

CHARLES BRINSLEY SHERIDAN (1796-1844) was the son of the famous dramatist and accomplished politician, Richard Brinsley Butler Sheridan, a close friend of Lord Byron. He read classics at Trinity College, Cambridge (Byron's *alma mater*), which contributed to his pro-Greek stance during the War of Independence of 1821. In 1822, his *Thoughts on the Greek Revolution* was published in London, a study that marshalled logical and telling arguments to refute the English Foreign Minister, Lord Castlereagh's firm conviction that the creation of an independent Greek state would encourage Russian designs on Ottoman territory. The study was praised by a learned commentator in *The Monthly Magazine*, a London periodical, and in 1823 Sheridan joined the newly established literary subcommittee of the Greek Committee of London, which undertook to better organise the propaganda for Greek affairs.

The second volume of Fauriel's Greek folksongs included the Greek text of Solomos's *Hymn to Liberty*, together with a French translation by Stanislas Julien. As soon as it came out in Paris, Sheridan wrote a glowing review, in which he recommended that the volume be translated into English: an English version, he averred, would be of great service to the embattled Greece, as also, and no less, to literature in general. In the end, he did the translation himself, and the English version of Fauriel came out in 1825 under the title *The Songs of Greece from the Romaic Text*. "Romaic" was the term applied at that time to the modern Greek language, as we can see from the writings of Byron and many other contemporary English-speaking writers.

Sheridan gave his translation of Solomos's *Hymn to Liberty* the title *Dithyrambics to Liberty*, a considerably altered title, which obviously reproduces that of Julien's French translation (*Dithyrambe sur la Liberté*) and may be taken as an early indication of the free, even arbitrary, nature of Sheridan's English version, which makes it more of a paraphrase or adaptation or imitation than a translation as such.

In fact, despite Sheridan's stated intention of making a faithful, precise translation,

this seems to extend only as far as producing a metrical version and preserving the coupled rhymes of the original and the fast alternating rhythm of its quatrains, by and large with no metrical hiatuses. We know that Solomos was displeased when he saw Sheridan's version and sharply reprehended its infidelity to the original. But I suspect that our national poet's anger stemmed from the overall impression given by the English free rendering: it is an "improved" version, more richly expressive in terms of both vocabulary and nuances that "embellish" the original.

Commenting on Sheridan's rendering of the first verse, one is struck by the archaic forms "thee", "glaive", "thou", and "gazest". These may, certainly, have been part of the traditional poetic vocabulary of contemporary English, but they are undeniably closer to the scholarly *υμάς*, *οράς*, and *φάσγανον*, than to Solomos's simple vernacular, which is thus 're-encumbered' with elements that the poet had consciously tried to excise.

In the second verse, Sheridan turns the *κόκαλα των Ελλήνων* into "our country's ashes" and adds the adjectives "Spartan" and "Tyrtæan", the substantive "lyre", and the phrase "sacred fire", in an attempt to fill out Solomos's elliptical *και σαν πρώτα ανδρειωμένη*, which carries enormous historical significance, since it correlates the ancient and the modern Greeks.

The celebrated, stirring verse 15, in which Solomos indirectly answers Byron's complaints about Greek inertia, servility, or cowardice, is changed ("improved") by the zealous Sheridan as follows: "Now thy sons, defying danger,/Strike beneath their native sky,/And distrusting every stranger,/Swear to free *themselves*, or die!" The words are not bad, nor are they alien to the spirit of a patriotic poet like Solomos. Yet nor do they bear much relationship to the simple, proud declaration of the Zakynthian bard:

Ναι· αλλά τώρα αντιπαλεύει
Κάθε τέκνο σου με ορμή,
Που ακατάπαυστα γυρεύει
Ἡ την νίκη, ἢ την θανή;

which in my own translation is rendered as:

Yes, but your sons, your offspring
Now fight with all their breath
And unceasingly are seeking
Either victory or death.

By and large, the other English translations of the *Hymn* keep much closer to the sense and conscientiously try to reproduce the melodious rhythm, the metrical form, and all the metrical features of the original. In Sheridan's defence, however, it must be said that the weaknesses in his rendering are due to his genuine fervour and his youthful eagerness to contribute to a sacred cause (he was an ardent, sincere philhellene and genuinely desired the liberation of the Greek nation), without really considering the fact that he did not know "Romaic", as Byron had, nor had he lived among the "Romii". His philhellenism was to take him on a pilgrimage to Greece much later, after the War was over. Nonetheless, the translation of the *Hymn* introduced a great many English people to Solomos and was excellent propaganda for the Greek cause.

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