**Images of Greece: Byron and Thomas Hope’s *Anastasius***

This essay addresses a question raised in the title of an article by the late Peter Cochran: ‘Why did Byron envy Thomas Hope’s *Anastasius*?’ Cochran’s article was published in the *Keats-Shelley Review* in 2010. [[1]](#footnote-1) That Byron did envy *Anastasius* seems well established, though his own comments on the novel are very brief (contained in two letters to his publisher, John Murray, from Ravenna, in July and September 1820). [[2]](#footnote-2) Neither of these letters suggests envy in any obvious sense, but Lady Blessington’s account of what Byron may or may not have said has carried the day:

Byron spoke to-day in terms of high commendation of Hope’s ‘Anastasius’; said that he wept bitterly over many pages of it, and for two reasons,--first that *he* had not written it, and secondly that *Hope* had; for that it was necessary to like a man excessively to pardon his writing such a book—a book, as he said, excelling all recent productions, as much in wit and talent, as in true pathos. He added, he would have given his two most approved poems to have been the author of ‘Anastasius’. [[3]](#footnote-3)

Thomas Hope was a very wealthy man, of Dutch-Scottish descent. His novel is subtitled: ‘Memoirs of a Greek; written at the close of the eighteenth century’, and it was first published by John Murray in a three-volume edition in 1819. The title page carried no name; the second edition, in 1820, also carried no name on the title page, but it had a dedication, with Hope’s name at the end of it. At its heart, this is a novel concerned with ideas of Greekness. So, by way of general context, I begin by looking at ways in which the Greeks have thought about themselves over time. I will then look briefly at the background to the publication of the novel; and then, finally, at the novel itself, why it remains worth reading, for all its considerable length and unevenness, and what Byron might have found to admire in it.

Firstly, then, ideas surrounding Greece and the Greeks. [[4]](#footnote-4) The Greeks themselves have used three words over the course of their history to describe who they are. The first name is ‘Hellenes’. This name already appears in Homer, where it applies only to the inhabitants of a small area of central Greece. Later, from around the sixth century BCE, it was generalised to mean ‘all Greeks’. Thereafter, it pursues a bewildering semantic course (with the advent of Christianity, for example, it was used to mean ‘those who believe in many gods’)—until, with the founding of the modern Greek state in 1830, it became, as it remains, the standard term for ‘Greeks’. Modern Greeks are Hellenes and their country is the Hellenic Republic.

The second term the Greeks have used about themselves is ‘Graikoí’. It is attested from at least the fourth century BCE. This seems, like ‘Hellene’, to have started out as a tribal name—in this case, to describe a people from Western Greece. It has never vanished from the language. It ran in parallel with the use of the name ‘Hellenes’ in Alexandrian times, survived the Byzantine period, and came back into fashion in the pre-Revolutionary period in Greece (i.e. the period before 1821). With the founding of the Greek state, it finally gave way to the term ‘Hellenes’ in nearly all contexts. It is, obviously, the name that has been borrowed into the modern western European languages. The *OED*’s first attestation of the noun ‘Greek’ in English is from *c*. 893.

The third word to describe Greeks is the most interesting from the point of view of the novel *Anastasius*. This is the name *Romaíoi* or *Romioí*. It means ‘Romans’, and goes back to Byzantine times, where it describes the inhabitants of the Eastern Roman Empire, which had its capital in Constantinople. Constantinople was founded as the ‘New Rome’, and the spoken Greek language came eventually to be called Romaic. During the Turkish occupation, after the fall of Byzantium, *Romiós* began to lose the prestige it had originally had, and began to take on pejorative connotations, as well as keeping its core sense of Orthodox Christian. It acquired senses of ‘cunning’ or ‘flattering’. In the twentieth century, the term *Romiós* has had an interesting career, which would take too much space to summarise here. But the idea of the Greek as *Romiós,* rather than as Hellene*,* is a fruitful way of thinking about the fundamental tension within Hope’s novel.

That tension is, very broadly, between two largely opposing ideas or narratives of Greece. On the one hand, there is the Hellenic ideal: this stresses the continuity of Greece and the Greeks from classical times to the present. It is a narrative that was promoted by some Greeks, both within and outside Greece, from the eighteenth century onwards. It is also the idea that united many non-Greeks who sympathised with the Greek cause in the War of Independence. It was a narrative that spoke to a growing sense of national pride, and it found favour partly because it offered an alternative to a revolutionary view of the Greek uprising against the Ottoman Empire, an alternative more easily acceptable to the European powers who had ultimate control over the destiny of Greece. The Hellenic story was a narrative of cultural continuity, stretching back into ancient times, rather than a narrative of sudden political upheaval. It was a story about the recovery, the reaffirmation, of a lost civilisation that had never been truly lost. The relative triumph of the Hellenic view today is reflected in scholarly works as much as in Greek travel posters. ‘Greece is considered the cradle of Western civilization’, as the Wikipedia entry uncompromisingly puts it.

So there is the Hellenic ideal, on the one hand. On the other hand, there is the idea of Greece that I have loosely associated with the *Romiós*. This narrative of Greece is powerfully resistant to a sense that Greece is Western, and consciously or otherwise, it functions in opposition to the fictionalised narrative of an unbroken Hellenism. Patrick Leigh Fermor, in a chapter of his book *Roumeli* (1966), gives a summary chart, only very slightly tongue-in-cheek, of 64 attitudes, aspirations, and beliefs that oppose the Hellene and the *Romiós*. [[5]](#footnote-5) While some of these are irrelevant to the early nineteenth century and *Anastasius*, if we seek to understand what drives the central figure of Hope’s novel, Leigh Fermor’s chart is a good place to begin. The Hellene, Leigh Fermor suggests, is characterised by an interest in theory, the *Romiós* by practice; the Hellene by the abstract, the *Romiós* by the concrete; the Hellene by the ideal, the *Romiós* by the real, and so on. The final opposition is nicely visual: the Hellene, he suggests, identifies with the columns of the Parthenon, the *Romiós* with the Dome of St Sophia in Istanbul.

This tension structures the whole of the novel *Anastasius*. It is made explicit towards the end of the book, at the moment where the central figure, Anastasius, finally leaves the world of the Ottoman Empire, where most of the novel has been set. He comes to Europe. In the lazaretto in Malta, where he is quarantined, he has the sensation that he is being ritually cleansed of the stains of the East. This, however, is far from a positive sensation. On the contrary, it leads him into a passionate defence of what the East has meant to him. ‘”Glorious sun of the East!” cried I with faltering tongue, “balmy breath of the Levant! warm affections of my beloved Greece,--adieu forever!’ He says a little earlier: ‘The people of Europe seemed heartless, the virtues of the Franks frigid, the very crimes of the West dull and prosaïc’. [[6]](#footnote-6) The West seems to him to lack form and shape. Responding unconsciously to the impact of the West’s modernity, he says: ‘whatever the eye could view or the mind comprehend—from the most fundamental organization of states to the most superficial gloss of social intercourse—seemed unfixed, discretional, subject to constant revolution, and, like the coat of the cameleon, borrowing a different hue from every passing cloud’. This is a forerunner of the famous line that appears in the English translation of the *Communist Manifesto* (1888) : ‘All that is solid melts into air’. Hope’s ability here to imagine how the West looks through the eyes of his Greek protagonist is culturally sensitive and it is easy to see what might have drawn Byron to it.

I turn now to the context of the publication of *Anastasius.* As I have noted, it was originally published anonymously. The circumstances and date of composition will probably never be fully clarified. A footnote added by Henry Hart Milman to his edition (1838) of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, states that *Anastasius*, like Beckford’s *Vathek*, was originally written in French. [[7]](#footnote-7) This is plausible, given Hope’s linguistic background. A parallel hypothesis, as John Rodenbeck has noted, is that the translation from French into English was entrusted to Thomas Hope’s son’s tutor, the Rev. J. Hitchens.[[8]](#footnote-8) Hope himself states, on the book’s title page, that *Anastasius* was ‘written at the close of the eighteenth century’. The setting is the years from roughly 1762 to 1798, and Hope may have begun the writing in the 1790s. [[9]](#footnote-9) It is highly likely, however, that the closing pages of the novel, which deal very painfully with the death of the protagonist’s son, are directly inspired by the death of Hope’s son, Charles, which, if so, would extend the period of the writing of the novel at least into 1817. [[10]](#footnote-10)

Thomas Hope was a collector and patron of sculpture, with interests in architecture, painting, and costume design. He published a book in 1807 called *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration*, while his wife was a prominent Regency hostess whom Byron knew in 1813/1814. [[11]](#footnote-11) Byron mentions Hope in some variant lines from *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,* Canto 2, where he disparaged Hope’s passion for collecting, in the general context of his attack on the arch-collector Elgin. [[12]](#footnote-12) It is understandable, given Hope’s background, that *The Edinburgh Review* (March 1821) carried a notice of the publication of *Anastasius* that refused to accept Hope as its author:

‘…we could not help exclaiming, in reading it, Is this Mr Thomas Hope?—Is this the man of chairs and tables…? Where has he hidden all this eloquence and poetry up to this hour? How is it that he has, all of a sudden…displayed a depth of feeling, and a vigour of imagination, which Lord Byron could not excel?’ [[13]](#footnote-13)

While an anonymous contributor in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* wrote:

‘I will as soon believe, that, by the operation of transfusion, a frog can be made to sing like Catalani [the Italian opera singer], as that any nick-knacky gentleman, like Hope, could so inhale from Byron’s works, the spirit of his bold, satirical, and libertine genius, as to be able to write a book, so like a book of his as the work in question…The character…of Anastasius, is exactly of a piece with Lord Byron’s…The spirit of Anastasius is that of Don Juan.’ [[14]](#footnote-14)

In reply to which, an injured Hope wrote to the Editor of *Blackwood’s* (October 1821), a very dignified letter, saying that: ‘[I] had finished my novel (or whatever else you may be pleased to call it,)…long before Lord Byron’s admirable productions appeared’, and he concluded simply: ‘I am the sole author of Anastasius’. [[15]](#footnote-15)

*Anastasius* is long and rather falls away in the final volume. This danger is inherent in the style Hope chose for the novel, a style that has been called the Oriental picaresque. [[16]](#footnote-16) The picaresque requires, on the author’s part, a plot-driven imagination that never falters. It is essential to the genre that the narrative simply goes on and on, scarcely allowing the reader pause to question its direction or the significance of its endless revelations. More or less everything in *Anastasius* is described through the protagonist’s eyes. Much happens to him. He rises high, he falls low; and his ability to keep going, through all of life’s challenges, is an element that surely drew Byron to him. Anastasius wanders from episode to episode, and the reader is often required to disregard plausibility. In the process, though, Hope gives us, what, at its best, is a marvellously imagined account of what it might have been like to live, as a Greek, within the Ottoman Empire at the close of the eighteenth century.

I turn now to look at some aspects of the book that might account for Byron’s supposed fascination with it.

First of all, there is the central issue of Anastasius himself, and the massive, often mis-applied energy he brings to the narrative. The name Anastasius is provocative here. It is the name of one of the saints of the Orthodox Church; the name of Patriarchs, priests, and bishops, of both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches; the name of emperors of Byzantium. It has huge prestige. The name Anastasius is associated with the anástasi of Christ (Christ’s resurrection), and, in more modern contexts, with the idea of the anástasi tou yénous (the resuscitation of the nation).

In the context of Hope’s novel, however, all these associations are ironic, since *his* Anastasius is driven by an all-pervading sense that, since life is largely without meaning, the fulfilment of individual appetite and desire lies at the heart of everything. Anastasius almost totally lacks a sense of community or of social obligation; or perhaps it would be more true to say that his sense of community is tied to moments of sentimental awakening that have only marginal purchase on the real. He is never going to be the kind of hero who might lead his people to freedom or regeneration.

Already by page 183 of the novel, he has given up his Greek name and turned Turk, abandoning the Greek religion. The immediate cause is the affair he is having with a young woman who is married to a high-ranking Ottoman. The husband discovers the affair and Anastasius is forced to flee. He enters a mosque to seek refuge and is immediately recognised as a *giaour* (the Ottoman term for a non-Muslim):

‘One human measure only remained to save my life. I drew my dagger, threw my cloak over my face…and cried, “I am a Moslemin!”’ (I, 183).

It is significant that Anastasius says (I, 185) his conversion, though driven by the immediate demands of the moment, had long been in preparation. The reader of the novel comes to understand how the solidity of traditional markers of identity, such as family, friends, home, and religion, is systematically undermined by Ottoman colonial authority, how all relationships are clouded by the simple fact of subject status. Anastasius has long sensed that his future, as a Greek in the Ottoman Empire, is blocked, but that it is even more blocked by his retention of his Orthodox faith, as it is by the retention of his Greek clothing, his Greek name, and much else. [[17]](#footnote-17)

The circumstances of his conversion to Islam are typical of how things happen to Anastasius. In a long passage of self-reflection in volume II, he says: ‘…man is from his first breath unto his last, as wholly passive an instrument in the hands of Providence as the insentient plant, or the unorganized mineral…To eat and be eaten by each other is the business assigned us here below by our Maker himself: --and, much as I may regret the greatness of my appetite, how can I more restrain it than the wolf or the vulture? (II, 182).

Anastasius has deeply unpleasant convictions and attitudes. He is a disaster for the various women who cross his path: he abandons his first lover, having made her pregnant; a subsequent one is sent by her husband to a remote convent as punishment for her adultery; while another is drowned in the Black Sea for the same offence. Friendships are equally abandoned at will. At one point (I, 209), Anastasius confusingly plunges a knife into one of his closest friends and kills him. He feels remorse and guilt and takes to opium. But, a few pages later, he is already moving on to other adventures.

What Hope clearly sees in Anastasius, and what Byron will have recognised, is the value of energy within a system that works to suppress it. A value that challenges, even if it does not entirely supersede, the promptings of conventional ethical stances. Early on in the novel (I, 9, 17), Anastasius identifies with Homer’s Achilles. Achilles’ exuberance is god-like, reflecting that he is himself half a god; but that god-like exuberance is a cruel perversion in the world of human mortality, which is the only sphere in which Achilles is free to operate. [[18]](#footnote-18) Anastasius has wild ambition, an energy that has no place to go within the stratified world of a declining Ottoman Empire, in which he is forever cast as a servant. Life as a colonised subject can never fully return the investment of energy that Anastasius instinctively commits to it. Only in sporadic moments of violence, war, sex, and the occasional passion of friendship, can life briefly seem to offer the promise of fulfilment. Anastasius is close to Byron’s Giaour; he, like the Giaour, chooses the pain of lived experience over the nothingness of what the Giaour calls ‘dull, unvarying days’:

Yet still in hours of love or strife,

I’ve scap’d the weariness of life;

Now leagu’d with friends, now girt by foes,

I loath’d the languor of repose…

I’d rather be the thing that crawls

Most noxious o’er a dungeon’s walls,

Than pass my dull, unvarying days,

Condemn’d to meditate and gaze… (*CPW,* 3, lines 984-987; 990-993)

Anastasius puts it this way: ‘Should any one be so fortunate as to have had no acquaintance before with the monster ennui, the most favourable situation without doubt for witnessing all its powers, is, when on board a small boat in a sea almost boundless, one lies for hours watching a cloudless sky for a breeze which stays away, and a waveless sea for a ripple which chooses not to come…I who could only exist in a bustle and thrive in a whirlwind, found myself so completely weighed down by this obstinate stillness of every surrounding element, as absolutely to gasp for breath; to persuade myself that even a sense of pain would be welcome relief from so horrible a tedium…’’’ (I, 227-8).

This revulsion against the tedium of life is both an expression of a particular temperament and a way by which Hope gives a sense of the generalised monotony of life in a colonised society. *Anastasius* is set in the closing years of the eighteenth century. Hope never engages with a realistic sense that life might change, still less that revolution might be a way out. At one point, late in the novel (III,97), Anastasius comes across an Italian who ‘belonged to the sect of political propagandists, about that time [we are in the late 1790s] disseminated all the world over, to preach emancipation from every bondage, natural, civil, and religious.’ The Italian holds forth prophetically: ‘”The time is at hand when all the tottering monuments of ignorance, credulity, and superstition, no longer protected by the foolish awe which they formerly inspired, shall strew the earth with their wrecks!”’ He invites Anastasius to offer himself ‘as the representative of oppressed and mourning Greece’. But then the Italian suddenly departs, leaving his bills unpaid and stealing his landlord’s silver spoons, at which Anastasius comments: ‘This inadvertency cast a shade upon his doctrine. I bade mourning Greece wipe away her tears without me’ (III, 99-100).

The tension within the novel depends to a great extent on the fact that change never appears a realistic solution to the problems or challenges Anastasius encounters. This static quality, the closed circle of colonial subjection, is a reflection of an apparent situation that virtually all travellers in the Ottoman Empire experienced. Byron’s note to *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (*CPW*, II, p. 201), is not noticeably imperceptive in the context of the age:

The Greeks will never be independent; they will never be sovereigns as heretofore, and God forbid they ever should! but they may be subjects without being slaves. Our colonies are not independent, but they are free and industrious, and such may Greece be hereafter. [[19]](#footnote-19)

The famous image of Greece as a corpse in Byrons’ *Giaour* (‘He who hath bent him o’er the dead, / Ere the first day of death is fled…/ Such is the aspect of this shore--/’Tis Greece—but living Greece no more!’) [[20]](#footnote-20) is exactly mirrored in an important passage from *Anastasius*. The protagonist is on the island of Rhodes. He climbs up into the medieval citadel that we know as the Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes and there reflects on issues to do with the recent and the deep past. Monuments which are ancient, he says, ‘have their gloom irradiated by at least an equal portion of gaiety; and resemble the human frame so entirely returned to its original dust, as to preserve no trace of its former lineaments’ (I, 274). The really old is never truly dead. But ruins recently abandoned ‘still bear about them all the marks of death and mourning…still remain the uninvaded property of solitude and silence…such edifices preserve their sadness unaltered; they chill the sense, oppress the heart, and make the blood run cold: for they resemble the human body just abandoned by the vivifying soul; just stiffened into an insensible and ghastly corpse; just displaying the first awful signs of fast approaching corruption’. [[21]](#footnote-21)

Ludmilla Kostova, in an interesting article, notes ‘the instability of identity’ in the world of Anastasius. That world, she writes, is in constant flux, ‘insofar as there is no system of solid religion or moral values that can produce a sense of continuity between past and present and guarantee permanence’. [[22]](#footnote-22) When Anastasius first kills a man (I, 54), he feels public shame, rather than inner guilt, and it is coloured by a sense of surprise at having contributed almost unwittingly to the drab theatricality of life’s contingency. Anastasius is a survivor throughout most of the course of the novel; he reflects, he feels, but, in general, he accepts the world’s unreadability. He rarely carries over the fruits of his analysis of the world into the next chapter and he refuses to systematize. [[23]](#footnote-23) Kostova rightly draws attention to the importance of the opening of chapter 10 (volume 1):

Historians often err in attributing to a single great cause the effect of many minute circumstances combined. (I,185)

All of this, the view of history, the distaste for the systematic is, of course, characteristic of Byron.

Endlessly trapped between his passion for life and life’s inability to respond to it, Anastasius is particularly alive to the forms of humiliation that are the daily experience of those among whom he moves. Here, again, Hope and Byron are very close in their capacity for empathy. Byron notes that the Greeks, like the Catholics of Ireland and the Jews throughout the world, ‘suffer all the moral and physical ills that can afflict humanity. Their life is a struggle against truth; they are vicious in their own defence. They are so unused to kindness, that when they occasionally meet with it they look upon it with suspicion, as a dog often beaten snaps at your fingers if you attempt to caress him’ (*CPW*, 2, 201).

On his first visit to Greece, Byron, with his companion Hobhouse, stopped for a while in the town of Vostitsa (modern Aigion) on the Gulf of Corinth. They stayed with a young man, Andreas Londos, who later went on to become a general in the Greek War of Independence. Thomas Gordon, one of the best of the foreign chroniclers of the War wrote: ‘Londos possessed abundance of courage, but he was drunken, debauched, rapacious, and oppressive’. [[24]](#footnote-24) Byron, though, had seen something in Londos in 1809, something which underpinned a letter Byron wrote to him from Mesolongi in January 1824: ‘Seeing you again and serving your country at your side…will be one of the happiest moments of my life’. [[25]](#footnote-25) Londos had been a high servant of the Turkish state in 1809, but he had been the one person they saw on their journey who belied the then traditional stereotype of the fawning, submissive Greek. [[26]](#footnote-26)

Anastasius states his position early on in the novel: ‘There is a something in my nature which revolts at every act of humiliation performed towards a fellow creature’ (I, 49). There is a subtle episode in volume 1 of the novel that throws light on Hope’s understanding of the rituals of humiliation. Anastasius is on a boat that calls at the island of Serpho (modern Serifos) to collect the regular tribute owed to the Ottoman authorities. All the inhabitants of the island turn out to witness the payment. The island leader asks for a reduction in the tribute, since the island is poor. The representative of the Ottoman state then threatens to have the islanders publically beaten. The islanders go off and return with half the money owed. Once again, they are threatened with being beaten. The islanders withdraw again and return with the full amount of money ‘neatly tied up in bags’ (I, 271). They had known all along, of course, that they would have to pay in full, but the ritual of resistance is a tiny act against the ritual of constant humiliation. More than that, the Ottoman representative is amazed to see the islanders, who had gone off ‘with the most dejected and miserable look’, celebrating a wedding immediately after, with singing and dancing. Life goes on.

Anastasius understands that there is no possibility of engagement between Greek and Turk on any level, except that of inferior to superior. At one point, he discusses with a Greek friend the nature of society. His friend introduces the idea of the social compact, a vision of a society sustained by reciprocity and a sense of mutual obligation; to which Anastasius replies:

‘…do I hear a Greek, and under the yoke of the Turks, talk of a social compact…? Ah! had I only discovered the faintest trace of any such agreement between Christianity and Islamism…who would have been more proud than myself of remaining a Greek, of standing by my oppressed countrymen, and of maintaining the glorious struggle to the last drop of my blood!’ (II, 188).

There is no social compact in Anastasius’ world, only the endless struggle to survive. Politics, ideology, revolution have no meaning for him. He early on becomes attached to a man called Mavroyeni, one of the class of Greeks called the Phanariots, whose members sometimes rose to the highest positions in the Ottoman state. Mavroyeni, in volume II, becomes Hospodar or Lord of the Turkish province of Wallachia, ‘the very highest situation which a Greek can attain in the Turkish empire’, as Anastasius says (II, 121). But Mavroyeni ends miserably, caught in the ebb and flow of historical events over which he has no control. Finally betrayed and utterly dispensable, he kneels on the floor, in passive acceptance of the executioner sent by his master in Istanbul:

‘He said no more, uncovered his neck, suffered the fatal bowstring to be fastened round his throat—and fell a corpse’ (II, 358). [[27]](#footnote-27)

The novel *Anastasius* would have appealed to Byron in numerous ways. Hope’s treatment of the liminal status of its central figure; the examination of the instability of identity in Anastasius’s world; the lack of any religious or moral values that can be made meaningful in a colonised space; Anastasius’s resistance to the idea that history can be read as a systematic series of causes and effects, rather than, as he experiences it, the endless flow of what he calls ‘many minute circumstances’ (I, 185); Anastasius’s ability, though all his meanness and treachery, to rise above the humiliation which Hope sees as the common condition of the Greek within the Ottoman Empire; the directness of Hope’s treatment of sex. [[28]](#footnote-28) To all these aspects Byron would have been sensitive.

But perhaps most important of all, Hope, in his rejection of the dominant Hellenic narrative of Greece in favour of something much less constructed, is very close to the Byron of some of the notes in *CHP*. Both Byron and Hope see that living under occupation distorts human relationships and often leads to attitudes that are deeply unpleasant, or offensive, to the onlooker. Anastasius is an unlovely hero for wretched times. But he has passion and he resists his subject status in the only way he knows how.

I conclude with one of the most powerful moments of the novel. It is the working out of the passage quoted earlier, in which Anastasius finds himself in the citadel at Rhodes. He is awestruck at first by what he sees around him, the vestiges of the Knights Hospitaller. He is dimly aware that the knights held Rhodes before the coming of the Turks and, just for a moment, he wishes that he, too, could have played a heroic part in the world of Gothic adventure. He is cast down by the sense having missed a moment in history when he could have played a role commensurate with his energy and ambition. But then he finds a piece of broken marble. It has an image of a European knight on one side. Then he turns it over and sees a Greek inscription on the other. ‘At this sight, my own national pride returned in all its force’ (I, 277). This is not pride in a Greece that is mother to the virtues of the West, but a Greece incomparably old and immensely superior:

‘And does it then belong to me…to envy the borrowed greatness of Goths and barbarians…Am I not a Greek? And what Grecian blood, even when remotest from the source and running in the smallest rills, is not nobler than the base stream that flows through the veins of these children of the West; whose proudest boast it is to trace their names to the obscurity of ignorance and the night of barbarism; whose oldest houses only date as of yesterday, and whose highest achievements are the exploits of savages!’

Hope’s passionate affirmation of an organic view of Greece, unrelated to a westernized ideal of a fictionalised Hellenism, remains the most interesting achievement of his novel *Anastasius*; it explores throughout an imaginative counter-current, one to which Byron would have been undoubtedly sympathetic.

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1. Peter Cochran, ‘Why did Byron envy Thomas Hope’s *Anastasius*?’, *Keats-Shelley Review*, vol. 24.1 (2010), pp. 76-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Byron’s* *Letters and Journals*, edited by Leslie Marchand, 13 vols (London, John Murray, 1973-1994), vol. 7, pp. 137-139 (Byron to John Murray, Ravenna 22 July 1820); pp. 182-183 (Byron to John Murray, Ravenna 28 September 1820). Hereafter *BLJ.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ernest Lovell, editor, *Lady Blessington’s Conversations of Lord Byron* (Princeton, University Press, 1969), p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. What follows is taken from a number of sources, notably: H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, Clarendon, 9th edition, 1940 [1996]); G. Babiniotis, *Lexiko tis neas ellinikis glossas* (Athens, Kentro Lexikologias, 2nd edition, 2002); Peter Mackridge, *Language and National identity in Greece, 1766-1976* (Oxford, University Press, 2009), pp. 47ff; Roderick Beaton, ‘Antique nation? “Hellenes” on the Eve of Greek Independence and in Twelfth Century Byzantium’, in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 31.1 (2007), pp. 76-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Patrick Leigh Fermor, *Roumeli: Travels in Northern Greece* (London, John Murray, 1966; Penguin, 1983), pp. 107-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. References to *Anastasius* are to the first edition: *Anastasius: Or, Memoirs of a Greek; Written at the Close of the Eighteenth Century* (London, John Murray, 1819), 3 vols (III, pp. 352-356). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Details in John Rodenbeck’s exceptionally well-documented article, ‘Thomas Hope. *Anastasius*: Towards Background and Meaning’, at <http://www.thomashope.org.uk/background.htm>; cf. David Watkin, *Thomas Hope, 1769-1831, and the Neo-Classical Idea* (London, John Murray, 1968), footnote 14, p. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Rodenbeck argues—almost certainly correctly-- that the story of Hitchens’s involvement as a simple translator of *Anastasius* is unlikely to be true; he suggests, on the basis of a remark in a letter of 1820, from the Scottish writer Henry Mackenzie to James Chalmer, that Hitchens may have been engaged at that time in preparing a bowdlerized version of the novel, but that he was unable to interest a publisher. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Watkin believes that the novel was written during the period of Hope’s Grand Tour of Europe, Asia, and Africa, in the period 1787-1995 (p. 66); or that it was written later ‘from notes which he had written as a young man at the end of the eighteenth century’ (p. 22). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Charles Hope died, aged seven, in Rome, early in 1817 (Watkin, p. 21). Hope had employed Byron’s physician John Polidori, to treat his son. In flippant mood, Byron wrote to Thomas Moore from Venice in April 1817: ‘Dr. Polidori has, just now, no more patients, because his patients are no more. He had lately three, who are now all dead*’.* (*BLJ,* vol. 5, p. 210, letter of 11 April 1817). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See *BLJ,* vol. 3, pp. 27-28 (Byron to Lady Melbourne, 18 March 1813); vol. 4, pp. 108-110 (Byron to Lady Melboune, 29 April 1814). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works* (hereafter *CPW*), edited by Jerome McGann (Oxford, Clarendon, 1980-1993), 7 vols (II, p. 48). The variant lines (Canto 2, stanza 14) are 118-26. Hope is referred to there as ‘The victim sad of vase-collecting spleen, /House-furnisher withal, one Thomas hight’; and Byron added a note (p. 286): ‘Thomas Hope, Esq., if I mistake not, the man who publishes quartos on furniture and costume’. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Sydney Smith, in *The Edinburgh Review*, vol. 35, 1 March 1821, pp. 92-102 (p. 93). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ‘Familiar Epistles to Christopher North, From an Old Friend with a New Face. Letter II. On Anastasius. By—Lord Byron’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 10, issue 55, September 1821, pp. 200-206 (p. 201). The anonymous letter is dated 29 August 1821; it was sent from Gordon’s Hotel, Albemarle Street. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Letter from Thomas Hope to the editor of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 10, issue 56, October 1821, p. 312. The letter is dated 9 October 1821; it was sent from the Duchess Street Mansion which Hope had purchased from the Dowager Lady Warwick in 1799 (see Watkin, chapter IV, pp. 93-124). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. James Watt, ‘James Morier and the Oriental Picaresque’, in *Comedy, Fantasy and Colonialism*, edited by Graeme Harper (London and New York, Continuum, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. After a successful battle, in which he fights against Albanians in the Peloponnese, the Ottoman commander of his force says: ‘”you are a brave lad; and if you will but become a true believer, you may rely upon me for promotion”. At this flattering offer, my heart rose to my lips. At once I would have answered: “Moslemin, or heathen, or whatever your highness pleases!...’ (I. 57). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Paolo Vivante*, The Homeric Imagination: A Study of Homer’s Poetic Perception of Reality* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1970) writes of Achilles: ‘The divine which he could not inherit as immortality accrues to him as a primal exuberance of feeling that can scarcely be contained within the patterns of heroic behavior’ (p. 53). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Mackridge (p. 123) notes that even such an influential a figure in the history of Greek independence as Korais apparently never saw the revolution coming. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *CPW*, III, p. 42 (lines 68-69; 90-91). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. McGann (*CPW*, V), pp. 718 and 741, mentions the possible influence of *Anastasius* on *Don Juan*. If there is anything more than coincidence in the image of the corpse in the *Giaour* and *Anastasius,* it suggests influence working in the other direction. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ludmilla Kostova, ‘Degeneration, Regeneration and the Moral Parameters of Greekness in Thomas Hope’s Anastasius, or Memoirs of a Greek’, *Comparative Critical Studies*, vol. 4.2 (2007), pp. 177-192 (p. 184). See the same author’s ‘”Racial” Politics and Personal Ethics in Thomas Hope’s *Anastasius*’, at [www.thomashope.org.uk/Kostova.htm](http://www.thomashope.org.uk/Kostova.htm). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. At one point, he notes, with studied irony, ‘that art of generalising my ideas, so esteemed, as I am told, among Frank (i.e western European) philosophers’ (I, 71). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Thomas Gordon, *History of the Greek Revolution* (Edinburgh and London, Blackwood and Cadell, 1832), 2 vols (II,173). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *BLJ*, vol. 11, p. 104 (Byron to Andreas Londos, Mesolongi, 30/18 January 1824). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. J.C. Hobhouse, A *Journey through Albania…during the years 1809 and 1810* (2nd ed., London, Cawthorn, 1813), 2 vols (I, 225) makes clear the significance of Londos to the two travellers: ‘the whole appearance of our host and his household presented us with the singular spectacle of a Greek in authority—a sight which we had never before seen in Turkey’. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Rodenbeck underlines the historical background to the story of Mavroyeni. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The 1831 Paris edition of *Anastasius* (which is in English) begins with ‘Memoirs of the Life of Thomas Hope’, signed V.R. This preface notes that: ‘One of the remarkable parts of Mr. Hope’s genius is his entire freedom from cant; a virtue of most precious estimation in this canting age. It would be worth while to read Anastasius immediately after the Excursion of Mr. Wordsworth’ (Thomas Hope*, Anastasius*…(Paris, Baudry, 1831), p. xi). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)