Time in Romantic Theatre

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Acknowledgements

In reviewing the temporal modalities of Romantic Theatre, my purpose is to provide a typology and a representative sampling. Not a general typology such as that attempted a century ago by Robert Metcalf Smith in *Types of Romantic Drama* (1928), but rather a typology of dramatic time. My intent is to draw attention to the ways in which the drama reflected the pervasive impact of increased temporal urgency in social and cultural behaviour. I acknowledge here the works of several colleagues, who have examined the time-obsessed characters and the time-driven plots, and who have raised critical awareness of British drama as a major genre of the Romantic period.

Among the many studies of time in the drama, I learned much from two richly insightful essays: Katherine Biers's "Clock-Watching: Time in Romantic Drama" (2018) and Brian Richardson's "'Time Is Out of Joint': Narrative Models and the Temporality of the Drama" (1987). To these I must add Marcus Tomalin's *Telling the Time in British Literature, 1675–1830* (2020), which reminds us, chapter by chapter, that characters in books and on stage enlist, just as folk in the real world, a variety of means of measuring time. With varying habits and degrees of urgency, characters consult watches and clocks, observe the lengthening shadows, the shifting light on a sundial, the sifting sand in an hourglass, the flower opening and closing its petals, the church bell, the cannon blast, the curfew warning. Perhaps not dramatic in themselves, these phenomena can precipitate action and reveal character.

As a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, I was a reader for Ricardo Quinones when he was writing on "Views of Time in Shakespeare."

At UCLA, a major influence in my thinking on time and the drama came from the wise and generous Reginald Foakes, who prompted me to delve into Coleridge on Shakespeare. Foakes provided me with a complete set, prior to publication, of page proofs of his two-volume edition of Coleridge's *Lectures 1808–1819 On Literature*. As a former student of Allardyce Nicoll at the University of Birmingham, Foakes was able to guide me through Nicoll's six-volume *History of English, 1660–1900*.

My education in Romantic drama has been significantly augmented by Jane Moody's *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840* (2000). Moody shifted attention to what had previously been the relatively neglected transpontine theatres and the consequences of the Licensing Act (1737). She invited me to her seminar at the University of York to speak on "*Bluebeard* and *The Castle Spectre*" (27 February 2007). Discussion of the comic character in the Gothic setting prompted a consideration of "timing," as in De Quincey's account of the Porter in "The Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*" (1823). My visit to York coincided with the publication of *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730–1830*, edited by Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn. My last personal interaction with Moody took place at the Thomas Moore Symposium, Queen's University, Belfast, 4–5 April 2009, where in a televised appearance she provided an astute critique of my critical emphasis on acting and performance. My reliance on her scholarship has persisted since her death, 28 October 2011.

When she attended the final dress rehearsal of a production of James Cobb's adaptation of Marquis de Sade's *The Haunted Tower* ["La Tour enchantée"] (2 March 2006), Moody was able to give the players sound advice on stepping into a scene or a song. This was the penultimate student production in the series of fourteen plays I directed or supervised through the UCLA English Department and the Office of Residential Life. It is a truth of our profession, that we learn more from our students than we can teach them. I became aware of the challenges of non-sequential duration in directing such plays as Thomas Morton's *Speed the Plough*, Elizabeth Inchbald's *To Marry or Not to Marry*, Joanna Baillie's *The Tryal*, and especially Thomas Lovell Beddoes's death-denying, time-scorning *Death's Jest Book* (which was rendered stageable only through the shrewd editing of Jerome McGann).

During our conversation on staging riot and reform, Julia Swindells, author of *Glorious Causes, The Grand Theatre of Political Change, 1789 to 1833* (2004), asked me to contribute the entry on acting theory to *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737–1832* (2014), which she

was co-editing with David Frances Taylor, whose closely allied interests in the drama of revolution and reform were published as *Theatres of Opposition: Empire, Revolution, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (2012). Following Swindells's death (29 October 2011), Taylor took over the project and saw it to completion. He gave thanks to Daniel O'Quinn who generously shared the skills acquired in his similar project with Jane Moody. Since his first book, *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770–1800* (2005), O'Quinn has more recently assembled two collections: *The Routledge Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Drama* (2017) and *The Routledge Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Performance* (2019), both with the assistance of Kristina Straub and Misty G. Anderson.

From its first appearance I have kept Jeffrey Cox's *In the Shadows of Romance* (1987) within ready reach at my desk. On 26 March 1988, he signed my copy. I was especially pleased when he and Jane Moody were among those who attended the final dress rehearsal of the UCLA production of *The Haunted Tower*. Two attributes of Cox's work made it especially relevant to my own: (1) recognizing the infiltration of romance into drama, (2) tracing pan-European sources and influences. In *Romanticism in the Shadow of War, Literary Culture in the Napoleonic War Years* (2014), Cox examined another shadow who "struts and frets his hour upon the stage," now a shadow darkened by the slaughter of revolution and conflict.

Together with Michael Gamer, Cox edited *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama* (2003), a useful collection in teaching Romantic drama. In addition to the Routledge Anthologies mentioned earlier, I consulted older anthologies, such as Katherine Rogers's *18th- and Nineteenth-Century Drama* (1979) and Adrienne Scullion's *Female Playwrights of the Nineteenth Century* (1996). The selection process for any anthology is governed by a functional typology, as in Scullion's attention to female playwrights, Cox's *Seven Gothic Dramas. 1789–1825* (1992), or Arnold Schmidt's three-volume *British Nautical Melodrama, 1820–1850* (2019). In their Introduction, Cox and Gamer attend to a range of types and subtypes that has influenced their selection. Sorting out generic subtypes is the brilliant accomplishment in Gamer's *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (2000).

Having identified *Gothic Feminism* (1998), Diane Long Hoeveler went on in *Gothic Riffs* (2010) to identify and formulate distinctive characteristics of prominent subtypes, which she dubbed the "collateral gothic."

Julie Carlson's *In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women* (1993) was among the first critical studies to place the women playwrights in the competitive roster. When I reviewed Judith Pascoe's *The Sarah Siddons Audio Files: Romanticism and the Lost Voice* (2011), I applauded her success in assembling from the many reviews a recreation of the actor's vocal quality. Drawing on paintings as well as reviews and biographies, Robyn Asleson and contributors to her *Notorious Muse: The Actress in British Art and Culture, 1776–1812* (2003) visually documented the body language and gesture of many of the actresses of the period. When Wendy Nielsen was a student at the University of Göttingen, I had occasion to walk with her along the ramparts of the mighty Fortress Marienberg in Würzburg. She may even then have had visions of the armed female wielding her weapons in the midst of the fray. In *Women Warriors in Romantic Drama* (2012), Nielsen not only brought these characters to life, she also explained their social and cultural relevance on the stage.

Angela Esterhammer's *Print and Performance in the 1820s: Improvisation, Speculation, Identity* (2020) is her fourth monograph on performativity and performative language. As in her previous works, she again demonstrated her thorough awareness of the subtleties and nuances contained within words and gestures. For the study of theatre performance, she exposes the slight-of-tongue magic of improvisation. She reveals, too, ways in which meanings may be amplified or redirected when the actor inadvertently alters lines or deliberately improvises or steps out of the role.

I also acknowledge an extensive debt to four books by David Worrall: *Theatric Revolution: Drama, Censorship and Romantic Period Subcultures* (2006), *The Politics of Romantic Theatricality: The Road to the Stage* (2007), *Harlequin Empire: Race, Ethnicity and the Drama of the Popular Enlightenment* (2007), and *Celebrity, Performance, Reception. British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage* (2013). In each of these studies, Worrall has developed a unique typology accompanied by a pertinent set of representative plays. Providing valuable insight into how theatres were managed, Worrall revived attention to a vast number of comedies, tragedies, melodrama, as well as burlesques, burletta, and harlequinades. When I reached an impasse in my own research, he readily responded to my queries with pertinent suggestions.

Conference encounters and correspondence with Terry Robinson predate by several years her invitation to contribute to her *Home and Abroad:*

Transnational England, 1750–1850 (2009), co-edited with Monika Class, author of the lucid and revelatory study, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England* (2012). In considering the reception of continental philosophy, I have turned to Nicholas Halmi, whose "Romanticism, the Temporalization of History, and the Historicization of Form" (2013) examines periodicity and the epochal organization of thought**.** Kant does not affirm that time is dependent upon mind for its existence, but such dependence is necessary to the awareness and representation of time. For Hegel, time has always already passed away, so that time perceived is past even in the moment of perception.

Terry Robinson follows Robyn Asleson in extending and enriching insight into the body language, physical movement, and optical devices on the Romantic stage. Her essay, "'The glass of fashion and the mould of form': The Histrionic Mirror and Georgian-Era Performance," *Eighteenth-Century Life* (April 2015), was preceded by a monograph, *Reading the Acting Body in the Romantic Age: Performance and Its Truth Effects, 1750–1830* (2012) and followed by a collection, *The Visual Life of Romantic Theatre* (2021, co-edited with Diane Piccitt). Her current deliberations on time in Romantic drama deal with audience response and the affective experience of temporality.

Although a prominent actor, playwright, and poet of the 1790s, Mary Robinson receives only passing attention in this volume, when I refer in Chap. 2 to the gambling craze of the period. Terry Robinson provided the introduction, text, and notes to Mary Robinson's *Nobody: A Comedy in Two Acts* (1794), readily accessible in *Romantic Circles* (web: March 2013). I cite William Brewer's "Mary Robinson as Dramatist: *The Nobody* Catastrophe," *European Romantic Review* (July 2006), and I recommend Brewer's comprehensive edition, *The Works of Mary Robinson*, 8 volumes (2009–2010). In his *Staging Romantic Chameleons and Imposters* (2015), Brewer identified, as correlative to the play-within-a play, the chameleonic performance, in which the actor plays the role of a character who plays a role.

Contemporary reviews, many of them anonymous, served as valuable references, all the more valuable when subjected to the interpretive strategies developed by Jonathan Mulrooney in his *Romanticism and Theatrical Experience: Kean, Hazlitt, and Keats in the Age of Theatrical News* (2018). His focus on the sway of theatre criticism in the popular press, and especially in the reviews of William Hazlitt, retrieves for the reader in the twenty-first century the dynamic interaction of player, critic, and the

theatre-going public of the Regency. As Mulrooney makes clear, Edmund Kean not only played to the audience, he played as well to the population at large. More especially, he played to the theatre critic who provided the grand mediation. Mulrooney examines the prose through which William Hazlitt contributed to the celebrity building of the age, informing audiences not only what they should be watching in a performance, but also how in his performance Kean should be Kean. The response infiltrated other genres as well. The poetry of Keats, Mulrooney argues, began to take on attributes of stage performance. Keats's imagination became theatrical. Indeed, cultural sensibilities widely readjusted in relation to the immediate trends in theatrical tradition.

To spare many additional pages, I must resort to the usual economy of presenting Acknowledgements in a list of names. I have tried to suggest the reasons underlying my debts and prompting my gratitude. My understanding of Romantic drama is further indebted to Catherine Burroughs, Gilli Bush-Bailey, Lila Maria Crisafulli, Thomas Crochunis, Stuart Curran, Tracy Davis, Franca Dellarosa, Regina Hewitt, Omar Miranda, Marjean Purinton, Nicholas Roe, Diego Saglia, Judith Thompson, and Duncan Wu. I trust in tolerant forgiveness for failing to name more of the colleagues to whom I owe recognition and gratitude.

In addition to the shared scholarship of friends, I must acknowledge the principal libraries and librarians that make research in the history of the drama possible. I am especially grateful for access to the theatre collections of the British Library, the Larpent Collection at the Huntington Library, the Mander and Mitchenson Collection at the University of Bristol, and the Westminster City Archives.

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