

Byron's Attempts to Reform English Stage in his Historical Dramas

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I

The English Romantic Age has properly been said to be one of the most prosperous and most productive age of the poetry throughout the long history of English literature. Until recently, therefore, most writers of the history of English literature have not paid special attention to the dramas of the age, with the exception of mentioning briefly to the melodramas as a sort of vulgar entertainment on the stage and the closet dramas only for the readers. The dramas composed by the great English Romantic poets, for example, *The Borderers* by Wordsworth, *Remorse* by Coleridge, *Manfred* and *Cain* by Byron, *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci* by Shelley, and *Otho the Great* by Keats have been defined as 'closet drama' (lese-drama) which are written for the reader in the closet not for the audience in the theatre. They have been read as literary works. Their inappropriateness for the stage might probably come from their subjective style of writing the works by confessing themselves, whereas the play on the stage should be produced objectively enough to attract a variety of audience on the spot. Here exists an unavoidable conflict between the subjective way of writing which is based on the spontaneous creativity of the author and the objective way of producing which depends upon the popularity of the audience.

Among the five Romantic poets mentioned above, it is evident that Byron

had a greatest and longest interest in drama. His interest in drama seems to have started at the age of thirteen when he wrote a play called "Ulric and Ilvina" under a strong impression of Sophia Lee's *The German's Tale*. The play would be repeatedly revised and completed at last in 1822 under the title of *Werner*. In Harrow school days, Byron was well-known for his oratorical skill; for example, King Lear's speech to the storm and Zang's speech over the body of Alanzo from Edward Young's tragedy *The Revenge*. When he was a Cambridge University student, he enjoyed acting in the Southwell amateur theatricals. His letters and journals reveal a continuing interest in drama. His acquaintance with actors and actresses, his composition of the prologue for the reopening of Drury Lane at the invitation of Lord Holland,⁽¹⁾ his appointment to the Sub-Committee of Management of Drury Lane in 1815 gave him an ample opportunity to notice the actual circumstances and the deplorable state of the theatre. Byron's ideas of drama had been formed by these experiences and then expressed in his eight dramas: *Manfred* (1816), *Marino Faliero* (1820), *Sardanapalus* (1821), *The Two Foscari* (1821), *Cain* (1821), *Heaven and Earth* [unfinished] (1821), *Werner* (1822), and *The Deformed Transformed* [unfinished] (1822). Of these eight dramas Byron's earnest attempt to reform the deplorable state of English theatres on the basis of neoclassical ideas can be most symbolically seen in the historical dramas: *Marino Faliero*, *Sardanapalus*, and *The Two Foscari*. The purpose of this paper is to elucidate his ideas of reforming English drama in his three historical dramas.

II

To begin with, it is necessary for us to examine concretely the deplorable state of the English theatre which Byron was eager to reform.

Nobody can deny that early nineteenth century drama was generally in a

deplorable condition.⁽²⁾ Bertrand Evans notes "the poor quality of all but a few plays,"⁽³⁾ and Allardyce Nicoll sees "a surprising lack of skill and originality, a sterile sameness which speaks of an age of decay."⁽⁴⁾ An educated contemporary, Henry Crabb Robinson, laments the situation in a diary entry for March 22, 1814: he "accompanied A. Taylor to the theatre, and heard some miserable Acting in a miserable situation in a miserable theatre."⁽⁵⁾ By 1836 the situation seemed so hopeless to William Charles Macready, probably the best actor of the age, that he was considering a move to America.⁽⁶⁾

The causes of this dramatic degeneration are also generally agreed upon.⁽⁷⁾ Among them Nicoll lists the unsuitability of the Romantic subjectivity in the creation of drama, the star system in which all else is subordinated to the character of the star, the actor-managers who valued their roles to the exclusion of other considerations, the small remuneration to playwrights because of the near-bankruptcy of the theatres, the audience's demand for spectacle above subtle drama, and the increased size of the theatres which made subtle delineation of character nearly impossible.⁽⁸⁾ Of these several intertwined causes, the shift in taste and makeup of the audience by the beginning of the century has traditionally been considered the major cause. From the Restoration through the eighteenth century the drama had been witnessed primarily by the literary and social aristocracy, but with the widespread socio-economic changes at the turn of the century, the lower classes again began to patronize the theatre, and the theatre began in turn to cater to their tastes. Harold Child outlines this phenomenon:

Hitherto, to a very great extent, the theatre had been the amusement of educated classes only.... The nineteenth century saw the influx of the populace into the theatre. And the populace, though ready to have its taste improved, brought with it its love of sensational incident and of

broad humor.⁽⁹⁾

One major result of this patronage was the expansion of all three "legitimate" London theatres by 1812 to a size which made it difficult to see as well as to hear the actors. Consequently, the subtleties of facial expression and voice inflection were lost upon the majority of the audience, and successful drama had to depend mainly upon visual action and spectacular events. As early as 1810 *The Mirror of Taste and Dramatic Censor* printed the critical remarks of an anonymous London theatre-goer:

I was myself at the Haymarket theatre, with my wife and daughter. There was no listening to the play, and as to the conversation of our delectable company, it was so profligate, so loud, so knowing, and so beastly, that, out of delicacy to all the modest ears it assailed, I would have given the world to have been anywhere else. This I hinted to my wife; when one of the rakes, who was perhaps a haberdasher, and came in with an order, thought proper to take offence, and cried out to me, in a manner insufferably insolent, "Sir, I'll tell you what it is — If you will bring modest women into the flesh market, you must take the consequence." My answer was "I thank you, sir; I will do so:" and we quit-⁽¹⁰⁾ted the house.

Another witness of one of London patent theatre by German prince Pückler-Muskau is as follows:

The most striking thing to a foreigner in English theatres is the unheard-of coarseness and brutality of the audiences. The consequence of this is that the higher and more civilized classes go only to the Italian Opera,

and very rarely visit their national theatre. English freedom here degenerates into the rudest licence, and it is not uncommon in the midst of the most affecting part of a tragedy... to hear some coarse expression shouted from the galleries in a stentor voice. This is followed, according to the taste of the bystanders, either by loud laughter and approbation, or by the castigation and expulsion of the offender.... Such things happen not once, but sometimes twenty times, in the course of a performance, and amuse many of the audience more than that does. It is also no rarity for some one to throw the fragments of his 'goute', which do not always consist of orange-peels alone, without the smallest ceremony on the heads of the people in the pit, or to shoil them with singular dexterity into the boxes.⁽¹¹⁾

These remarks clearly tell us that the shift of the audience caused the degeneration of the morality in the theatre.

By 1813 a marked taste for pantomime had developed. After an evening at the theatre, Robinson makes the following diary entry for January 7 of that year:

The pantomime *Harlequin and Humpho* a very poor one. One excellent trick by which the clown is shot out of a Cannon and is fixed against the Window alone rises above common hackneyed artifices.⁽¹²⁾

To attract more theatre-goers, theatre-managers are willing to use more spectacular actions rather than meaningful and subtle dialogues. A few random examples will illustrate this change. Thomas Morton's *The Slave* (Cov-ent Garden, 1816) is an attack on the slave trade, written with all the fervour of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The following is one of the many dramatic moments

in the play:

Somerdyke: Her child! then we triumph — seize him!

[A slave seizes the child, and runs up a point of the rock, L.]

Move one step further, and you will see him buried in the waters — submit, or this instant is his last.

[Holding him up in the act of precipitating him.]

Zelinda: I do submit.

Gambia: Never [Gambia, who has concealed himself in the branches, snatches him up into the tree.] — Father, receive your child! [Throws the child across the stream.] they have him — he is safe! Ha! ha! ha!⁽¹³⁾

Here the stage directions tell all; the dialogue is superficial. Another similar dramatic moment is taken from James Sheridan Knowles's *William Tell* (Drury Lane, 1825), based on the life of the Swiss hero. Tell is about to shoot his arrow at the apple on his son's head:

[Tell bends his bow, and fixes the arrow — As he raises the bow to take aim, one of the spectators drops lifeless — Tell lowers the bow.]

Tell: Do you see?

Gesler: Away with him! — Go on!

[He raises the bow again, and when he has brought it to his eye, a woman shrieks, and falls fainting in the arms of another.]⁽¹⁴⁾

Clearly, where physical action usurps the place of meaningful dialogue, thus rendering a subtle depiction of character virtually impossible, characters tend

to separate sharply into those who are good and those who are bad. What results then is melodrama.

Moreover, the near-bankrupt London theatres apparently demanded more emphasis on the spectacular in an effort to attract a larger audience. Robinson's diary entry for December 6, 1823, illustrates the degeneracy of both theatre-manager and playwright:

Went to Drury Lane.... Then saw *The Cataract or Rajah's Daughter* — gorgeous scenery — but even that not in good taste — The author Moncrieff has printed the thing and with great naivete said "Mr. Elliston applied to me to write a piece in which I could introduce a cataract and live horses and I have done so."⁽¹⁵⁾

The exhibition of live animals on stage steadily increased. By 1836 a play such as the popular *Thalaba*, an adaptation by Edward Fitzball of Southey's mystical poem, exhibited as part of the cast a pair of Burmese bulls, some elephants, ostriches, and other animals borrowed from the Surrey Gardens. In 1838 the manager of Drury Lane, Alfred Bunn, famous for his quarrel with Macready, included in his play *Charlemagne* a circus rider with horses and a "Mr. Van Amburgh and his celebrated lions." Even the young Queen Victoria was so intrigued by the lions that she attended the play six times in six weeks.⁽¹⁶⁾ While *Charlemagne* was playing to a full house, Macready's production of *The Tempest* at Covent Garden was a financial failure, even though Macready had compromised with audience tastes to the extent of presenting an Ariel who with the aid of wires flitted about in the air while singing.⁽¹⁷⁾

Noting the degeneration of the theatre described above, one can easily understand why potentially respectable playwrights turned to the closet drama; for an author of ability and good taste, the successful production of his

play was in fact an insult. The only other avenue was to attempt, as Byron did for a time in his historical dramas, the seemingly impossible task of reforming the English stage.

III

It is during a fifteen-month period from April 9, 1820, to July 9, 1821, while Byron was residing in Count Guiccioli's palace at Ravenna, that Byron had composed three "regular" dramas — *Marino Faliero*, *Sardanapalus*, and *The Two Foscari* — apparently intended to reform the English theatre. He wrote to John Murray:

It appears to me that there is room for a different style of the drama — neither a servile following of the old drama — which is a grossly erroneous [sic] one — nor yet *too French* — like those who succeeded the older writers. — It appears to me that good English — and a severer approach to the rules — might combine something not dishonorable to our literature.⁽¹⁸⁾

Byron repeatedly asserted that his plays were never written for the stage, but he inconsistently prefaced these plays with scornful innuendos about the contemporary English stage and with praise for the neo-classical unities within which he moulded his historical plays. In the preface to *Sardanapalus* and *The Two Foscari*, he stressed his conformity to the unities:

The Author has in one instance attempted to preserve, and in the other to approach, the "unities;" conceiving that with any very distant departure from them, there may be poetry, but can be no drama. He is aware of the unpopularity of this notion in present English literature; but

it is not a system of his own, being merely an opinion, which, not very long ago, was the law of literature throughout the world, and is still so in the more civilised parts of it. But "nous avons change tout cela," and are reaping the advantages of the change. The writer is far from conceiving that any thing he can adduce by personal precept or example can at all approach his regular, or even irregular predecessors: he is merely giving a reason why he preferred the more regular formation of a structure, however feeble, to an entire abandonment of all rules whatsoever.⁽¹⁹⁾

Evidently Byron felt that the discipline imposed by the unities was precisely what the nineteenth century stage needed to regain respectability. In reality, Byron's criticism here leaps backward half a century to neo-classic theory before Kames, Johnson, and Coleridge had allowed a theatre audience the imaginative power to accept dramatic representations of much greater degrees of time and space. Byron's observation that the nineteenth century drama needed to discipline itself is perceptive, but the rigidity of his suggested cure may be a rather unreasonable extreme. His extreme inclination towards the neo-classic theory may be said to reflect his strong antipathy to romantic irregularity of the contemporary English drama.

Undoubtedly one of the reasons Byron so enthusiastically stressed the unities is that he had by that time become impressed with the tragedies of Count Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803), the famous Italian dramatist who in his personal pursuit of aristocratic pleasures was a kindred spirit to Byron. During his lifetime Alfieri wrote twenty-two tragedies severely modelled upon Greek and Roman, and especially Senecan, drama. Because his theory was influenced heavily by the French neo-classicists, his tragedies exhibit extreme simplicity in the sense that the *dramatis personae* are restricted to the essential characters and the action is limited to what furthers the development. The lan-

guage is terse and prosaic, and the unities govern the structure. An example is his popular *Myrrha*, adapted from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in 1784. There are actually only five characters — Cinyras, king of Cyprus; Cecriis, his queen; Myrrha, their daughter; Pereus, prince of Epirus and engaged to Myrrha; and Eurycleia, Myrrha's nurse. Set entirely at the palace in Cyprus, the play opens with dialogue about the problem: why is Myrrha unhappy on her wedding day? During most of the first three acts Myrrha's vacillation between a desire for marriage and a preference for breaking off the engagement reveals gradually that she really loves someone else. Suspecting the truth, Pereus expresses willingness to release her from her vows, but Myrrha promises "that no other man in all the world, / If he have not, shall ever have my hand."⁽²⁰⁾ Shortly after this interview the cause of Myrrha's frustration is revealed: Cecriis admits that her excessive pride in her daughter's beauty has brought down Venus's anger because Cecriis "dared deny to Venus ... / Her tributary incense":

I suffer'd the imprudent boast to fall,
That by the wondrous, celebrated beauty
Of Myrrha, now more votaries were drawn
From Asia and from Greece, than heretofore
Were e'er attracted to her sacred isle
By warm devotion to the Cyprian queen.⁽²¹⁾

The climactic scene occurs in the fourth act, shortly before the wedding ceremony is to begin, when Myrrha becomes deranged and reveals clearly her unhappiness. In despair Pereus rushes to his apartments and stabs himself, while Cinyras, as the fifth act begins, finally draws from Myrrha the revelation that he himself is the object of his daughter's unlawful love. In shame,

Myrrha stabs herself and dies in Eurycleia's arms while Cinyras and Cecris are overcome with despair. The entire action of the play encompasses only two or three hours.

As it deals with incest as a main theme, *Myrrha* offended many people, notably Schlegel,⁽²²⁾ but Byron praised it lavishly, calling it "the best worked-up, perhaps, of all Alfieri's tragedies."⁽²³⁾ Byron saw the play, on the night of August 11, 1819, and the next day he wrote to John Murray: "Last night I went to the representation of Alfieri's *Mirra* — the two last acts of which threw me into convulsions. I do not mean by that word — a lady's hysterics — but the agony of reluctant tears — and the choking shudder which I do not often undergo for fiction."⁽²⁴⁾ His feminine companion to the representation also describes:

Lord Byron took a strong interest in the representation, and it was evident that he was deeply affected. At length there came a point of the performance at which he could no longer restrain his emotions: — he burst into a flood of tears, and, his sobs preventing him from remaining any longer in the box, he rose and left the theatre. — I saw him similarly affected another time during a representation of Alfieri's *Philip*, at Ravenna.⁽²⁵⁾

Philip (1783) also centres around an incestuous relationship — the love affair of Carlos, son of Philip II of Spain by his first wife Mary, with Isabella, his step-mother and present queen. Upon discovery, the two stab themselves in true Senecan fashion.

The effect these plays had upon Byron is not entirely warranted by their dramatic merit. One recalls also Byron's earlier extravagant praise for Walpole's *Mysterious Mother*, a bad early Gothic play which recounts an affair be-

tween the Countess and her son Edmund, and the later unfortunate marriage of Edmund with Adeliza, who is eventually discovered to be the offspring of the earlier incest. However, whatever biographical implications one may draw from Byron's excessive emotion, it is obvious that he was very much impressed with the dramatic effectiveness of Alfieri's plays and that this fact undoubtedly influenced him later when he adopted Alfieri's theories of tragedy: "It has been my object to be as simple and severe as Alfieri — & I have broken down the *poetry* as nearly as I could to common language."⁽²⁶⁾

In addition to advocating compliance with the unities, Byron also stressed that a proper tragedy should be based on historical facts. "I want to be as near the truth — as the Drama can be,"⁽²⁷⁾ he writes Murray in reference to *Marino Faliero*. Based on the rebellion of the Doge of Venice against the stage in 1355, the play is "strictly historical, read the history — and judge."⁽²⁸⁾ To Murray Byron had earlier sent Marin Sanuto's account of Faliero, and he later asked Murray to append an account of the Doge to the next edition of the play, because he feared that the play was not clear to those who were not familiar with the history of the Doge.⁽²⁹⁾ In the preface to *Sardanapalus* and *The Two Foscari* Byron emphasized that these plays, too, contained an "historical foundation."⁽³⁰⁾ During the composition of *Sardanapalus*, Byron says, he

thought of nothing but Asiatic history. — The Venetian play too is rigidly historical. — My object has been to dramatize like the Greeks (a modest phrase!) striking passages of history, as they did of history & mythology. — You will find all this very *unlike* Shakespeare — and so much the better in one sense — for I look upon him to be the *worst* of models — though the most extraordinary of writers.⁽³¹⁾

Such adherence to the "truth" of history prohibits the playwright from distorting a character to emphasize emotions such as jealousy or love. Byron admits that in conceiving *Marino Faliero* he "was rather disposed to have made it turn on a jealousy.... But, perceiving no foundation for this in historical truth, and aware that jealousy is an exhausted passion in the drama, I have given it a more historical form."⁽³²⁾ In rejecting jealousy as an "exhausted passion" Byron was admittedly following the advice of Monk Lewis and Sir William Drummond.⁽³³⁾ Probably with the excesses of contemporary English drama in mind, Byron stated also that love was "*not the loftiest* theme for true tragedy"⁽³⁴⁾ and explained that in the case of *Marino Faliero* he had "attempted to make a play without love."⁽³⁵⁾ However, when *Sardanapalus* was in the planning stages, Teresa persuaded him to modify his theory: after a discussion with her on January 13, 1821, he concluded, "I must put more love into "Sardanapalus" than I intended."⁽³⁶⁾ Behind his too strong emphasis upon the historical truth and his excessive underestimation of love theme we can easily find his great esteem for simplicity and severity and '*suppressed* passions'⁽³⁷⁾ in accordance with the dramatic rules.

The Bowles-Byron controversy (1819-21) might be another incident which perhaps encouraged Byron's emphasis on the unities. The controversy was initiated by the Rev. William Bowles's attack on Pope's personal morality and the status of Pope's poetry.⁽³⁸⁾ In this controversy, as a whole, Byron defended not only Pope but also the eighteenth-century literary viewpoint, criticizing the Lake poets' school as well as W. L. Bowles. For example, repulsing Bowles' biased (or a little hysterical) adoration of 'nature', Byron recognizes the value of 'art' and appropriately attributes poetical beauty to the 'reciprocal' relation between 'art' and 'nature'. The primary relevance of this controversy to the plays is that it undoubtedly had the effect of keeping the neo-classic tenets very much in Byron's mind when he was forming his

theory of drama and beginning *Marino Faliero*. The following architecture metaphors he uses in the controversy rightly tell of his respect for the neo-classic tenets by contrast with the then romantic ideas:

The attempt of the poetical populace of the present day to obtain an ostracism against Pope is as easily accounted for as the Athenian's shell against Aristides; they are tired of hearing him always called 'the Just.' They are also fighting for life; for, if he maintains his station, they will reach their own — by falling. They have raised a mosque by the side of a Grecian temple of the purest architecture; and, more barbarous than the barbarians from whose practice I have borrowed the figure, they are not contended with their own grotesque edifice, unless they destroy the prior, and purely beautiful fabric which preceded, and which shames them and theirs for ever and ever. I shall be told that amongst those I *have* been (or it may be still *am*) conspicuous — true, and I am ashamed of it. I have been amongst the builders of this Babel, attended by a confusion of tongues, but never amongst the envious destroyers of the classic temple of our predecessor.⁽³⁹⁾

Byron compares the Lake poets including Bowles to 'the poetical populace of the present day' and 'the envious destroyers of the classic temple of our predecessors'. The Romantic theory (in which he admits he has unwillingly been absorbed) is expressed in 'a mosque' and 'grotesque edifice', and the neo-classic theory is described as 'a Grecian temple of the purest architecture' and 'purely beautiful fabric'. It is very easy for us to understand that he had been under the decisive influence of the neo-classic theory in those days.

Now we need to determine if Byron's historical dramas are to be evaluated as stage plays. His letters and the prefaces to the plays protest repeatedly

and strenuously that they are not for the stage but for 'the mental theatre of the reader'⁽⁴⁰⁾. For example, he writes to Murray that *Marino Faliero* "never was intended nor written with any view to the Stage. — I have said so in the preface too. — It is too long — and too regular for your stage. — The persons too few — and the *unity* too much observed. — It is more like a play of Alfieri's than of your stage — (I say this humbly in speaking of that great Man)"⁽⁴¹⁾ In the preface to *Sardanapalus* and *The Two Foscari* he states: "In publishing the following Tragedies I have only to repeat, that they were not composed with the most remote view to the stage."⁽⁴²⁾ In his diary he writes:

Murray writes that they want to act the Tragedy of *Marino Faliero*; — more fools they, it was written for the closet. I have protested against this piece of usurpation, (which, it seems, is legal for managers over any printed work, against the author's will) and I hope they will not attempt it.... It is too regular — the time, twenty-four hours — the change of place not frequent — nothing *melodramatic* — no surprises, no starts, nor trap-doors, nor opportunities "for tossing their heads and kicking their heels" — and no *love* — the grand ingredient of a modern play.⁽⁴³⁾

Medwin also records Byron's expressed attitude towards the theatre:

When I first entered upon theatrical affairs, I had some idea of writing for the house myself, but soon became a convert to Pope's opinion on that subject. Who would condescend to the drudgery of the stage, and enslave himself to the humours, the caprices, the taste or tastelessness, of the stage?⁽⁴⁴⁾

And when Byron heard that Elliston (the Drury Lane stage manager) was preparing to stage *Marino Faliero* simultaneously with its publication, he wrote to Murray asking the publisher to obtain a restraining order, which Murray did after some delay, but the play was performed anyway for seven nights, before small crowds forced its closing. After Byron had read the erroneous Milan newspaper report that the play at the first performance was condemned by the public, he wrote again to Murray:

I presume... that you and my other friends will have at least published my different protests against it's [sic] being brought upon the stage at all — and have shown that Elliston (in spite of the writer) *forced* it upon the theatre. — It would be nonsense to say that this has not vexed me a good deal, — but I am not dejected — and I shall not take the usual resource of blaming the public (which was in the right) or my friends for not preventing what they could not help — nor I neither — a *forced* representation by a Speculating Manager. — It is a pity that you did not show them it's [sic] *unfitness* for ye stage before the play was *published* — & exact a promise from the managers not to act it.⁽⁴⁶⁾

In view of such protests as these, most scholars have, like Chew, seen “no reason to doubt his sincerity.”⁽⁴⁶⁾ However, there are a few dissenters. When Jeffrey reviewed the *Sardanapalus* volume in the *Edinburgh Review*, he implied that Byron must have written for the stage:

If Lord Byron really does not wish to impregnate his elaborate scenes with the living part of the drama — if he has no hankering after stage-effect — if he is not haunted with the visible presentiment of the persons he has created — if, in setting down a vehement invective, he

does not fancy the tone in which Mr. Kean would deliver it, and anticipate the long applauses of the pit, then he may be sure that neither his feelings nor his genius are in unison with the stage at all. Why, then, should he affect the form, without the power of tragedy?⁽⁴⁷⁾

And More suggests, in his 1905 edition of Byron's works, that Byron

protests too much, and that all the while in his heart he longed to see them [the play] drive the accepted drama of the day off the boards. Otherwise it is hard to see why he should have drawn the contrast so frequently between his work and the lawless plays against which he waged war.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Finally, Erdman has made a strong case for concluding that Byron's disclaimers are in reality "so convincing a display of stage fright that few critics have reflected that its very intensity betrayed the depth of his ambition to succeed."⁽⁴⁹⁾ Erdman notes that Byron protected himself in similar fashion when *Childe Harold* was first published, but that he dropped the pretense after he was assured of *Childe Harold's* success. When *Marino Faliero* did fail, however, his excuses were needed to protect his reputation and ego. Erdman also points out that the other two "regular" plays were completed enthusiastically during the few weeks Byron thought *Marino Faliero* had succeeded upon the stage. In addition, it may be noted that Byron did not so much as mention to the stage when he composed his first drama *Manfred* and that he ceased to reiterate his adherence to the neo-classic theory when he continued to write his last four dramas, *Cain*, *Heaven and Earth*, *Werner* and *The Deformed Transformed*. In that sense those dramas can be called really the 'closet drama' written just for the reader, but his historical dramas un-

doubtedly seek for their existences on the stage, betraying his pretended intention and catching his real intention.

IV

With the shift of the audience, the theatres of the English Romantic Age came to be patronized by the new type of theatre-goers and had to offer them the new type of production; melodrama, burletta, pantomime, live animal show and so on. Although the shift might mean the influx of new energy into the theatres to activate the stage from the viewpoint of 'science of theatricals', it is true that English major Romantic poets regarded the change as the degeneration and vulgarization of the theatre and began to write the dramas not for the audience but for the reader. In other words they began to write the dramas not as theatrical works but as literary works. It is possible to say that the melodrama and the closet drama English Romantic Period brought about signify the 'dipolarization' of dramas. The audience at the age of Shakespeare seems to have been 'dipolarized' into those who read the drama in the closet and those who see the drama in the theatre during the Romantic Age. Most of Romantic poets who were the devout Bardolaters were very often disappointed in the theatre, and so they preferred to find their own chapels in the closet rooms in order to worship Shakespeare. Byron, far from the Bardolater, refused to model Shakespeare at least as a dramatist because of his irregularity and on the other hand admired Seneca and Alfieri because of their regularity and simplicity and severity. It is, however, owing to Shakespeare's 'naturalness' or a form of irregularity that Coleridge became the devoutest believer of Bardolatry. Both sides of the same coin named Shakespeare. Byron who esteemed 'suppressed passion' saw the coin from the neo-classic viewpoint and Coleridge who esteemed 'spontaneous passion' saw it from the romantic viewpoint. There is a cease-

less ambivalent conflict in Byron between romanticism and classicism. In the endless oscillation, he kept on longing for the neo-classical rule and law of literature to suppress his inherent irresistible romantic passion. His attempts to achieve dramatic regularity and approach the unities in his historical dramas should be understood in this context. Therefore E. H. Coleridge the editor of Byron's poetical works was quite right in describing the poet's neo-classical attempts in his historical plays as 'his self-denying ordinance'⁽⁵⁰⁾.

Notes

- (1) In his article "'A Buzz in a Box': The Re-opening of the Drury Lane Theatre", J. G. Wasserman shows an interesting episode of George Frederick Busby's attempt to present his father's rejected address in the Drury Lane Theatre on the day after the reopening of the Theatre. *The Byron Journal* (1994), pp. 70-79.
- (2) Joseph Donohue divides the period more extensively and calls it 'the age of Edmund Kean' (from 1780 to 1830) and characterizes the age: the "period of shifting values in which the old and the new, the moribund and the vigorous, move together in mutual dependence and mistrust." in *Theatre in the Age of Kean* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), pp. 6-7.
- (3) Bertrand Evans, *Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1947), p. 13.
- (4) Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama* (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), IV, p. 47.
- (5) Eluned Brown (ed.), *The London Theatre 1811-1866; Selections from the Diary of Henry Crabb Robinson* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1966), p. 57.
- (6) W. Hall Griffin and H.C. Minchin, *The Life of Robert Browning* (London: Methuen and Company, 1938), p. 107.
- (7) It must be importantly noted here that there are two contrary opinions concerning the evaluation of the stage of the age: the one regards it as 'the dramatic degradation', and the other 'theatrical vitality'. The former is representative of the evaluation as the literary work (for the reader) and the latter as the theatrical work (for the audience).
- (8) Nicoll, pp. 22-78.
- (9) Harold Child, "Nineteenth-century Drama" in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, eds. Sir A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (Cambridge: University Press,

- 1953), XIII, p. 255.
- (10) *The Mirror of Taste and Dramatic Censor* (Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1810), II, p. 453.
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