

BYRON Part 1
screenplay by
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FADE IN:

1 INT. BEDROOM -- DAY 1

Close on a BUCKET of black paint or dye, a garment is plunged into it, a chemise possibly, something light and white. Dripping with BLACK PAINT the bundle is smeared across the wall by a NAKED GIRL.

2 INT. CORRIDOR MORTUARY (MISSOLONGHI) -- DAY 2

A group of DOCTORS make their way down the narrow white corridor. Silhouetted against the light.

3 INT. DINING ROOM, AUGUSTA HOUSE -- DAY 3

Breakfast, a table filled with children, GEORGIANA 16, AUGUSTA 14 GEORGE 13, MEDORA 9. (NB In this sequence everybody is 12 years older than they are in the actual film) At the head of the table sits their mother, AUGUSTA LEIGH, her hair is thick and dark and her skin very pale, she is barely forty. A MANSERVANT enters.

MANSERVANT

Mr Kinnaird is here.

AUGUSTA

At this hour? What can he possibly want.

(realising)

Oh my God.

Knocking a cup over, she runs out of the room. The children watch her GO. MEDORA starts to get up.

4 INT. MORTUARY (MISSOLONGHI) -- DAY 4

A darkened room with shafts of light from a high window. The DOCTORS stand around a SHEET COVERED BODY. We hear a muttered series of exchanges in GREEK as they prepare to perform an autopsy. Standing against a WHITE WALL we notice a man in his middle forties, FLETCHER, BYRON'S valet.

5 INT. BEDROOM -- DAY 5

The black painting continues. In a series of CLOSE CUTS we see that the NAKED GIRL is CAROLINE LAMB, short brown hair and a sharply intelligent face, in her late twenties, her face streaked with tears and paint struggling to make the wall of her bedroom black.

6 INT. MORTUARY (MISSOLONGHI) -- DAY 6

A cloth is draw back from an array of KNIVES and SURGICAL TOOLS. The sheet is pulled away from the face. PALE and yet still with a lumious beauty we catch a glimpse of LORD BYRON. Matted dark hair and a strong nose.

6 CONTINUED: 6

He is in fact thirty six, but we can see quite clearly the twenty-four year old face.

7 INT. CORRIDOR AUGUSTA'S HOUSE -- DAY 7

DOUGLAS KINNAIRD a serious looking man in his thirties is standing nervously in the hallway as AUGUSTA appears.

AUGUSTA
Tell me he isn't...

KINNAIRD
I came as quickly as I could.
Hobhouse didn't want you to see
it in the newspapers...

AUGUSTA falters and then collapses on the ground. Behind her MEDORA stands in the doorway.

8 INT. ANNABELLA'S BEDROOM -- DAY 8

The open NEWSPAPER lies on the bed, the CAMERA moves across to find ANNABELLA, a pale beautiful girl. She is staring at her reflection in the glass. As the CAMERA moves closer we see she is crying.

9 INT. MORTUARY -- DAY 9

CLOSE as the knife slits open the chest of the corpse. FLETCHER looks away not able to look at the sight of the body being so invaded. The DOCTORS lean forward.

10 INT. STAIRWAY OFFICE -- DAY 10

A narrow stairway leading to the office of WILMOT HORTON, climbing up it we see JOHN MURRAY, receding hair in his forties, BYRON'S publisher. He is out of breath.

11 INT. MORTUARY -- DAY 11

CLOSE on the faces of the DOCTORS as they work on the body.

12 INT. WILMOT HORTONS'S OFFICE -- DAY 12

THREE NOTEBOOKS are placed onto a desk. Staring at them is a short plump man, the solicitor, WILMOT HORTON, standing opposite him is JOHN MURRAY.

WILMOT HORTON
And this is the only copy?

MURRAY
There are two copies. You are
looking at both of them.

WILMOT HORTON
They don't look very long.

12 CONTINUED:

12

He picks one up and turns it over in his hands.

MURRAY

I haven't read them myself but I am informed that they deal principally with his Lordships life in London.

WILMOT HORTON

His marriage, then.

MURRAY

Yes.

WILMOT HORTON

And before his marriage.

MURRAY

Yes.

WILMOT HORTON

Are they truthful?

MURRAY

I believe so.

WILMOT HORTON

Oh my God.
(he picks up one
of the volumes)
His sister?

MURRAY

There is a section which describes in some detail his feeling for Augusta.

13 INT. CORRIDOR AUGUSTA'S HOUSE -- DAY

13

AUGUSTA is being carried by two servants to a morning room watched by kinnaird. Her husband, George LEIGH comes down the stairs.

COLONEL LEIGH

What's the bloody fuss?

KINNAIRD

I am afraid we have had news from Greece.

COLONEL LEIGH

About time. He's dead I hope?

KINNAIRD

Lord Byron has passed away.

He looks towards AUGUSTA who is being carried into a room.

13 CONTINUED:

13

COLONEL LEIGH

Is there a will?

KINNAIRD

I'm sorry. We have only just heard the news. I don't know about any will.

COLONEL LEIGH

Bloody lawyers will be a nightmare I suppose. Well, keep an eye on Augusta. I have an urgent appointment in Newmarket this morning.

As COLONEL LEIGH leaves through the front door , KINNAIRD becomes aware of the dark, serious looking girl standing in the doorway watching him.

14 INT. DRAWING ROOM BECKENHAM -- DAY

14

ANNABELLA is sitting at a small table WILMOT HORTON is standing in front of her, looking nervous. Although ANNABELLA is twenty two for most of this film, now at twenty eight, her face looks a little harder. More adult. Her manner is cold and austere.

WILMOT HORTON

Mr Murray got the manuscript from Tom Moore. Moore needed money as usual, so Murray paid him £2000 for it.

ANNABELLA

And now he wants to blackmail me with my own husbands manuscript.

WILMOT HORTON

(quietly)

No, Lady Byron, he is offering it to us for the same money that he paid for it. He would make a great deal more if he published it.

ANNABELLA looks at him fiercely trying to hide her humiliation.

ANNABELLA

He has read it I suppose.

WILMOT HORTON

He says, not a word.

(gently)

I am very sorry, I realise that this is very distressing for you.

14 CONTINUED:

14

ANNABELLA

Well, Augusta can pay. Have you seen the will? He's left everything to his bloody sister and her wretched children and nothing to me, or my daughter. Our daughter. Well, she won't see a penny of his money. Not while I'm alive. And she can pay for his bloody 'Memoirs'. I don't see why I should take responsibility for her shame.

WILMOT HORTON

Augusta doesn't have two thousand pounds, Lady Byron. She already owes considerable sums.

ANNABELLA

(sharp)

Then we will lend it to her and she shall pay us back. We will make sure of that. She will pay us back. Tell Mr Murray he shall have his money.

WILMOT HORTON

Yes m'lady.

He starts to collect his belongings and go.

ANNABELLA

And Mr Horton.

WILMOT HORTON

Yes m'lady.

ANNABELLA

I want them destroyed.

WILMOT HORTON

Of course. Of course.

He starts to leave.

15 INT. AUGUSTA'S BEDROOM -- DAY

15

AUGUSTA is lying in bed looking pale and exhausted she has been crying. HOBHOUSE, a large, big handed man with a gentle but deliberate manner, is sitting at her bedside.

HOBHOUSE

Lady Byron is saying that she will lend you the money.

AUGUSTA

What difference will that make, I couldn't pay her back. Where is he?

15 CONTINUED:

15

HOBHOUSE for a moment not sure what she means.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

Where is he? His body.

HOBHOUSE

At sea. He should reach England in a few days. Her lawyer, Mr Horton will draw up an agreement, it will be an amount every year. She wants you to take out an insurance policy.

AUGUSTA

In case I should...

HOBHOUSE

(gently)

In case you should die before the amount is paid.

AUGUSTA

It is only a day since we heard he was dead, how can she think like this?

HOBHOUSE

You agree they must be destroyed?

AUGUSTA

I agree that you know best. What about Caroline Lamb?

HOBHOUSE

She must know by now. Everybody knows.

16 INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

16

CLOSE ON: CAROLINE sitting exhausted on the floor. The CAMERA pulls away. She is covered with streaks of BLACK PAINT. Beyond her the wall is totally BLACK.

17 EXT. ALBERMARLE STREET -- DAY

17

TOM MOORE, Irishman, poet, BYRON'S friend and later biographer is running full tilt through the crowded pavements and traffic of Albermarle Street towards John Murray's house at number 52. On the doorstep he meets HOBHOUSE.

MOORE

Hobhouse. Thank God, I thought I wasn't going to make it. I've got the money £2000. I'm going to get them back from Murray.

17 CONTINUED: 17

HOBHOUSE
(terse)
John.

The door is opened by a SERVANT.

18 INT. HALL ALBERMARLE STREET -- DAY 18

HOBHOUSE leads the way and MOORE follows as they move up the stairs.

MOORE
You will be reasonable won't you?

HOBHOUSE not looking at all reasonable.

HOBHOUSE
Of course, but they must be destroyed.

MOORE
But it's absurd. Too fast. His body's barely cold.

HOBHOUSE
He's been cold for nearly a month. His body reaches England in a few days and then there will be other matters to face.

MOORE
Then let's just burn a few pages. There's nothing in the rest that can harm him.

HOBHOUSE
He wanted them destroyed.

MOORE
(angry)
No he didn't. That's why he gave them to me not you.

HOBHOUSE continues up without replying.

19 INT. MORTUARY (MISSOLONGHI) -- DAY 19

Close on a large SAILCLOTH NEEDLE sewing up the corpse. We see the faces of the DOCTORS as they finish their work. The POST MORTEM complete they move away from the table. Leaving FLETCHER staring down at the PALE STITCHED CORPSE.

20 INT. FIRST FLOOR DRAWING ROOM, ALBERMARLE STREET -- DAY 20

A tall elegant room overlooking the street. Present are John MURRAY, WILMOT HORTON, Colonel DOYLE an imposing mustachioed gentleman and another man (Suffolk?), HOBHOUSE and MOORE.

20 CONTINUED:

20

As we cut into the scene everybody is speaking at once: MOORE saying that the manuscript is his and that the decision is therefore his, MURRAY that it reverted to him on BYRON'S death, WILMOT that he has another appointment and the matter must be settled. The result is noise until:

HOBHOUSE

Quiet!

They are all silenced.

HOBHOUSE (CONT'D)

Mr Moore, did you not undertake to me yesterday that you would abide by Augusta's decision in this matter?

MOORE

I did, but she's not here, that's what I am saying why don't we postpone this decision until it can be considered more carefully.

HOBHOUSE

I was with Augusta yesterday and - I have her written instruction that she wishes the memoirs destroyed.

MOORE

But that's ridiculous she hasn't read them.

WILMOT HORTON

(exasperated)

And I speak with Lady Byron's full authority that she agrees with his sister.

HOBHOUSE

(to Moore)

Will you now therefore go back on the word?

MOORE

No, but I...

HOBHOUSE

Then the matter is settled. Burn them.

(to Murray)

Now sir, if you please.

There is a pause.

WILMOT HORTON

I have other important matters to attend to so if we could get this over with.

20 CONTINUED: (2) 20

MURRAY looks across at MOORE who nods.

MOORE

Very well. Burn the damned thing.

He tears the first page out of the bound notebook and throws it in the fire. Then a second.

ANGLE ON THE PAGES BEING BURNT IN THE FIRE.

21 INT. MORTUARY (MISSOLONGHI) -- DAY 21

A coarse sailcloth sheet is pulled over the cadaver. We see BYRON'S face as the sheet is dragged over it and the coarse stitching continues.

TITLE SEQUENCE

22 EXT. THAMES -- DAY 22

A THAMES BARGE is making it's way in stately fashion up the river. Black flags flying from the foremast and topmasts.

23 EXT. QUAYSIDE PORTSMOUTH -- DAY 23

HOBHOUSE pushing his way through the crowded quayside. He stops and looks slightly surprised. Ahead of him a customs table has been set out and there is crowd of people around it arguing in different languages. As HOBHOUSE stares a YOUNG MAN turns to see him, detaches himself and starts to push towards him. He is striking looking with dark curly hair and bright forceful eyes, in the crowd we are not aware of his disability but this is George Gordon BYRON, twenty three years old and newly arrived back from Greece.

BYRON

Don't say a word, I've told them
I can't speak any English! I'm
an italian poet come to London to
study under 'il magistri inglesi',
as if there were any, luckily
their Italian was even worse than
mine and they didn't choose to
argue the point, but if they hear
I'm a Lord they'll double the
duty on everything. What's the
matter you look like you've seen
a ghost.

HOBHOUSE embraces him, to the surprise of both of them.

BYRON (CONT'D)

Careful, they'll think you're
Italian too. Oh God!

(MORE)

23 CONTINUED:

23

BYRON (CONT'D)
(produces a bottle
from under his
coat)
Hold this, it's 'Attar of roses',
for my mother. I know I smell
like a tart in a Turkish brothel,
not that you'd know anything about
that dear Hobby! Go on have a
sniff! God it's good to see you!
Shall we escape? They're
momentarily distracted by my
tortoises I have four, each
stupider than the other.

He pushes past HOBHOUSE and heads up the quayside. Despite himself HOBHOUSE cannot help but notice his RIGHT FOOT sliding rather than stepping as he goes.

24 INT. HOTEL PORTSMOUTH -- DAY

24

A crowded bare room with wooden tables and stools, BYRON and HOBHOUSE are sitting with two GREEK SERVANTS, one very large, one small both are middle-aged.

BYRON
They are my bodyguards, anyway I
couldn't desert them they don't
speak a word of English Thank
God.

He says something to them in Greek about HOBHOUSE which makes them smile.

BYRON (CONT'D)
The little one, Demetrius, is
very dangerous and would cut you
from ear to ear if I gave him a
nod, the big one's harmless, found
him in a fruit market in Athens
but he looks rather severe don't
you think?

LANDLORD
Would you gentlemen like to order
any lunch?

HOBHOUSE
Yes, please.

BYRON
Most certainly, do you have any
carrots?

LANDLORD
Yes, Sir.

24 CONTINUED:

24

BYRON

For all their civilization the Greek nation has no idea of cuisine, a piece of burnt sheep is considered the height of sophistication and they have barely heard of the vegetable. I'll have a plate of carrots with anything green and some water please.

(to HOBHOUSE)

I hope you've noticed how unfashionably thin I am.

HOBHOUSE smiles.

25 INT. BEDROOM NEWSTEAD -- DAY

25

A dark room with heavy dark furniture, dominated by a four poster bed. On it sits a woman in her late fifties with untidy black hair falling about her face. MRS BYRON, Catherine Gordon of Gight, as she was born, is huge. She is lying on top of the bed with an assortment of shawls and blankets draped over her.

MRS BYRON

(reading)

...For a long time I have been restricted to an entire vegetable diet, neither fish nor flesh coming within my regimen; so I expect a powerful stock of potatoes, greens and biscuit.

Mrs BYRON looks around her. No one. Then she calls at the top of her voice.

MRS BYRON (CONT'D)

Susan. Susan.

The shouting brings on a fit of coughing and unable to speak she picks up a cup that is beside the bed and flings it at the wall, smashing it.

26 EXT. NEWSTEAD -- DAY

26

The gothic house looks dark and unwelcoming, with the ruined abbey next to it.

MRS BYRON (O.S.)

Susan!

27 INT. HALL AND STAIRS NEWSTEAD -- DAY

27

A dark and gloomy looking hallway, this is the ancestral home of the BYRON family, there is little furniture and what there is appears large, dark and ugly. An old man JOE MURRAY the family BUTLER is asleep on a chair. MRS BYRON's voice is audible from the upper level.

28 INT. LANDING, NEWSTEAD -- DAY 28

Still under a mound of shawls the large shape of MRS BYRON making her way onto the landing.

MRS BYRON

Susan!

29 INT. HALL AND STAIRS NEWSTEAD -- DAY 29

The sound of a door slamming and SUSAN, nineteen, pretty, with dark hair and a Welsh accent appears, struggling to neaten her appearance.

SUSAN

Yes m'lady. Coming m'lady.

MRS BYRON

Get up here! And find Robert and Fletcher. His Lordship is coming home.

There is another fit of coughing and a thump as MRS BYRON falls over. SUSAN runs towards the stairs.

SUSAN

Robbie, Robbie come quick.

From behind her young servant ROBERT RUSHTON, 22, appears, he look a little disheveled as well and runs after SUSAN.

30 INT. LANDING, NEWSTEAD -- DAY 30

MRS BYRON lies heaving and collapsed.

MRS BYRON

(to herself)

Stop yelling, you stupid Girl.

She coughs again.

31 INT. REDDISH HOTEL, LONDON -- DAY 31

BYRON dressed in an exotically embroidered coat from Turkey is unpacking his treasures watched by HOBHOUSE (24) and another friend DALLAS (25), a slightly overexcited cousin. The room is filled with exotic items, pictures, an embroidered cloak, swords from Spain and a Scimitar from Turkey.

BYRON

I am going to decorate each room in the house after a different country, the bedroom of course will be Turkish, these are all from Spain and shall go in the drawing room and everything from Athens is for the Library.

(MORE)

31 CONTINUED:

31

BYRON (CONT'D)

Look at these I dug them up myself
near the Parthenon, what do you
think?

(holding up two
human skulls)

Warriors, murderers or
philosophers? I think they may
be too small for philosophers.

DALLAS

(holding up a
tortoise)

What do they live on?

BYRON

Vegetables and water. Same as me.

HOBHOUSE picks up a small grey bottle.

HOBHOUSE

(picking up a phial)

More perfume I suppose?

He takes the top off and sniffs. BYRON snatches it away
from him.

BYRON

Hemlock, dear Hobby. For when
all else fails and it is time to
make an exit with dignity,
surrounded by a few adoring
admirers. I understand that you
might be needing some yourself.

(teasing)

What is it? Twelve copies of
your book sold, and six of those
to your mother?

HOBHOUSE is embarrassed.

BYRON (CONT'D)

Don't worry, you'll have no
competition from me I didn't even
keep a journal, after you deserted
me. My conduct was too filthy to
bear description.

DALLAS

Too busy writing poetry.

BYRON

I wrote a little satire. I've
called it 'Hints from Horace'.
Quite funny I think. Dallas hates
it but is too polite to tell me
to my face.

31 CONTINUED: (2)

31

DALLAS

No my Lord, I do not hate it.

HOBHOUSE who has been rummaging in the items on the bed picks up some manuscript pages.

HOBHOUSE

What's this?

BYRON

Nothing, that's mine.

He grabs at the pages but HOBHOUSE evades him.

HOBHOUSE

(reading)

"Maidens like moths are ever caught
by glare, /And Mammon wins his
way where Seraphs might despair".
Very satirical.

BYRON

(taking it back)

It's a silly thing written to
amuse myself.

DALLAS picks up another page.

DALLAS

(reading)

"Ah Vice! How soft are thy
voluptuous ways! While boyish
blood is mantling who can 'scape,
The fascination of thy magic gaze".
Your autobiography I suppose.

BYRON

Give that back.

He snatches the pages and starts to gather them up.

DALLAS

As your literary advisor I must
read everything.

He grabs at the papers. There is a knock at the door.
HOBHOUSE opens it. RUSHTON the page from Newstead is
there.

BYRON

Robbie, what are you doing here?
I told her I would be up as soon
as my affairs were settled in
London.

RUSHTON

The doctor told me to come and
fetch you at once.