

*Philology*

## Byron and Georgia

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**ABSTRACT.** The article aims to present links between Byron and Georgia in two ways: how Byron perceived Georgia and how Georgia accepted Byron.

The first way deals not only with the attitude Byron showed in his works towards Georgia, but also unveils a new episode of the poet's life leading to a supposed conclusion that the mysterious Thyrza as one of the characters of Byron's lyrical poems had a Georgian prototype.

The second way is a short story of accepting Lord Byron in Georgia since his lifetime up to the present days.  
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**Kew words:** *Mysterious Thyrza, Byron in Georgia.*

**The Way Byron Perceived Georgia.** At the age of twenty one Lord Byron published his famous satire "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" where he spoke about the plans of his first journey: "*Yet once again, adieu! ere this the sail / That wafts me hence is shivering in the gale; / And Afric's coast and Calpe's adverse height, / And Stamboul's minarets must greet my sight: / Thence shall I stray through beauty's native clime, / Where Kaff is clad in rocks, and crown'd with snows sublime*" [1: 126].

Here Kaff denotes Caucasus; and in the nineteenth century editions of Byron's poetical works, the phrase "beauty's native clime" has one word as commentary – "Georgia" [2: 446; 1: 689].

By June 19, 1809 Byron announced that he was setting off and soon he and his Cambridge friend John Cam Hobhouse left for Falmouth with Byron's servants and equipment. Byron greatly appreciated the beauty of a sailor's town from where he wrote to Charles Skinner Matthews, his friend: "...*A delectable region, as I do not think Georgia itself can emulate in capabilities or incitements...*" [3: 206-207].

As we know *Manfred* caused a lot of discussion whether it was borrowed from Marlowe, Goethe or Aeschylus. Byron remarked that he had never read Goethe's *Faust*, as he knew no German, and he also denied Marlowe as his progenitor. However, of "Prometheus Bound" by Aeschylus he wrote the following: "*Of the Prometheus of Aeschylus I was passionately fond as a boy, (it was one of the Greek plays we read thrice a year at Harrow;) indeed that and the Medea, were the only ones, except the Seven before Thebes, which ever much pleased me. The Prometheus if not exactly in my plan, has always been so much in my head, that I can easily conceive its influence over all or anything that I have written*" [2: 202].

Prometheus was nailed on a Caucasian crag in today's Georgia, and the Georgian mythological tale about Amirani corresponds to the myth about Prometheus.

Byron shared Medea's tragedy and alluded to her. He fell in love with a simple Venetian woman, Margarita Cogni, in so far as she reminded him of Colchian Medea.

Thus Prometheus and Medea are of Georgian origin, but they were universally spread as uniquely impressive figures through their Grecian versions and Greek civilization as a whole.

Canto VI of "Don Juan", depicting the harem, features the passage where Georgian girls and their beauty are described with relish. We remember the stanzas where Juan, clad in female attire, looks charming and is compared to a Georgian maid: "*But no one doubted on the whole that she / Was what her dress bespoke, a damsel fair, / And fresh, and "beautiful exceedingly" / Who with the brightest Georgians might compare.*" (Stanza XXXVI) We read that Juan is landed "under the Seraglio wall" in Canto IV and finds himself in a slave market "with Georgians, Russians and Circassians, Bought up for different purposes and passions" (Stanza CXIII). In the harem two young ladies appear to be Georgian – Katinka and Dudu (Canto VI, Stanza XL).

Leila in "The Giaour" flew "her master's rage in likeness of a Georgian page."

As we know handsome and healthy Georgian boys were sold and often brought up as Mamelukes. "Mameluke" was the name of Byron's Arabian horse which he rode on his last journey in Missolonghi, in Greece.

Further investigation of Byron's life and of works led us to new discoveries and conclusions.

The publication of "Letters and Journals" by Thomas Moore, in the years 1830-31, with its tremendous success and convincing way of presenting the poet's life through correspondence, actually meant oblivion to other biographies for a long period. In spite of the fact that the latter resonates to this day, we have enough grounds to doubt its superiority. We are aware of the fact that "the originals of the hundred and fifty-eight letters which Byron wrote to Moore himself, and which Moore published in his biography of Lord Byron, have never been found" [4: 51].

Thus Byron's letters to Moore shared the same fate of being destroyed as were the Memoirs presented and entrusted to him. The absence of the latter deepens not only interest but also the importance of its copious recollections. Therefore we became interested in Lord Byron's other biographies especially those that were published before Thomas Moore's. We had a good fortune to come across the three volumes of "The Life, Writings, Opinions and Times of the Right Hon. George Gordon Noel Byron, Lord Byron" [5], in the British Museum Library as early as in 1995. These volumes were published in London, in 1825, a year after Lord Byron's

death, by Mathew Iley, the publisher, but printed anonymously as copious recollection of the poet's destroyed manuscripts originally intended for posthumous publication.

The third volume (pp.121-132) contains a long and interesting story of Byron's unlucky attempt to save from disgrace a Georgian girl whom he had bought at a slave market when on his first journey in Asia Minor. According to the Iley book, Byron bought a girl with the intention of restoring her to her parents in Tifflis, but in vain. Unfortunately the girl died and Byron deeply deplored his loss. The story appeared to be of enormous importance for our research.

Byron bought the Georgian girl at a slave market in Alexandria. Sources confirm that Byron visited Alexandria of Troas, the day after embarking at Smyrna on the 11th April 1810 [6: 37]. It is universally acknowledged that in the case of Lord Byron most of the poetic pieces refer to real episodes of his life. Therefore we had the belief that, if true, this tragic story would certainly cause emotive lines. According to the story the news of the girl's death could reach him in England not earlier than in late August or September.

Are there any traces of the girl's death either in Byron's works or in his letters? Yes, there are!

Byron's letter to Dallas dated October 11, 1811 comprises the lines: "I have been again shocked with a death, and have lost one very dear to me in happier times; My friends fall around me, and I shall be left a lonely tree before I am withered" [7: 110].

On that very day, i. e. 11 October, 1811 Byron composed a poem entitled "Thyrza". Thyrza is Lord Byron's lyrical character which has caused so much controversy upon its archetype. A poem entitled "Thyrza" became an object of discussion and research alongside a series of poems also dedicated to Thyrza and composed later than October 1811.

Thyrza became a matter of concern not only due to the nature of this mystical poetic image, but mainly due to the identity of a real prototype. English or oriental? – this was the question that puzzled Byron's biographers and scholars of the XIX century.

There can be no doubt that Lord Byron referred to Thyrza in conversation with his wife, Lady Byron, and probably also with his half-sister, Mrs. Leigh, as a young girl who had existed, and the date of whose death almost coincided with Lord Byron's landing in England in 1811. On one occasion he showed Lady Byron a beautiful tress of hair, which she understood to be Thyrza's. He said he had never mentioned her name, and that now she was gone his breast was the sole depository of that secret.

Later, in the twentieth century, the same literary phenomenon became a target of an absolutely new and unusual approach. The question of “eastern or western?”, “English or oriental?” was substituted by a dilemma “male or female?” The latter has been established mainly due to the opinion expressed by Professor L. A. Marchand who identified the prototype of the poem and the whole series as appertaining to John Edleston, the Cambridge choirboy [8: 107]. We consider this opinion not to be true, enclosing the detailed analysis in a special book [9].

On 14 of October, 1811, Byron sent off to Dallas a stanza to be added to “Childe Harold” (IX, Canto II).

Here is what Byron wrote to Dallas concerning these lines in the same letter: “I think it proper to state to you, that this stanza alludes to an event which has taken place since my arrival here, and not the death of any male friends”, to which Dallas replied: “I thank you for your confidential communication. How truly do I wish that being had lived, and lived yours: What your obligation to her would have been in that case is inconceivable”.

In our opinion, Byron wrote to Dallas to assure him that the lines really belonged to a lady and that they were caused by the death of a female creature “and not the death of any male friends”. Most probably he needed it, due to the fact that the new loss was preceded by a number of losses of his male friends and he would never want to be misinterpreted.

Shall we trust Lord Byron when discussing his own writings or Professor Leslie Marchand, the well-known Byron biographer? Dallas trusted Byron! I myself would also rather trust Byron! It is very important for a scholar not to invent his own hypothesis by ignoring existing sources – in Byron’s case his poetic lines and letters.

When writing his Memoirs, Byron could feel the inner demand to describe the tragic story which was the main cause of the mournful lines for the series of poems composed in October 1811 and later. The Memoirs were unfairly destroyed but “Don Juan” escaped as a treasure of poetic genius and emotive experience. As Professor John Clubbe observed, Byron started both his Memoirs and “Don Juan” together and “if the Memoirs represented his literal biography, “Don Juan” was his imaginative one” [10: 12]. As Jerome J. McGann points out, “Don Juan” “might better be compared to the lost Memoirs, which were also anecdotal, digressive and full of personal discursiveness” [11: 668].

Can we really find any echoes of Iley’s story concerning the Georgian slave girl in the imaginary reflection of the Memoirs, i.e. in “Don Juan”?

The answer is positive. Cantos 8-12 of “Don Juan” reflect those emotions through a moving story of how Don Juan saved a ten-year-old Turkish girl named Leila and whom he finally brought to England and committed her to the charge of an English lady. The purity of feelings Don Juan has towards Leila absolutely corresponds to the purity of attitude with which Lord Byron treated the Georgian girl as an object of his care.

Thus Thyrsa remained as mysterious and fashionable for all periods as was the description of Leila in “Don Juan”: “*Her charming figure and romantic history / Became a kind of fashionable mystery*” [1: 802]

**The Way Georgia Received Byron.** The reception of Byron in Georgia started, then, during his lifetime. One of the earliest contacts with Byron appears in a letter of 1823, sent to Tbilisi from Russia to a Georgian intellectual, which comprised information on Byron’s poetry with an enclosed Russian translation of *The Prisoner of Chillon* by the Russian poet Zhukovsky, probably directly from the English rather than a French version.

Prince Aleksandr Chavchavadze (1786-1846), an outstanding Georgian poet, a great popularizer of Oriental and European literature in Georgia and Lord Byron’s almost exact Georgian contemporary, was the first to translate his poems into the Georgian tongue. Unfortunately, the translated pieces did not survive but the extant sources confirm the fact. Apart from his translations, Lord Byron’s influence is strongly felt in Chavchavadze’s original poems.

The first period of Byronic reception is that of Georgian Romanticism but mostly through Russia and Europe. Among the writers who were exiled to Georgia from Russia were Aleksandr Griboyedov and Wilhelm Küchelbecker. It was Küchelbecker who penned an inspiring poem “Lord Byron’s Death. A Poem”, which was published in volume form in Moscow in the very year of Byron’s death in 1824. A Russian diplomat and an outstanding dramatist, Griboyedov (1795-1829), a close friend of Pushkin and the Decembrists and the man who considered Byron to be his idol, also established close relations with Georgian aristocratic circles during his mission in Georgia. In 1828 Griboyedov married Nino Chavchavadze, Prince Alexander Chavchavadze’s beautiful daughter. Griboyedov’s most famous play *Woe from Wit* was staged for the first time in Chavchavadze’s house in Tbilisi. To our opinion this drama is an echo of the tragedy Byron suffered in his own homeland.

The Georgian dramatist, Giorgi Eristavi, was sent into exile to Poland where he learned the Polish language and its literature; consequently he became a great admirer

of Mickiewicz and, through him, Byron. One of his famous comedies *The Madwoman* includes an expression of praise for Lord Byron.

The plot of 1832 against the oppressive Russian tsarist regime involved Georgian noblemen deeply anxious about the future of their motherland. Unfortunately, the plot of 1832 had the same fate as the Decembrists in 1825 and the Russian rulers were extremely severe in the punishments meted out. Many liberals were arrested and sent into exile. The Tsar, Nicholas I, prohibited all publishing activities in Georgia so that no books were printed in the country between 1832 and 1839. During those six years the Georgian aristocratic circles positively fed on Byron.

Byron's heroic spirit and his own personal sorrow and doubts were very close to the Georgian Romantic poetical vision.

In this respect we might draw attention to Byron and Nikoloz Baratashvili (1817-1845), a celebrated Georgian poet, whose life was very similar to that of the English bard. My own schematic biography would indicate the uncanny common points of contact:

A genius Romantic poet and a sorrowful Bard of a lonely soul, a great innovator of poetic style and reasoning. Born to an aristocratic but impoverished family. On his mother's side descended from a king. Was lame but extremely imposing. His lameness forbade serious consideration of the Army as career. Suffered from an unshared love and missed her all his life. His first large poem was composed at the age of 21. Hounded out from his country when young. Died of fever away from home and family. Buried in his homeland.

There remain no references to Byron in any of Baratashvili's letters or writings. Many of his manuscripts did not survive, especially translated versions. Yet in spite of the lack of direct evidence, various facts speak of Byron's influence on Baratashvili. Baratashvili clearly appreciated Lord Byron's innovative power and literary importance and followed him with enthusiasm. The most remarkable point of this enthusiasm is his poetic masterpiece "Merani". According to Meunargia, we learn that Baratashvili was taught "Pharis" by Mickiewicz at school in the Russian translation. Yet a basic reading suggests that "Pharis" (1828) was itself probably created under the influence of Byron's *Mazeppa*, even though Mickiewicz never refers to Byron or any other literary sources when discussing this poem. The comparison of the two pieces suggests that the influence of *Mazeppa* upon "Merani", though they are of different genre and composition, was considerable. In *Mazeppa* Byron offers a long poem with twenty

cantos; the poem relates a series of adventurous episodes in a man's life, a man who was bound to the back of a horse for punishment. The horse carried him away to an uncertain destination. Similar episodes are described by Byron earlier in the First Canto of *Childe Harold*.

In Baratashvili's "Merani" we follow the adventure of a man's soul rather than that of his life; the short lyrical poem comprises only nine stanzas. Baratashvili's hero is never bound physically to a horse but he is bound to it spiritually.

The major writer who figures in the reception of Byron is Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907), another important Georgian writer and public figure. "Ruler of thoughts", as his compatriots called him, Prince Ilia Chavchavadze also fell under Lord Byron's spell, especially with regard to the view that struggle and progress went hand in hand with creative writing. He compared Byron with the fast-running and turbulent river Terek (Tergi), considering motion and relentless onward progress to be the main source for strength and energy in the country. He spent several years in Russia and studied law at St. Petersburg University. On his return Ilia Chavchavadze found himself at the head of a group of contemporary Georgian writers. He was also a leading figure in a number of cultural and public institutions. One of his finest pieces, a poem "Ghost", is remarkable for its national and social aspirations. The Ghost, as the main character of the poem, symbolizes the eternal spirit of Georgia. Yet the shape, metrical structure and thrust of the poem strongly suggest that Ilia Chavchavadze had read and been influenced by Byron's *Vision of Dante*.

Among Ilia Chavchavadze's translations appear "Oh, Weep for Those" from *Hebrew Melodies* and fragments from *Cain* and *Manfred*. Among the personal belongings of the poet there remains a large oil painting of Mazeppa which the young Prince had brought from St. Petersburg and which nowadays hangs in his former country house, now the Chavchavadze Museum in the village of Saguramo near Tbilisi.

In 1883 Pyotr Tchaikovsky composed his opera *Mazeppa*, followed, in 1891, by the symphony *Manfred*. No doubt the fame of his work, regularly heard in the Opera House in Tbilisi, prepared the way for his warm reception in the visits Tchaikovsky made between 1886 and 1890; certainly his music left a deep trace in the cultural life of the country.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed many attempts to translate Byron from Russian versions. When translating Byron the Georgian writers strove to imitate the poet, limited by the flaws in the process of

translation. However, some of them were able to develop his artistic achievements and take them along original lines. Among the principal Georgian translators of that period figure Akaki Tsereteli, Niko Lomouri, Ioseb Bakradze, Dutu Megreli and Mamia Gurieli. They mainly translated lyrical verses and fragments rather than the longer poems and verse dramas. Mamia Gurieli went so far as to name Byron as one of his two favourite poets, the other being Shota Rustaveli, the Georgian Renaissance's genius.

Prince Akaki Tsereteli (1846-1915), an outstanding Georgian poet, is a further disciple of Byron. Tsereteli never occupied an official post but, nevertheless, responded keenly to all the signal events in the social and political life of Georgia. As the most popular poet of his time, a writer of unusual fecundity and many facets he was nicknamed "The Uncrowned King of Georgia". The closest parallel between the English poet and the Georgian bard are the two mythological characters of Prometheus and Medea, basic figures in their creative work.

Akaki Tsereteli links Georgia with Amirani, a national founding folkloric hero, considered by many scholars to be the prototype for Prometheus, in the hope that finally he will break his chains to gain his freedom. In his drama, *Media* (A. Tsereteli offers "Media" for "Medea"), he absorbs these two myths. Prometheus and Medea are the focal points through which it is possible to trace spiritual links which bind Byron and Georgia as much as Byron and Tsereteli.

Galaktion Tabidze (1892-1959), an outstanding poet, was well versed in world literature from ancient times up to the European Symbolists and had mastered the best traditions of his native poetry to renovate Georgian verse. He, too, came under Byron's spell.

Many aspects of his poetic vision inspired his colleagues and friends to give him the name of the "Georgian Byron". Tabidze frequently speaks of Byron in his letters and often alludes to him in his poems. He translated various fragments from "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte", "Darkness", etc. and was greatly moved not only by Byron's poetic achievements but also his personality. Lord Byron's lyricism and sorrows were especially close to Tabidze's own poetic vision. One of his literary characters, Mary, as an evoked image of a remote and unshared love, is an exceptional favourite for readers. This image emerges in a number of his lyrical

poems and some are specifically dedicated to her. The name acquires at least two meanings: the name of a beloved lady as a symbol of lost love and constant sorrow and the name of the Virgin Mary as a symbol of divine love, eternal purity and Christian devotion. In regard to the first image it is more than likely that the image of Mary as a symbol of lost love must have derived from Byron and largely because of the prominence of Byron's Mary in Russian poetry (principally Pushkin, Lermontov and Blok). One of Tabidze's lyrics dedicated to Mary under the title "With Mary's Eyes" (*Meris tvalebit*), is clearly a free translation of Byron's quatrains in "Hills of Annesley" (the 1805 fragment). But this instance is neither a case of a simple influence nor mere imitation in that Tabidze goes far beyond his source when he develops Lord Byron's vision and creates his own "Queen of a Fantastic Realm". The plot of one of the most successful poems of this cycle, "Mary" (*Meri*), even to Tabidze's opening stanza, must be associated with the marriage of Miss Chaworth, Lord Byron's lost love: "You were married that night, Mary, / Mary, that night your eyes were dimmed, / The glints and hues of Heavens weary – / With autumn's sadness overfilled!" ("Mary", translated from Georgian by Innes Merabishvili).

The foundation of the Georgian Byron Society at I. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University in 1988 and its involvement with the International Byron Society, with the encouragement of British colleagues, opened the way to new contacts, reappraisals of Byron's impact, new research programmes and new translations.

The reception of Byron in Georgia, as in Europe, differs from the reaction to the noble Lord in his own country. If, in Great Britain, Byron's name and even his myth were established during his life time as a result of his unusual success, the legendary stories and anecdotes which surrounded his life, the scandals, slander, rumour and controversy which followed him and still continue to follow him beyond the grave, in other countries and, among them Georgia, his writings became famous because of a true appreciation of his works and life. In lands which did not enjoy the freedoms enjoyed in Great Britain his unselfish patriotism, his cry for liberty and his indomitable spirit found an echo among young men oppressed by tyranny and antiquated ideas. Byron spoke to the idealists in Georgia and continues to speak to them today in the language of truth, devotion and liberty.

ფილოლოგია

## ბაირონი და საქართველო

### ი. მერაბიშვილი

საქართველოს ბაირონის საზოგადოება, თბილისი

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ე. ხინთიბიძის მიერ)

ნაშრომი მიზნად ისახავს ბაირონსა და საქართველოს შორის არსებული კავშირების გამოვლენას: 1) საქართველო ბაირონის ცხოვრებასა და შემოქმედებაში და 2) ბაირონის აღქმა საქართველოში.

სულიერ კავშირებთან ერთად პირველი ნაწილი აღრიცხავს იმ შემთხვევებს, როდესაც პოეტი საქართველოს მოიხსენიებს. აქვე ყურადღება ეთმობა მისი ცხოვრების იმ ეპიზოდს, რომელიც აღწერილია 1825 წელს ლონდონში გამოცემულ ბაირონის ბიოგრაფიაში, რაც უცნობი რჩებოდა საქართველოსთვის, ხოლო დასავლეთში მის ირგვლივ კვლევა არ ჩატარებულა.

კვლევამ ნათელყო, რომ აღწერილი ეპიზოდი ისტორიულ სინამდვილეს შეეფერება. ამასთან ერთად გამოვლინდა, რომ ეს ეპიზოდი აისახა ბაირონის შემოქმედებაში და ქართველი ქალი არის პროტოტიპი თირზასადმი მიძღვნილი ლექსების ციკლისა. ამ აღმოჩენის ღირებულება იმდენად იზრდება, რამდენადაც თირზას ვინაობა დაუდგენელი რჩებოდა და მის ირგვლივ ორი საუკუნის მანძილზე მრავალი საპირისპირო აზრი გამოითქმებოდა. ამ საკითხის შესახებ ვრცლად იხილეთ შემდეგი: Innes Merabishvili, “Lord Byron’s Thyrsa”, თბილისი, 2007.

ნაშრომის მეორე ნაწილი ეძღვნება ქართულ კულტურასა და მწერლობაზე ბაირონის დიდი გავლენის შესწავლასა და აღწერას. ამ საკითხის შესახებ ვრცლად იხილეთ შემდეგი: Innes Merabishvili, “Liberty and Freedom and Georgian Byron”, “The Reception of Byron in Europe”. Continuum: London–New York, 2004.

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