Abstract — This essay provides an analysis of a long-forgotten novel about Lord Byron, The Missolonghi Manuscript (1968), written by the American author Frederic Prokosch (1906-1989). Born in a cosmopolitan and well-educated family in Madison, Wisconsin, Prokosch travelled widely for much of his life through Europe, writing books that aroused the admiration of Thomas Mann, Albert Camus, Thornton Wilder and of his long-dated friend Gore Vidal. At first sight a reconstruction of the lost memoirs of Lord Byron, The Missolonghi Manuscript actually is, in his author’s words, ‘a study of the romantic artist’. As a consequence, the novel seems to transcend Byron’s life involving reflections on the way Romantic art changed the history of ideas. Focusing on the reasons that led Prokosch to write his imaginary portrait of the ‘Wicked Lord’ and examining the modalities of his literary depiction of Byron, this work explores how history and biography blend together in The Missolonghi Manuscript in order to depict the Zeitgeist of the Romantic Era. Finally, this essay aims to revaluate the position of Frederic Prokosch in XX century literature, stressing the importance of The Missolonghi Manuscript as a precursor to that kind of postmodernist historical fiction notably practised by Anthony Burgess, A.S Byatt and Umberto Eco.

Keywords: Frederic Prokosch, Lord Byron, The Missolonghi Manuscript, Romanticism, imaginary portrait