

Now the room is ahiss. The instrument
Withdraws its tentacle.
But the spawn percolate in my heart . . .

with Lowell's

I nursed my last clear breath of oxygen,
there, waiting for the chandelier to fall,
tentacles clawing for my jugular.¹³

What function does poetry serve for the poet? Lowell came to question whether his method of composition was "a death-rope or a lifeline". Jeremy Reed sees it as unquestion-

¹³ "Words Heard by Accident, Over the Phone", in Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems*, p. 202; Robert Lowell, "The Severed Head", quoted by Jeremy Reed in *Madness the Price of Poetry*, p. 101.

¹⁴ See Linda Wagner-Martin, *Sylvia Plath: A Biography*, p. 55.

¹⁵ A. Alvarez, *The Savage God* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), p. 32.

ably the latter, but in Plath's case the answer is not so clear. Although writing appeared to make her happy—transforming hurt and beauty into words, as she put it in her Summer 1950 journal¹⁴—it may also have contributed to her death. For artistic expression, as A. Alvarez has pointed out, is not always therapeutic; the artist does not necessarily enjoy some kind of cathartic relief:

"Instead, by some perverse logic of creation, the act of formal expression may simply make the dredged-up material more readily available to him. The result of handling it in his work may well be that he finds himself living it out."¹⁵

Jeremy Reed concludes that a poet's only biographer is his double: "It is what happens in the dark corners, in the hours when one is unrestrainably alone, that comprises the record of one's life." Sylvia Plath has left us a graphic account of those dark places.

Lord Byron: Dramaturg

"The Arbiter of Others' Fate"—By RICHARD LANSDOWN



ON 11 MAY 1815, one friend of Lord Byron's, Douglas Kinnaird, wrote to another, John Cam Hobhouse, then in Paris. "I write this", Kinnaird began, "to anticipate your gratulatory epistle on my elevation into the Committee of management of a *real play house*—your cautious disposition will dispose you to cry out against the folly of exposing myself to be shot at by every ill-natur'd fellow that visits London for the Holydays—What will you say to me for drawing our friend Byron into the same situation? Scarcely out of his Hebrew scrape¹ 'ere I get him well into this—Well Sir, the Lord is delighted with his office, and will, I think, fill it nobly—I am not sure that he feels the full weight of the responsibility as much as I do—But there was no alternative between letting the Theatre and coming forward boldly to serve and I hope *preserve* it—If you do not forthwith write a play for us, we fully expect you will send

us over any light French after-pieces, and operas (new ones) which wd do well to translate—if you stay in Paris, you might employ a leisure hour of your evening in visiting the Theatres with such a view."²

Byron and Kinnaird had become members of the management subcommittee of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, on which subcommittee Byron was to serve until the scandal surrounding his separation from his wife drove him out of England for ever. Relatively little is known about Byron's brief period of service in the English theatre. The minutes that this subcommittee must surely have kept (along with other records of Drury Lane) appear to have been lost during the Blitz, but the outline of its function—and of Byron's function within it—can be traced in published sources like Leslie Marchand's biography of the poet, and his monumental edition of Byron's letters.³ In the course of my own researches into Byron's historical dramas, however, I have found some additional material at the British Library, and also in the Byron archive at the offices of John Murray, Publishers, of Albemarle Street ("Drury Lane" folder). Through the letters Byron received and kept, we can glimpse the theatrical world of the Regency and the elements of which it was composed. In the main, it must be said, those elements were venality and self-delusion.

The Theatre Royal had burned down in February 1809, and its owner, the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, had proved incapable of rebuilding it. That responsibility was eventually undertaken by a joint-stock company—the first in English theatre—under the chairmanship of the Whig politician and brewer Samuel Whitbread II. The Drury Lane

¹ Byron's collection of poems, *Hebrew Melodies*, had been published in April, with Kinnaird's encouragement.

² The Broughton Papers. British Library Additional MS, 47224 ff. 3-4.

³ Leslie Marchand, ed., *Byron's Letters and Journals*, 12 vols (John Murray, 1973-82); *Byron: A Portrait* (John Murray, 1971).

Company of Proprietors, founded in June 1810, went on to raise £300,000 by an issue of shares, and reopened the theatre on the night of 10 October 1812.⁴ Byron wrote a rather stilted poetical "Address" to mark the occasion.

That this great theatre should be run along joint-stock lines, with a management subcommittee reporting to a main committee of proprietors, was an unfamiliar enough idea in Regency London. That both these committees, and the enterprise as a whole, should have a distinctly Whiggish political cast, attracted a fair amount of adverse comment in the newspapers, broadsheets, and cartoons of the day. Whitbread and his supporters on the main committee spoke openly—in reports published by the Company—of Drury Lane as a "*National* object" and as a "*National* theatre". By this they meant a theatre in which the English dramatic heritage would be protected against both the "German" melodramas of Kotzebue *et al.*, and the excesses of the unlicensed, "illegitimate" stage: child actors, performing dogs, elephants, horses, etc., etc. However, in so far as the Theatre promulgated these ideas, and sought to associate its cultural refinement with a Whig Party hungry for political advantage, it brought upon itself the unfriendly attention of Party critics. Tory journalists and cartoonists tended either to attribute cultural pretensions to Whitbread and his colleagues, which they then proceeded to deflate, or to allow the accusation to gather weight that Whitbread planned, through his "national theatre", to inculcate Bonapartism and to criticise the government during a period of crisis. The main committee's published report of 11 April 1812 spoke of "open hostility" and "secret enmity" being shown towards the concern.

This hostility might not have mattered, except that Whitbread's Drury Lane proved to be a commercial failure. Takings for the 1812-13 season were £80,000; those for 1817-18 were £43,000. Eventually, in 1819, the management subcommittee resigned, and the theatre was leased to the successful actor-manager Robert Elliston. Eight years later, Elliston himself went bankrupt.

BACK IN 1815, however, the committee system still had many supporters, though Whitbread was no longer one of them. It was he who had suggested, at a general meeting held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on 3 May of that year, that Drury Lane be leased out to a professional manager; and in response to this suggestion Douglas Kinnaird acted (as he felt) to save the Theatre as a national concern. A week later, on 10 May, a further meeting was held to debate Whitbread's proposition. Kinnaird

⁴ Together with Covent Garden, Drury Lane had held a monopoly over conventional dramatic representation in London since the Restoration in 1660. This monopoly was eventually abolished in 1843.

⁵ A Collection of Memoranda, Documents, Playbills, Newspaper Cuttings, etc. Relating to Drury Lane Theatre . . . arranged by James Winston. Box for 1815-16. British Library.

⁶ A Collection of Cuttings from Newspapers and Periodicals Relating to Lord Byron 1812-1880, ed. Thomas J. Wise. British Library.

⁷ Quoted by Malcolm Elwin, *Lord Byron's Wife* (1962), p. 318.

opposed what he called this "sordid speculation". Furthermore, Kinnaird,

" . . . adverting to a change in the management, stated, that he was authorised to name a Noble Lord as willing to be one of the [Sub-] Committee. The talent and great genius of Lord Byron made him peculiarly fit for the concern, and no doubt could be entertained by the subscribers that the assistance of the Noble Lord would be a tower of strength."⁵

Whitbread, thoroughly out-manoeuvred, was forced to agree. He suggested that Byron, Kinnaird, and the Whig MP Peter Moore form the nucleus of the new management subcommittee, which was elected yearly, and consisted of five members. Though one Sir Thomas Turton doggedly insisted that the theatre be leased—and supported the "gratifying of the public taste by the introduction of quadrupeds" if need be—the motion was carried by an overwhelming majority.

One newspaper at least, was pleased with Byron's appointment, and clearly sympathetic to Kinnaird's point of view. *The Champion* for Sunday, 14 May 1815, reported his election as follows:

"That which has been conceded to the Theatre [i.e. monopoly status], whether wisely or not, has been afforded for the sake of supporting a rational and elegant amusement, and to enable the managers to resist the demands of vulgarity or popular caprice, and to consult only the interests of good taste, and the reputation of the country."

The election of Byron to the subcommittee, the paper felt, would guarantee the maintenance of these high standards:

"The report that Lord Byron may be concerned, is a very pleasant one, for his Lordship's literary reputation is a pledge to the public, that literary talent would not be considered by him, as it is by others, quite subordinate to the talents of an instructor of animals, and the maker of fireworks."⁶

The idea of Byron defending the reputation of his country—if only its theatrical reputation—is a novel one, even to us, nearly 200 years after the event. A year after this report, Byron's reputation had taken on an entirely different colour. His wife, the former Isabella Milbanke—whom he had married on 2 January 1815—in fact disapproved of the Theatre from the very start. She wrote to her father on 15 September:

"Drury Lane opens on Saturday—I don't much like the concern, and I believe it is the general sentiment, as far as regards B's share of it. Lady Hardwicke told me it was only fit for *a six and eight penny man*, and it seems to involve a species of business and attendance which I did not at all foresee. In short it is the vocation of an *Acting* Manager—to superintend candle-snuffers, lecture performers, &c &c."⁷

Byron had many reasons, not altogether of the best kind, for accepting his friend's suggestion that he serve at Drury Lane. Some of those reasons may have been whimsical ones, but it is inconceivable—given the intensity of public conten-

tion over the direction of the Theatre, and Byron's association with some of those involved in its management—that Byron did not know that he was engaging himself with a financially and politically embattled institution. He must have known, too, that he was joining a subcommittee which had been reorganised precisely to prevent a sliding-away on the part of the management from the cultural, quasi-ideological ambitions it had initially proclaimed for itself. He was being asked not only to serve the theatre but, in Kinnaird's words, to "preserve it".

BYRON'S PRIMARY FUNCTION at Drury Lane was to encourage the writing and submission of new dramas. "How I wish", Mrs Siddons had once written, "that Somebody would write two or three good tragedies some wet afternoon."⁸ If quantity had been any substitute for quality, she need not have worried. Drury Lane had a huge stock of playscripts, despite the conflagration of 1809: 176 were received at the theatre in the 1813-14 season alone. Byron—"in person and by proxy"—dutifully waded through nearly 500 such scripts. "I do not think", he wrote, "of those which I saw—there was one which could be conscientiously tolerated."

Byron's colleagues also had it in mind that he might persuade men like Thomas Campbell, Samuel Rogers, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Sir Walter Scott, and Thomas Moore to write for the theatre. He was the poet, after all. These too, the new member tried; but to no avail.

Finally, there were the new submissions, some of which, much to Byron's embarrassment, were delivered by hand:

"Then the Scenes I had to go through!—the authors—and the authoresses—the Milliners—the wild Irishmen—the people from Brighton—from Blackwell—from Chatham—from Cheltenham—from Dublin—from Dundee—who came in upon me!—to all of whom it was proper to give a civil answer—and a hearing—and a reading. . . ."

Byron sent the most awkward and persistent cases "up to Douglas Kinnaird", who was "sufficiently ready with a negative" and relieved Byron of the task. The scripts kept arriving for all that; Sir James Bland Burges, Lady Byron's uncle by marriage, sent in "four tragedies and a farce", one or all of which Byron thought acceptable, but could not persuade the subcommittee to stage.⁹ Thomas Sheldrake, a quack whom Byron had consulted about his lame foot, hoped, perhaps mistakenly, that his medical exertions on Byron's behalf might lead him to look kindly on a friend's play—the script was lost when Byron left England in 1816.¹⁰

On 20 July 1815, a writer "in the mystery of anonymous garb" (but hailing from Bath, according to the stamp) sent in a play "founded on Beaumont and Fletcher's *Island Prin-*

cess" which had the advantage, not only of being "in strict unison with the rules of the Drama", but also of requiring "no expensive scenery or decorations", as the "Indian paraphernalia" required for the production was "already to be found in the Theatre". The same author spoke, too, of the "consolation" due to "the insulted Muse"—insulted, that is, by neglect. Under "the fostering genius and patronage of your Lordship", he felt, "the candidates for public favour who can write regular Dramas are sure of a just decision"—which is probably what Byron gave him.

In another play Byron received, "the unities could not fail to be observed for the protagonist was chained by the leg to a pillar during the chief part of the performance". The play sounds no more ridiculous than the Regency average: at the conclusion, the would-be usurper of a peaceful kingdom makes one last attempt, during a royal visit to his cell, to stab the king with a knife; "but, finding himself at the end of his tether [i.e. his chain], he sticks it into his own carcass, and dies, saying he has fulfilled a prophecy".¹¹

On 30 August 1815, W. Lingham, writing from Glasgow, sent another play—already performed at Edinburgh—for Byron's consideration. Should Byron find this "successful effort of my pen . . . worthy for Drury's boards", the author would thank him "to recommend it for representation". Needless to say, the play could be "brought out at very little expence"—which is surprising, for it was clearly not as simple as an adaptation from Beaumont & Fletcher: "The Procession in honor of the Woollen Manufactory" which constituted the climax of the production, "produced the happiest effect here—a similar procession was never attempted in Britain", the author concluded smugly.

BYRON'S FAME as a poet, it was hoped, would sway diffident playwrights in his favour. His fame attracted more than amateur dramatists, however. Persons of every kind, connected with Drury Lane or not, wrote to him with their suggestions, applications, appeals and demands for justice. Letter after letter makes reference to Byron's "kind disposition" and his "generous heart", or flatters him with "knowing something more of the drama, than a mere Mussulman". He was clearly a more attractive proposition where such correspondence was concerned than Peter Moore, for example, or Lord Essex, another member of the subcommittee. On 14 June 1815, one Ralph Wewitzer sent Byron a three-page letter concerning the historical solecisms and lapses of "continuity" which Drury Lane's haphazard stocks of costumes and scenery often visited on productions at the theatre.¹² Wewitzer wrote about an incongruity that must have been common at the time:

"The different parts [of the set] . . . do not always correspond; the side wings being sometimes inapplicable to the body of the scene. The same inaccuracy not unfrequently occurs in respect to the decorations, furniture, utensils &c and above all the characteristic dresses of the Performers, especially in inferior parts of an historical play."

The remedy Wewitzer proposed for this problem was his "Chronological Statement" of "architecture, decorations,

⁸ Quoted by Linda Kelly, *The Kemble Era* (1980), p. 116.

⁹ *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. IX, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰ Ernest J. Lovell, ed., *His Very Voice and Self: Collected Conversations of Lord Byron* (1954), p. 18.

¹¹ Murray MSS: Anon. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. IX, p. 36; vol. IV, p. 323.

¹² Murray MSS: Lingham, Cazenove, Holland, Wewitzer.

and costume”, which listed plays by period and catalogued relevant illustrations of stage furnishing to prevent anachronisms. It was one of those schemes that is, at one and the same time, very sensible and totally impracticable, for all the author’s claims that it was “material to the dignified management of our great National Theatre”. Mr Wewitzer was ahead of his time. But the subcommittee on the other hand, as Byron well knew, had larger problems on its hands than those of continuity.

AT SOME TIME in July 1815, James Cazenove—whom Byron had met (and financially assisted) in Athens in 1811, when Cazenove and his brother were on the run from Napoleon—wrote to the new subcommittee member, asking for his help. A friend of his, a Miss Mortimer, was “very desirous of making some advantageous use of her vocal talents” and of taking part in “the future success of Drury Lane Theatre”. Miss Mortimer, Cazenove wrote:

“... feels herself quite confident of success, as during the last seven or eight years she has been acting Prima Donna at all the best theatres of Italy, and lastly at Palermo.”

Byron replied on 23 July:

“On receiving your letter I immediately mentioned Miss M. to the Managers & the Committee—but I am sorry to say that according to the present arrangements for the season there will be no vacant engagement.”¹³

Cazenove had written from Old Broad Street in the City, as one gentleman asking a favour of another. Another of Byron’s correspondents, Jane Scott, lived at 25 Old Compton Street in Soho, and took an altogether humbler line. Three of Mrs Scott’s five daughters had been employed at Drury Lane, on Whitbread’s recommendation, for the past three seasons: “Two of them were dancers the other was a Singer.” Now, however, Whitbread was dead, having committed suicide on 6 July 1815:

“I have just received their discharge from Mr Ward [secretary at Drury Lane] wherein he mentions there is such a considerable reduction made in the Theatre that it will not be in the power of the Committee to engage my daughters for the ensuing season.”

The poor widow (“My husband was a Captain in the 83rd Regiment”) was in desperate straits, and concluded her letter with barely concealed and unrehearsed hysteria:

“For Heavens sake My Lord and have them reinstated or they will inevitably Perish and great will be your reward here and hereafter will ever be the Prayers of the most unfortunate but Grateful family on Earth. . . .”

On 26 July Byron wrote to secretary Ward:

“I have received a letter from a Mrs. Scott written in very

great apparent distress at the dismissal of her daughters in ye course of our late retrenchments.—Her case seems a hard one. . . . Of this person and her family I know nothing except from her letter—nor have I any motive in this application in their favour. . . . I wish them to be replaced if it can be done without much inconvenience—and is not contrary to the will of my colleagues. . . .”

Ward replied the following day:

“I have received your Lordships note in favor of the Miss Scotts. The Sub Committee are to meet tomorrow afternoon at two when I will lay it before them.—I hope your Lordship may find it convenient to attend. The causes of their dismissal were inattention & inefficiency.”¹⁴

Most of the contents of Byron’s theatrical mail-bag were neither so unintentionally amusing as Mr Wewitzer’s letter nor so sad as Mrs Scott’s. Many were appeals for employment in which the writer simply put his or her (mostly her) case in the most deserving or attractive light. All struggled with their bashfulness, or at length overcame their diffidence, as did the almost-anonymous “E. L.”, who had been “encourag’d”—as had so many others—by Byron’s “general Character for goodness of heart and Liberality of mind”. She wrote on 22 September 1815:

“I am my Lord a very *young* Female, and unfortunately an Orphan, a Widow, and a Mother, who having from infancy an inclination and some talents for the Stage which if Honour’d by your approbation might be the means of affording an Independence for myself and

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¹³ Murray MS: Cazenove. *Byron’s Letters and Journals*, vol. IV, p. 305.

¹⁴ Murray MS: Scott. *Byron’s Letters and Journals*, vol. IV, p. 306. Murray MS: Ward.

Infant. Trusting that in the Characters of Desdemona—Belvidera—Juliet—Mrs Haller &c—I could acquit myself to your satisfaction should your Lordship favour me with an answer you will have the goodness to address E. L. to the care of Mr Harker Wax Chandler Fetter Lane Holborn.”¹⁵

E. L.’s letter, coming as it does from a woman eager to stress both her youth and her lack of masculine “support”, raises some questions. Were the young actresses who aspired to the boards of Drury Lane expected (either by themselves, or by others) to grant sexual favours to the great and the good who might place them there? Byron was accused, wrongly, of having an affair with Mrs Mardyn, an actress at Drury Lane, though he *did* have an affair with another actress, Susan Boyce.¹⁶ Claire Clairmont—Mary Shelley’s stepsister, and mother of Byron’s illegitimate daughter Allegra—who was nothing if not ingenious, made her first approaches to Byron in March 1816, pretending to have ambitions for the stage. The evidence seems overwhelming: rumoured affairs, real affairs, sexual approaches disguised as professional ones, professional approaches garnished with sexual lures.

However, we should reflect very carefully on such evidence. The affair with Mrs Mardyn did not take place, and Susan Boyce was already a working actress at the theatre when her affair with Byron began. Nor did she make any professional gains from the liaison—quite the contrary. Equally, Claire Clairmont set out deliberately to capture Byron’s interest, and was prepared to adopt any tactic to that end. We should remember, too, that E. L.’s (to modern eyes) ambiguous advertisement of her youth and independence may not have appeared as such in the more paternalistic days of the Regency. E. L. might have thought her letter an appeal for protection, not an incitement to sexual interest. Then again, she might not. In either case, E. L.’s letter suggests the kinds of tortuous—and possibly dangerous—manoeuvre which young women with ideas of popular success were more or less forced to undertake in attracting the interest of those who might make those ideas a reality. *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.*

WHAT OF THE PLAYS themselves? If Byron could not find new dramas among either the professional or the amateur classes of playwright, what was presented at Drury Lane between 9 September 1815, when the season began, and 26 April 1816, when Byron left the country? Disappointed in his researches, Byron had resorted to writing a play himself. *Werner* was started at some point in the autumn of 1815, abandoned, and eventually completed years later in the winter of 1821-22. Byron later suggested that *Werner* had been set aside because “Lady Byron’s farce [that is to say, her leaving him and suing for

a separation] put it out of my head for the time of her representation”. This may be true, but the separation also coincided with the arrival of *Bertram*, a tragedy by the impoverished Reverend Charles Robert Maturin, best known today for his gothic novel *Melmoth the Wanderer*. Byron seized on the play eagerly, stopped work on *Werner*, and presented *Bertram* to his colleagues on the subcommittee. They announced themselves “quite as ready and willing” as Byron was to see the play presented.¹⁷

Maturin’s melodrama was first performed on 9 May 1816, and was a very palpable hit. It ran for 22 nights, and the text of the play went through seven editions—with John Murray, needless to say—before the end of the year. But other productions of the season ran, on average, for four nights apiece, and many were performed only once. A still more depressing statistic is the fact that *Bertram* was the only new play produced that season. Most of the productions were well past retirement age. Nineteen of the 35 plays performed between September and April were straightforward comedies, ranging from George Farquhar’s *The Recruiting Officer*, William Congreve’s *Love for Love*, and a polite adaptation of William Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* called *The Country Girl*, to Mrs Inchbald’s *Lovers’ Vows* (which was itself adapted from Kotzebue and was to be of such importance in *Mansfield Park*) and George Colman the younger’s *John Bull* and *The Heir at Law*. Mrs Centlivre’s *The Wonder* had been written in 1714, and her *The Busy Body* in 1709. Isaac Bickerstaffe’s *Love in a Village* dated from 1762, Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *A Trip to Scarborough* from 1777, and Richard Cumberland’s *The West Indian* from 1771. An adaptation of Molière’s *Tartuffe* (called, unimaginatively, *The Hypocrite*) had been written in 1768. Nor were the tragedies or “serious” plays any fresher: Edward Young’s reworking of *Othello—The Revenge*—dated from 1721; George Lillo’s *The London Merchant* from 1731; Nicholas Rowe’s *Tamerlane* from 1702. Philip Massinger’s *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* was revived, as was his *The Duke of Milan*. Monk Lewis’s *The Castle Spectre* was a mere stripling, being only eighteen years old in 1815.

Any space intervening between these tried-and-tested pieces was taken up with Shakespeare who, along with Massinger, provided Drury Lane’s star attraction, Edmund Kean, with roles in which he could display his talents. Kean’s first performance of the season was on 16 October, in *Richard III*. He then tore through *Othello*, *Richard II*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*—before the end of the month. This was no mean achievement, even in a repertory theatre such as Drury Lane. The standard of these productions can only be guessed at.

One new play—albeit a successful one—was all Byron could find for the subcommittee’s “national theatre”. (In fact he had found two; the other, *Ivan*, was written by “that wretched leper of literature—that *Itch* of Scribbling personified”, William Sotheby.¹⁸ Unfortunately, Sotheby withdrew his drama in a fit of pique, in the spring of 1816.) The rest of the season had been cobbled together from the most antique specimens of the English stage.

It must have been with some relief that Byron relinquished his responsibilities to the Theatre Royal. But he never resigned from the subcommittee, and remained—in

¹⁵ Murray MS: E. L.

¹⁶ Her story is told, and her letters to Byron are reprinted in George Paston’s and Peter Quennell’s *To Lord Byron* (1939).

¹⁷ *Byron’s Letters and Journals*, vol. VIII, p. 237; vol. V, p. 201.

¹⁸ *Byron’s Letters and Journals*, vol. VI, p. 33.

theory at least—a member of it until a new subcommittee was elected in November 1816. By that time the “national theatre” enterprise, under this form of management, had been utterly discredited. In October a newspaper decided that the members selected so far had been

“. . . so far elevated from the ordinary occupations of life, as to deprive them of the correct means of judging concerning the necessary qualifications for it. Poetic genius or senatorial eloquence are but ill-fitted to enforce the discipline of a stage or a green-room, and are in these places as far removed from their appropriate sphere of action, as the manager of a Theatre would be at a loss in the cabinet.”

Byron, the journalist continued, “never once seems to have troubled himself about the matter, but has pursued and is still pursuing his studies and his amusements on the Continent”.¹⁹

¹⁹ Newspaper clipping, provenance unknown, in A Collection of Memoranda, Documents, Playbills, Newspaper Cuttings, etc. Relating to Drury Lane Theatre . . . arranged by James Winston. Box for 1815-16. British Library.

This is a rather harsh judgment. Byron had used his best efforts to obtain plays for the Theatre, and carried out as well as he could the thankless task of reading and, if need be, rejecting such plays. Equally, he appears to have handled enquiries and complaints sent to him personally with sympathy and tact. Nor did he put Drury Lane out of mind on finally leaving England on 26 April 1816. He enquired about the Theatre’s progress repeatedly from Switzerland and from Venice; and in time, when he came to write his own dramas, memories of Drury Lane were very much with him. “I have had no view to the stage”, he wrote, disingenuously, in his preface to *Marino Faliero* (1820), “. . . in its present state it is, perhaps, not a very exalted object of ambition; besides I have been too much behind the scenes to have thought it so at any time.”

This, the modern literary historian might decide, amounts to the Regency stage exerting a negative influence over Byron’s plays. A negative influence, however, is not the same as no influence at all, and a series of experiences as apparently bizarre and inconsequential as those I have described may well have contributed to that austere and uncompromising notion of the theatre that we find at work in Byron’s unjustly neglected historical plays.

Two Historians

Arnold Toynbee & Lewis Namier—By MAX BELOFF



IT WAS IN 1920 that Lewis Namier lent Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* to Arnold Toynbee, and thus helped to crystallise in Toynbee’s mind the theme of what was to become his life’s work, *The Study of History*, of which he sketched the first outlines in 1921. And it is to the tracing of such influences upon Toynbee’s intellectual development as well as the ramifications of Toynbee’s fraught private and

domestic life (explaining his constant hunger for praise and money) that the eminent American historian W. H. McNeill has devoted his utterly absorbing biography.¹

Toynbee and Namier had been colleagues in the British delegation to the Paris Peace Conference when Toynbee—

not yet convinced (as he was to become) of the irrelevance of Judaism, and not having yet developed the strong anti-Zionism of his subsequent years (culminating as we now learn in the sending of good wishes to a Syrian general at the time of the Yom Kippur war)—could join with Namier in advocating the cause of the Jewish National Home. The divergence in their subsequent paths does not seem to have given Toynbee any feeling of antipathy towards Namier—a common allegiance to Balliol College, Oxford, may have overcome the latent anti-Semitism into which Toynbee’s anti-Zionism, as with other anti-Zionists, seems sometimes to have overflowed.

Indeed, Toynbee was to publish a rather affectionate tribute—“Sir Lewis Namier”, in *Acquaintances* (1967)—emphasising his indebtedness to the young Namier for being made aware of Eastern Europe. Toynbee also gives an account of the transfer of Namier’s allegiance, from strong support of Poland’s claims, to Zionism and a strongly anti-Polish stance during the 1919 Peace Conference,² and reveals that Namier broke off all relations with him over the treatment of Palestine in the *Chatham House Survey* in the 1929-32 period, but was then reconciled.

At the same time as Professor McNeill’s book there also appears a new study of Lewis Namier by Professor Linda Colley, once of Cambridge and now of Yale.³ Published in Weidenfeld’s “Historians on Historians” series, the book has no pretensions to being a full biography, but is mainly and

¹ *Arnold J. Toynbee*. By W. H. McNEILL. Oxford University Press, £24.95.

² This is further documented in Sir James Headlam-Morley, *A Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919*, edited by Agnes Headlam-Morley (Methuen, 1972).

³ *Lewis Namier*. By LINDA COLLEY. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £14.95, paper £5.95.