Messrs B[rown]e. and T[relawny].²⁸ proceeding to Tripolitza – subsequently to the departure of the Turkish fleet {to write to the acting part of the

18: Two Ionian bankers, Cariddi and Corgiale^{gno}, had with discourtesy, refused to honour B.'s letters of credit. See BLJ XI 16-17.

19: Marcos Bozzaris (c.1788-1823) from Epirus, had associated with Ali Pacha, but changed sides.

20: Count Constantine Metaxata was military governor of Missolonghi.

21: From the play *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* by Susan Centlivre (1717).

22: See *Don Juan X*, stanzas 84-6.

23: For B.'s use of the adverb that goes with this adjective, see *Don Juan I*, 219, 6.

24: *Henry IV I*, IV ii 40 app.: ... *the villains march wide betwixt their legs, as if they had gyves on*. The quotation makes Byron into Falstaff, and the Greeks his followers, of whom the jail has just been emptied.

25: Could be “liv'd”.

26: Unfair on Eve, who was seduced and misguided, not mendacious.

27: The paradox contained in the statement “Epimendies is a Cretan: he says all Cretans are liars”. B. implies that Greeks could not tell the truth if they wanted to.

28: James Hamilton Browne and E.J.Trelawny had gone to Tripolitza in impatiernce at B.'s seeming paralytic inability to move from Cephalonia. Trelawny and B. never met again.

Legislature.} My object was not only to obtain some accurate information so as to enable me to proceed to the Spot where I might be if not most safe at least more serviceable but to have an opportunity of forming a judgement on the real state of their affairs. In the mean time I hear from Mavrocordato and the Primate of Hydra²⁹ – {the latter} inviting me to that island – the former hinting that he should like to meet me there or elsewhere.

1823
10^{bre}. 17.th

My Journal was discontinued abruptly and has not been resumed sooner – because – on the day of it's former date I received a letter from my Sister Augusta – that intimated the illness of my daughter – and I had not then the heart to continue it. – – Subsequently I had heard through the same channel that she was better – and since that she is well – if so – for me all is well.

But although I learned this early in 9^{bre}. I know not why – I have not continued my journal, though many things which would have formed a curious record have since occurred. – – – –

I know not why I resume it even now except that standing at the window of my apartment in this beautiful village – the calm though cool serenity of a beautiful and transparent
<m/>Moonlight – showing the Islands – the Mountains – the Sea – with a distant outline of the Morea traced between the double Azure of the waves and skies – have quieted me enough to be able to write – {from} which (however difficult it may seem for one who has written so much publicly – to refrain) is, and always has been to me – a task and a painful one. – – I could summon testimonies were it necessary – but my handwriting is sufficient – it is that of one who thinks much, rapidly – perhaps deeply – but rarely with pleasure. – – –

But – “En Avant!” – The Greeks are advancing in their public progress – but quarrelling amongst themselves. – – – –

I shall probably bon gré mal gré be obliged to join one of the factions – which I have hitherto strenuously avoided in the hope to unite them in one common interest. – Mavrocordato – has appeared at length with the Idriote Squadron in these seas – (which apparition would hardly have taken place had I not engaged to pay two hundred thousand piastres (10 piastres {per} <the> dollar {being the} present value on the Greek Continent) {in aid of Missolonghi} – and has commenced operations somewhat successfully but not very prudently. – Fourteen (some say Seventeen) Greek Ships attacked a Turkish vessel of 12 Guns – and took her. – – This is not quite an Ocean=Thermopylæ³⁰ – but n'importe; they (*on dit*) have found on board 50000 dollars – a sum of great service in their present exigencies – if properly applied. – This prize however has been made within the bounds of Neutrality on the Coast of Ithaca – and the Turks were (it is said) pursued on shore – and some slain. – All this may involve a question of right and wrong with the not very Tolerant Thomas Maitland³¹ – who is not very capable of distinguishing either. – I have advanced the sum above noted to pay the said Squadron – it is not very large but is double that which Napoleon the Emperor of Emperors – began his campaign in Italy, withal – vide – Las Cases – passim vol 1. (tome premier.)³²

The Turks have retired from before Messolonghi – nobody knows why – since they left provisions and ammunition behind {them} in quantities – and the Garrison made no sallies – or none to any purpose = they never invested Messolonghi this year – but bombarded Anatoliko – (a sort of village which I recollect well having passed through the whole of that country with 50 Albanians in 1809 Messolonghi included)³³ near the Achelous – some say

29: The primate of Hydra otherwise unidentified.

30: In 480 Leonidas, King of Sparta, held the Thermopylæ pass against the Persians under Xerxes with a force of three hundred men, allowing the rest of Greece time to organise.

31: “King Tom” Maitland, drunken and boorish English Governor of the Ionians.

32: Las Cases reports that on the eve of his invasion of Italy in 1796 Bonaparte could raise no more than 2,000 *louis*. Nevertheless, he triumphed there, just as B, hopes to do in Greece

33: Anatoliko, which B passed through with Hobhouse on their way back from Tepellene in autumn 1809.

that Vrioni Pacha³⁴ heard of an insurrection near Scutari³⁵ – some – one thing some another – for my part I have been in correspondence with the Chiefs – and their accounts are not unanimous. – – –

The Suliotes both there – here – and elsewhere – having taken a kind of liking *to*, or at least formed or renewed a sort of acquaintance *with*, me – (as I have aided them and their families in {all} that I could according to circumstances) are apparently anxious that I should put myself forward as their Chief – (if I may so say) I would rather not for the present – because there are far too many divisions and Chiefs already – but if it should appear necessary – why – as they are admitted to be the best and bravest of the present combatants – it might – or may – so happen – that I could – would – should – or shall take to me the support of such a body of men – with whose aid – I think something might be done both *in* Greece and *out* of it – (for there is a good deal to put to rights in both) I could maintain them out of my own present means (always supposing my present income and means to be permanent) they are not above a thousand – and of these not six hundred *real* Suliotes – but then they are allowed to be equal (that seems a bravado though but it is in print recently) *one* to 5 European Moslems – and ten Asiatics – – – be it as it may – they are in high esteem – and my very good friends. – – –

A Soldier may be maintained on the Mainland – for 25 piastres ({rather} better than *two* dollars a month) monthly – and find his rations out of the Country – or for *four dollars* – including his paying for his rations – therefore for between two and three thousand dollars a month (and the dollar here is to be had for 4 and 2 pence instead of 4 and 6 pence – the price in England) I could maintain between five hundred {or or} and a thousand of these warriors for as long as necessary – and I have more means than are – (supposing them to last) [sufficient] to do so – for my own personal wants are very simple (except in horses as I am no great pedestrian) and my income considerable for any country but England – (being equal to the President's of the United States – the English Secretaries' of State's or the French Ambassador's at Vienna and the greater Courts – 150000 Francs – I believe) and I have hope to have sold a Manor³⁶ besides for nearly 3000000 francs more – thus I could (with what We should extract according to the usages of war – also) keep on foot a respectable clan or Sept or tribe or horde³⁷ – for some time – and, as I have not any motive for so doing but the well=wishing to Greece, I should hope with advantage. –

34: Vrioni Pacha unidentified. An Ottoman general. The Mss. looks like “Santa or “Scutra.”

35: Modern Shkodër in northern Albania.

36: The Rochdale collieries. They had been subject to litigation, but were sold in autumn 1823.

37: B. does not know whether to give his followers a Scots, Roman, Hebrew / Native American or Hunnish appellation.

January 22nd 1824.

Messalonghi.

On this day I complete my thirty sixth year. –

1.
'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,
Since others it hath ceased to move –
Yet though I cannot be beloved
Still let me love!

2.
My days are in the yellow leaf³⁸ 5
The flowers and fruits of Love are gone –
The worm – the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!

3.
The Fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some Volcanic Isle, 10
No torch is kindled at its blaze –
A funeral pile!

4.
The hope, the fear, the jealous care
The exalted portion of the pain
And power of Love I cannot share, 15
But wear the chain.

5.
But 'tis not *thus* – and 'tis not *here* –
Such thoughts should shake my Soul, nor *now*,
Where Glory decks the hero's bier
Or binds his Brow. 20

6.
The Sword – the Banner – and the Field –
Glory and Greece around us see!
The Spartan born upon his shield,
* Was not more free! –

7.
Awake! – (*not* Greece – She *is* awake! –) 25
Awake my Spirit! think through *whom*
Thy Life=blood tracks its parent lake,
And then Strike home! –

38: *Macbeth*, V iii 22-3: *My way of life / Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf ...*

8.

Tread those reviving passions down,
 Unworthy Manhood; – unto thee 30
 In different should the smile or frown
 Of Beauty be.³⁹

9.

If thou regret'st thy Youth, why *live*?
 The Land of honourable Death
 Is here – up to the Field! and Give 35
 Away thy Breath.

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! 40

Messalonghi. January. 22nd 1824

* The Slain were borne on their shields – witness the Spartan mother's speech delivered with the buckler – “Either *with* this or *on* this.”

February 15th.1824

Upon February 15th. – (I write on the 17th. of the same month) I had a strong shock of a Convulsive description but whether Epileptic – Paralytic – or Apoplectic is not yet decided by the two medical men who attend me – or whether it be of some other nature (if such there be) it was very painful and had it lasted a minute longer must have extinguished my mortality – if I can judge by sensations. – – I was speechless – {with} the features much distorted – but *not* foaming at the mouth – they say – and my struggles so violent that several persons – two of whom – M^r. Parry the Engineer⁴⁰ – and my Servant Tita the Chasseur⁴¹ are very strong men – could not hold me – it lasted about ten minutes – and came on immediately after drinking a tumbler of Cider mixed with cold water in Col. Stanhope's⁴² apartments. – This is the first attack that I have had of the kind to the best of my belief: I never heard that any of my family were liable to the same – though my mother was subject to *hysterical* affections. – Yesterday (the 16th.) Leeches were applied to my temples, – I had previously recovered a good deal – but with some feverish and variable symptoms; – I bled profusely – and as they went too near

39: Refers to Loukas' indifference. Compare B.'s confession of his inadequacy as a Stoic, at *Don Juan*, XVII, stanza 10:

*If such doom waits each intellectual Giant,
 We little people, in our lesser way,
 To Life's small rubs should surely be more pliant;
 And so for one will I – as well I may.
 Would that I were less bilious – but, Oh fie on't!
 Just as I make my mind up every day
 To be a “totus, teres” Stoic Sage,
 The Wind shifts, and I fly into a rage.*

40: William Parry was the Fire-Master sent out by the London Greek Committee to organise B.'s artillery, and so on. He made, ghost-written, a convincing account of his days at Missolonghi, in *The Last Days of Lord Byron* (1825). He and B. got drunk frequently.

41: Tita Falcieri was B.'s gondolier.

42: Leicester Stanhope, nicknamed the Typographical Colonel, was a Benthamite, also sent out by the London Greek Committee. He believed in republics, papers, and pedagogy. He too wrote a book, *Greece in 1823 and 1824* (1824).

the temporal Artery – there was some difficulty in stopping the blood – even with the Lunar Caustic – this however after some hours was accomplished about eleven o'clock at night – and this day (the 17th.) though weakly I feel tolerably convalescent. – –

With regard<s> to the presumed cause of this attack – as far as I know there might be several – the state of the place and of the weather permits little exercise at present; – I have been violently agitated with more than one passion recently⁴³ – and a good deal occupied politically as well as privately – and amidst conflicting parties – politics – and (as far as regards public matters) circumstances; – I have also been in an anxious state with regard to things which may be only interesting to my own private feelings – – and perhaps not uniformly so temperate as I may generally affirm that I was wont to be⁴⁴ – how far any or all of these may have acted on the mind or body of One who had {already} undergone many {previous} changes of place and passion during a life of thirty six years I cannot tell – nor – – but I am interrupted by the arrival of a report from a party returned from reconnoitring a Turkish Brig of War just stranded on the Coast – and which is to be attacked the moment we can get some guns to bear upon her. – I shall hear what Parry says about it – here he comes. –

43: B. quotes or paraphrases Brutus at *Julius Caesar* I ii 39-40: *Vexed am I / Of late with passions of some difference ...*

44: A reference to his feelings for Loukas (see poem above).

OTHER POEMS

“I watched thee when the foe was at our side ...”

1.
I watched thee⁴⁵ when the foe was at our side⁴⁶ –
Ready to strike at him; or thee and me –
Were safety hopeless – rather than divide
Aught with one loved – save love and liberty.
2. 5
I watched thee in the breakers – when the rock
Received our prow – and all was storm and fear,
And bade thee cling to me through every shock –
This arm would be thy bark – or breast thy bier,
3. 10
I watched thee when the Fever glazed thine eyes
Yielding my couch – and stretched me on the ground –
When overworn with watching – ne’er to rise
From thence – if thou an early grave hadst found.
4. 15
The Earthquake came – and rocked the quivering wall –
And men and Nature rocked as if with wine –
Whom did I seek around the tottering Hall –
For *thee* – whose safety first provide for – thine.⁴⁷
5. 20
And when convulsive throes denied my breath
The fainted utterance to my fainting thought –
To thee – to thee – even in the grip of death
My Spirit turned – Ah! oftener than it ought.
6.
Thus much and more – and yet thou lov’st me not,
And never will – Love dwells not in our will –
Nor can I blame thee – though it be my lot –
To strongly – wrongly – vainly – love thee still. –

45: Loukas Chalandritsanos.

46: The foe was never at B.’s “side”; but his boat was nearly intercepted by a Turkish ship during the passage from Cephalonia to Missolonghi, and he put Loukas ashore “(as Luke’s life was in most danger)”: see BLJ XI 87-8.

47: B. to Augusta, February 23rd 1824: “... I will not plague you with politics – wars – or earthquakes – though we had another smart one three nights ago which produced a scene ridiculous enough as no damage was done except to those who stuck fast in the scuffle to get first out of the door or windows” (BLJ XI 120).

A Song for the Suliotes⁴⁹

Up to battle! Sons of Suli –
 Up, and do your duty duly –
 There the wall – and there the Moat is –
 Bouwah! – Bouwah! – Suliotes!
 There is booty, there is Beauty⁵⁰ – 5
 Up, my boys, and do your duty. –

By the sally and the rally
 Which defied the arms of Ali⁵¹ –
 By your own dear native Highlands
 By your children in the Islands – 10
 Up – and charge – my Stratiotes –
 Bouwah! – Bouwah! – Suliotes!

As our ploughshare is the Sabre⁵²
 Here's the harvest of our labour –
 For behind those battered breaches 15
 Are our foes with all their riches –
 There is glory – there is plunder –
 Then away in spite of thunder.⁵³ –

49: Suli is an area on the north-east coast of Greece, opposite the Ionians. The violent and greedy behaviour of B.'s Suliote bodyguard, some of whom, he found, were neither Suliote nor Greek, eventually disgusted B, and he dismissed them (see BLJ XI 112). The song is intended ironically.

50: B. rhymes "beauty" with "booty" and "duty" at *The Prophecy of Dante*, III, 7.79.81.

51: Ali Pacha, who had in 1805 massacred the entire Suliote population of Epirus.

52: See Isaiah 2, 4: "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks." The Suliotes reverse this dictum

53: *Macbeth* IV I 86: *That I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies, / And sleep in spite of thunder.* As Macbeth has just decided to kill Macduff, this is an unfortunate echo.

