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'Wars and Words': 46th International Byron Conference,
Thessaloniki 28 June–2 July 2021

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The 2020 IABS conference had been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the organisers wisely decided to make a further shift to an online format that ensured the safety and access of all participants. It was unfortunate that attendees missed out on a visit to Thessaloniki and its Aristotle University, this year also marking the 200th anniversary of the Greek Revolution. With the theme of ‘Wars and Words’, the 46th International Byron Conference nonetheless proved an astounding success. Despite the trying situation, the Organizing Committee and Academic Committee made it possible for all to share their thoughts and research.

Maria Schoina (Thessaloniki) welcomed attendees to the conference and was an orchestrating presence throughout the entirety of the conference, aiding and advising presenters and participants alongside her ‘Team Byron’. The ceremonies proceeded with welcoming addresses from Nikos Papaioannou, Rector of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Kate Smith, the British Ambassador to Greece, Robin Byron, the 13th Lord Byron (ever-present at international Byron Conferences), Basil Gounaris, Chair of the Aristotle University Committee, and Anastasios Tsangalias, Chair of the Aristotle University School of English.

In the first plenary of the conference Richard Cronin (Glasgow) presented a provocatively clever rethinking of heroism and Byron in *Don Juan*, arguing that the unfinished poem established Byron as the epic poet of the unheroic, with the glut of heroes considered and ignored in favour of Juan, then so often relegated to the margins in his eponymous poem, Juan’s tale thereby marking the transition from the age of the heroic to the age of the committee. The first day ended with a concert by pianist Athanasios Papaisiou, delighting attendees with the ‘Epirotikos Dance’, the ‘Marche Hellenique de Nauplie’, Franz Liszt’s ‘Eclogue’ originally captioned with lines from *Childe Harold* (III, 98), and ‘Echi Marini’ from Giuseppe Verdi’s 1848 *Il Corsaro*.

The following day, in the first session themed around Military and Intellectual Wars, Agustín Coletes Blanco (Oviedo) reconciled the timeline of early 1820s largely anonymous poems and depictions in cheap print of post-Waterloo Wellington as seen in Canto IX of *Don Juan*, and the further significance of the *Age of Bronze* to Wellington’s British

delegate role in the Congress of Verona deciding on royalist intervention in liberal Spain. Alicia Laspra (Oviedo) then shifted the focus as she explored Wellington's estimation of Byron, from a generally disparaging attitude towards his poetical faction to a reconsidered thoughtfulness about his project and actions in Greece. Finally, Ioannes P. Chountis (Kapodistrian, Athens) reconsidered the visions and judgments of George III by Southey versus Byron as seen through the lenses of Tory versus Whig interpretations of history, therein demonstrating the deviations of each poet from each intellectual tradition.

The Political Activism session began with Peter Francev (Victor Valley) examining how Lord Elgin's seizure of the Parthenon Marbles elicited Byron's criticism in *Childe Harold*, which in turn saw Felicia Hemans enter into political-poetical debate with Byron on the subject. Aristides Hatzis (Athens) examined Byron's censorious intervention in Greek newsprint, focusing our attention on Byron's clash of views with the radical Swiss editor of *The Greek Chronicles*, Johan Jakob Meyer.

In the session on the Aesthetics of Opposition, Anhiti Patnaik (Birla) introduced the chaotic aspect of Eugène Delacroix to the definitional spectrum of the Sublime, alongside Kant, Burke, and De Quincey, arguing that Byron's martial sublime in the *Siege of Corinth* prefigures modern trauma theory as participant-witness with near diagnostic description of, and physiological reaction to, war. Kaila Rose (BSA) explored links between Byron's poetic espousal of opposition and the present-day musical lambasting of structural and systemic racism by artists such as Childish Gambino, Kendrick Lamar, and Tobe Nwigwe. Jonathan Gross (DePaul) entertained and enlightened us by reconsidering Byron as graffiti artist, musing over inscription versus vandalism in Byron's etchings of his name and the broader implications of graffiti clusters as social memory.

Ekaterini Douka-Kabitoglou (Thessaloniki) treated us to the second plenary lecture, focusing on Felicia Hemans' ambivalence towards Byron; adoring his poetry and using it as epigraphs in her own, but jealous of Murray's publishing favouritism. Douka-Kabitoglou showed Hemans' channelling of Byron for a conception of male poetic genius, especially as Hemans increasingly adopted the constructed and gendered domestic poetess persona.

In a shift of theme to Byron and the East, Konstantina Tortomani (Democritus, Thrace) began the session with her examination of shifting dichotomies in the image of Greece: ancient civilisation versus modern barbarism in Clarke and Hobhouse, and sad relic versus noble savage in Byron's *Giaour* read against John Polidori's *Vampyre*. Piya Pal-Lapinski (Bowling Green) provided an enlightening exploration of kinship and blood complications to conceptualising Balkan nationalism, with parallels between the emergence of the vampire figure in Byron's time to contemporary Ottoman blood-tax levying of Christian youth into Janissaries and ethnic re-definitions under Ottoman rule leading to fratricidal outcomes. Gregory Dowling (Ca' Foscari) then guided us through representations of the Turk in Byron's *Beppo* and *Don Juan* and the Venetian tradition of dramatists like Goldoni that Byron would have been privy to. Dowling argued for the act of becoming a Turk as representative of a broadening of sympathies and perspectives, much in line with the history of trade-savvy Venice.

The next day, Hamide Bahmanpour (Isfahan) offered a comparative reading of Byron's view of Greek Independence versus the thirteenth-century Iranian figure Shahabuddin Muhammad Zeidari Nasavi's views on the Mongol invasion of Iran. Elena V. Haltrin-Khalturina (Gorky Institute) presented us with resonances of the Byronic hero in Pushkin's tale 'The Shot' where a retired officer seeks postponed vengeance.

In the following session, Lilla Maria Crisafulli (Bologna) compared Byron's parallel writing of *Childe Harold IV* and *Beppo*, noting their settings offering a point from which Byron could critically reflect back upon Britain and its prejudices. Alan Rawes (Manchester) advanced a reconsideration of Byron's adaptation of Dante in 'The Prophecy of Dante', arguing for Byron's keen sympathies and considerable research into Italian history and the poet himself. David Woodhouse (Byron Society) gave us an account of the exiles of literary warfare that appear in Byron's 1820s writing, foremost himself and Pope, especially as evidenced in *Some Observations Upon an Article in 'Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine'*.

In a special session, Ursula Martin (Oxford/Edinburgh) delighted us by detailing Ada Lovelace's significance as a writer who could articulate the analytical engine designs of Charles Babbage such that they might be supported and patronised by the wider public. The interviewer, Argyros I. Protopapas (Kapodistrian, Athens), outlined Martin's recent publication, *Ada Lovelace: Making of a Computer Scientist* (2018), in relation to other studies of Lovelace and the broader context of science in nineteenth-century England. With Martin's expertise being the history of science, the session refreshingly moved beyond Ada's father and highlighted Ada on her own merits as an explicator of scientific frontiers and collaborator with Charles Babbage.

The 'Warring with Words' session saw Shobhana Bhattacharji (Delhi) and Bernard Beatty (Liverpool) directly contrasting their considerations of Words of War versus War of Words, wherein Bhattacharji focused upon moments of Byron's unwavering poetic gaze upon the blasted battlefields and all their atrocious detail, whereas Beatty considered the more metaphoric warring between Byron and Southey in their visions of Judgment, only for both Bhattacharji and Beatty to find common ground in noting Byron's engagement with the inevitability of war as a result of both flawed human nature and seeking justice. Following this, Franca Dellarosa (Bari) offered wonderful insights based on her research of *Manfred* on stage, showing the adaptation and transmutation of the closet drama through playbill broadsheet advertisements, as well as her work to edit the manuscripts of the staged production into an electronic edition.

The 'Material Culture' panel began with Stephen Webb (Alberta) outlining his ongoing work to disambiguate and digitally reconstitute Byron's library based on the sales catalogues, then offering preliminary results to illustrate how Byron's virtual library might allow future researchers to undertake corpus analysis and data visualisation, or more simply the opportunity to peruse Byron's shelves. Jonathon Shears (Keele) focused his presentation on Byron's Ravenna Journal and how that account of the Carbonari movement was mediated through paper and how it also exhibited Byron's reflection on the ephemeral fate of paper objects and his vacillating between resolve and futility.

The next day, Young-ok An (St Thomas, Minnesota) plumbed the dialogue between a number of Byron's and Mary Shelley's works as they revealed drives for transformation and underlying questions of gender and sexual desire. Maria Gabriella Tigani Sava (Malta) provided insights into the life and writing of Giuseppina Turrise Colonna, whose appreciation of Byron resulted in a trilogy of cantos narrating Byron in Italy and Greece. Irina A. Shishkova (Gorky Institute) outlined the shared concerns of Byron, Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen over the human costs of wars.

In the *Don Juan* session, Mirosława Modrzewska (Gdansk) considered Byron's serious and comic play with the motifs of war and glory. Monika Coghen (Jagiellonian, Kraków) focused upon Byron's invocations of Kościuszko and Poland in *Don Juan* as positive signals towards freedom, in contrast to the failings of Napoleon's Russian campaign. Nadezhda Prozorova (Kaluga State) questioned whether Byron's skepticism towards the efficacy of words changed to be more favourable in his later works, as evidenced in *Don Juan's* Ismail and Russian cantos.

Next, Christine Kenyon Jones (KCL) presented on Byron's adoption of various military uniforms, and how the depiction of Byron in these forms of dress in contemporary illustrations and portraiture demonstrated Byron's respect for military attire despite his awareness of the human toll of warfare. Naji Oueijan (Notre Dame, Lebanon) then examined the poetic prominence and cultural appreciation of the horse in Eastern tradition, and how Byron also prized the ability to ride and fight as a basis for dignity and honour. Iaroslava Muratova (Gorky institute) then provided a thoughtful examination of the rebellious figures in Byron's poetry and to what extent each might have dovetailed with the author's own struggles against repressive systems.

For the third plenary, David Roessel (Stockton) examined Walter Scott's observing of Byron's Greek operations, and Byron's eager reading of Scott's latest novels and its potential influence on him in Greece, especially the political manoeuvring in *Quentin Durward* (1823). This plenary was followed by a special session on 'Fierce Loves and Faithless Wars', in which Peter Graham (Virginia Tech) asked the panellists to what extent Byron's poetry could be read as 'serious delivery of serious thought' versus artifice. Alex Grammatikos (Langara) considered the aristocratic fashioning of Byron at odds with the revolutionary cause, and how even the seriousness of the 'funeral pile' in 'On this Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year' is undermined by the ludicrous image of Sardanapalus in his resolution to build a funeral pyre rather than accept military surrender. Samantha Crain (Minnesota) took up the moments in *Don Juan* where Byron showed the value of cliché to signal sincerity, especially concerning Juan and Haidée. Mirka Horova (Charles, Prague) cleverly asserted that the initial premise introduced false dichotomy between sincerity and levity, arguing for Byron enacting a form of Italo Calvino's conception of lightness aesthetics and the complicated process whereby levity and gravity coexist.

The following day, the session on the Greek War of Independence presented ninth bicentenary insights, with Nikitas Paterakis (Kopodistrian, Athens) examining Mary Shelley's manuscript short story 'Euphrasia: A Tale of Greece' as an assimilation of the eponymous character into the Greek landscape and the complexity of a modern

Greece between its Orthodox Christianity and its hearkening back to classical times. John S. Gaton (Bellarmine) regaled us with a recounting of J. H. Amherst's unpublished manuscript dramatisation of the Siege of Messolonghi, which interestingly wove together political messaging around the evils of the slave trade and the cause of the Greeks against Ottoman oppression.

Next, Savo Fouad Karam (Lebanese University, Tripoli) had us reconsider Byron's reformulation of nationalism beyond masculine militarism to instead depict empowered heroic womanhood in pursuit of nationhood. Continuing in this session themed around gender crossings, Joselyn M. Almeida (NCIS) drew our attention to Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's translation of Byron's 'Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte', which brought up special resonances between Byron's repudiation of Napoleon and Avellaneda's contemporary situation in Cuba under the dictatorial governorship of Miguel Tacón. Finally, Emily Paterson-Morgan (Byron Society) charted the similarities between the nightmarish depictions of Coleridge's Catherine the Great and Byron's Semiramis in *Sardanapalus*.

For the third special session and final academic event, Andrew Stauffer (Virginia) invited panellists to focus upon Byron's theatres of war, with Roderick Beaton (King's College London) noting the marked difference between Byron's engagement with Napoleon's Waterloo over Philip's Chaeronea. Grace Rexroth (Colorado-Boulder) showed how Byron's depiction of the 1790 Battle of Ismail shed light upon this under-reported event for British audiences and encoded into the sequence Byron's frustrations with English military entanglements. Finally, Jonathan Sachs (Concordia) considered the ways in which Troy for Byron was *the* battlefield and how Byron's excavating articulation of Troy in *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan* blur the historical event into his broader fantasy of loss and decline emblematic of epic Romantic despair.

With that, a tremendously successful conference closed, Maria Schoina thanking all and all thankful to her and her 'Team Byron' from Aristotle University for their flawless coordination. In spite of an ongoing pandemic, undeterred by the range of time zones, and notwithstanding the fickleness of our analytical engines, the 46th International Byron Conference in virtual form was equal to any Byron Conference in the excellence of the research and scholarship shared by the participants.