

[To JOHN MURRAY]

[*Rareina*] May 14th. 1821

Dear Murray!—A Milan paper states that the play has been re-presented & universally condemned.—As remonstrance has been vain—complaint would be useless.—I presume however for yr. own sake (if not for mine) that you and my other friends will have at least published my different protests against it's being brought upon the stage at all—and have shown that Elliston (in spite of the writer) *forced* it upon the theatre.¹—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 *unfitness* for ye stage before the play was *published*—& exact a promise from the managers not to act it.—In case of their refusal—we would not have published it at all.—But this is too late.

yrs [Scrawl]

P.S.—I enclose Mr. Bowles's letters—thank him in my name for their candour & kindness.—Also a letter for Hodgson—which pray forward.—The Milan paper states that "*I brought forward the play!!!*"—This is pleasanter still.—But don't let yourself be worried about it, and if (as is likely) the folly of Elliston—checks the sale—I am ready to make any deduction—or the entire cancel of your agreement.—You will of course *not* publish my defence of Gilchrist—as after Bowles's good humour upon the subject—it would be too savage.—Let me hear from you the particulars, for as yet I have only the simple fact.—If you knew *what* I have had to go through here—on account of the failure of these rascally Neapolitans—you would be amused.—But it is now apparently over.—They seemed disposed to throw the whole project and plans of these parts upon [me chiefly].—²

[To THOMAS MOORE]

May 14th, 1821

If any part of the letter to Bowles has (unintentionally, as far as I remember the contents) vexed you,¹ you are fully avenged; for I see by an Italian paper that, notwithstanding all my remonstrances through all my friends (and yourself among the rest), the managers persisted

¹ See Jan. 20, 1821, to Murray, note 1.

² Byron had been a confidant and encourager of the revolutionary Carbonari and had allowed them to use his house as an arsenal. See his diary for Feb. 16, 1821.

¹ See May 3, 1821, to Moore, note 3.

in attempting the tragedy, and that it has been "unanimously hissed!!" This is the consolatory phrase of the Milan paper (which detests me cordially and abuses me, on all occasions, as a Liberal), with the addition, that I "brought the play out" of my own good will.

All this is vexatious enough, and seems a sort of dramatic Calvinism—predestined damnation, without a sinner's own fault. I took all the pains poor mortal could to prevent this inevitable catastrophe—partly by appeals of all kinds up to the Lord Chamberlain, and partly to the fellows themselves. But, as remonstrance was vain, complaint is useless. I do not understand it—for Murray's letter of the 24th, and all his preceding ones, gave me the strongest hopes that there would be no representation. As yet, I know nothing but the fact, which I presume to be true, as the date is Paris, and the 30th. They must have been in a *hell* of a hurry for this damnation, since I did not even know that it was published; and, without its being first published, the historians could not have got hold of it. Any one might have seen, at a glance, that it was utterly impracticable for the stage; and this little accident will by no means enhance its merit in the closet.

Well, patience is a virtue, and, I suppose, practice will make it perfect. Since last year (spring, that is) I have lost a lawsuit, of great importance, on Rochdale collieries—have occasioned a divorce—have had my poesy disparaged by Murray and the critics—my fortune refused to be placed on an advantageous settlement (in Ireland) by the trustees—my life threatened last month (they put about a paper here to excite an attempt at my assassination, on account of politics, and a notion which the priests disseminated that I was in a league against the Germans)—and, finally, my mother-in-law recovered last fortnight, and my play was damned last week! These are like "the eight-and-twenty misfortunes of Harlequin."² But they must be borne. If I give in, it shall be after keeping up a spirit at least. I should not have cared so much about it, if our southern neighbours had not bungled us all out of freedom for these five hundred years to come.

Did you know John Keats? They say that he was killed by a review of him in the Quarterly—if he be dead, which I really don't know. I don't understand that *yielding* sensitiveness. What I feel (as at this present) is an immense rage for eight-and-forty hours, and then, as usual—unless this time it should last longer. I must get on horseback to quiet me.

Yours, &c.

² *Le disgratie d'Arlecchino* [Harlequin's Misfortunes, London, 1726.]

Francis I. wrote, after the battle of Pavia, "All is lost except our honour." A hissed author may reverse it—"Nothing is lost, except our honour." But the horses are waiting, and the paper full. I wrote last week to you.

[TO RICHARD BELGRAVE HOPNER]

Ravenna. May 17th. 1821

My dear Hopper!—You will have seen a paragraph in the Italian papers stating that "Ld. B had exposed his [tragedy] of M[arino] F[aliero] &c. & that it was universally hissed."—You will also have seen in Galligani (what is confirmed by my letters from London) that this is *twice* false—for in the first place—I *opposed* the representation at all—& in the *next*—it was *not* hissed—but is continued to be acted—in spite of Author—publisher—& the Lord Chancellor's injunction. Now I wish you to obtain a statement of this short & simple truth in the Venetian & Milan papers—as a contradiction to their former lie.—I say *you*—because your consular dignity will attain this justice—which out of their hatred for *me* (as a *liberal*) they would not concede to an unofficial Individual.—Will you take this trouble? I think two words from you to those in power will do it—because I require nothing but the statement of what we both know to be the fact—& that a *fact* in no way political.—Am I presuming too much upon your good nature?—I suppose that I have no other resource—and to whom can an Englishman apply in a case of ignorant insult like this—(where no *personal* redress is to be had) but to the person resident most nearly connected with his own government?—I wrote to you last week—and am now in all haste—

yours ever & most truly

BYRON

P.S.—Humble Reverences to Madame—pray favour me with a line in answer.—If the play had been condemned—the Injunction would be *superfluous* against the continuance of the representation.—

[TO JOHN MURRAY]

Ravenna—May 19th. 1821

Dear Murray!—Enclosed is a letter of Valpy's¹ which it is for you to answer.—I have nothing further to do with the mode of publication.—

¹ Probably Abraham John Valpy (1787–1854) editor and publisher particularly of classical works. Since the reference here and in a later letter (Aug. 10, 1821, to Murray) seems to be to some publishing proposal, it is possible that he wanted to publish Byron's translation of Pulci.

By the papers of Thursday—& two letters from Mr. Kilmair¹ I perceive that the Italian Gazettes had lied most *Italically*—& that the drama had *not* been hissed—& that my friends had interfered to prevent the representation.—So it seems they continue to act it—in spite of us all.—For this we must "trouble them at 'Size'"—let it by all means be brought to a plea—I am determined to try the right—& will *meet* the expences.—The reason of the Lombard Lie—was that the Austrians who keep up an Inquisition throughout Italy and a *list of names* of all who think or speak of any thing but in favour of their despotism—have for five years past abused me in every form in the Gazettes of Milan &c.—I wrote to you a week ago upon the subject.—Now—I should be glad to know what compensation Mr. Elliston could make me—not only for dragging my writings on the stage in *five* days—but for being the cause that I was kept for *four* days—(from Sunday to Thursday morning the only post days) in the *belief* that the *tragedy* had been acted & "unanimously hissed" and with the addition—that "I had brought it upon the stage"—and consequently that none of my friends had attended to my request to the contrary.—Suppose that I had burst a blood vessel like John Keats, or blown [out] my brains in a fit of rage—neither of which would have been unlikely a few years ago.—At present I am luckily calmer than I used to be—& yet I would not pass those four days over again—for—I know not what—

I wrote to you to keep up yr. spirits.—for reproach is useless always & irritating—but my feelings were very much hurt—to be dragged like a Gladiator to the fate of a Gladiator—by that "*Re-tiarius*"² Mr. Elliston.—As to his defence—& offers of compensation—what is all this to the purpose? It is like Louis the 14th. who insisted upon buying at any price Algernon Sydney's horse—& on refusal—on taking it by force.—Sydney shot his horse.³—I could not shoot my tragedy—but I would have flung it into the fire rather than have had it represented.—I have now written nearly *three* acts of another⁴ (intending to complete it in five) and am more anxious than

² A gladiator furnished with a net, with which he strove to entangle his adversary. It was a term which Byron probably found in Suetonius (*Caligula*, 30).

³ An apocryphal story told of Louis XIV and Algernon Sydney, according to which Louis covered a horse of Sydney, who refused to sell it. When the King sent an order to seize it, Sydney shot it, "saying that his horse was born a free creature, had served a free man, and should not be mastered by a king of slaves." (Ewald, *Life and Times of Algernon Sydney*, Vol. II, p. 17.)

⁴ *Sardanapalus*.