

## last night's tv

## Everett lords it up

Andrew Billen

**The Scandalous Adventures of Lord Byron**

Channel 4

★★★★☆

**Bang Goes the Theory**

BBC Two

★★★★☆

**The Street**

BBC One

★★★★★

**Panorama: The Trauma Industry**

BBC One

★★★★☆

**W**ho does Rupert Everett think he is? Lord Byron, obviously, judging by his singularly possessive presentation of the same's **Scandalous Adventures**. Maybe in next week's episode Everett will confess to a secret life as a poet and an incestuous

relationship with a half sister. Otherwise, I can't quite see why the 50-year-old actor identified so greatly with the young swordsmith's voyage across the Med 200 years ago. Bryon may have been, as he claimed, "the first modern sex symbol" but was Everett ever one? I honestly forget but last night, as he shuffled around Albania and Turkey in beard and track suit top, he looked more like a tramp.

He went with the theory that Byron was the "first celebrity", an artist who elided his life with his art. This turned *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* into "the most celebrated travel blog in the history of the English language", or, perhaps, a rhyming press release. By thus reducing his subject to a pathological self-publicist, Everett gave himself an extensive licence to trivialise. We were treated to two to-camera pieces from his bath, a striptease in a British Embassy bathroom and a remark to the consular official about the present Queen being "well stacked".

Everett educated and irritated in equal measure. "Such an actor, I think, beautiful lips," he said, looking at a portrait, although it might as well have been a mirror. When he failed to match Byron's feat of swimming the Hellespont, disappointment steamed off him. A particular novelty in Everett's approach was that rather than interview Byron experts, he would announce his theories to them. Above all he wanted to emphasise his hero's early homosexuality and the suggestion that he may have reciprocated the attentions of the Albanian warlord Ali Pashar who had the hots for him. We heard four times Byron's bon mot that, when it came to vices, the English chose whoring and drinking and the Turks sodomy and sherbet (a joke that twice went down like the *Titanic* at a

British Embassy party in Istanbul). I just hope Anabella, Augusta, Lady Caroline Lamb and his other women get their due next week. The theory that, while Byron enjoyed bonking them, he was never really interested in women sounds like a gay man's wishful thinking to me.

There was more banging away on the new science shoe **Bang Goes the Theory**.

The presenter Jem Stansfield devised a vortex airgun that propelled a great ring of water vapour in the direction of a brick wall. Stansfield whooped when it was partly demolished. People will say this new show dumbs down science but I distinctly heard Stansfield say the word molecule. Besides who ever mistook *Tomorrow's World*, on which this magazine is surely based, for the Open University? Some of the horsing about was tiresome, but I thought the programme's reports — particularly an interview with Craig Venter on the ethics of creating synthetic life — made good popular journalism.

The explosion at the heart of **The Street** came from the bomb detonated by a suicide bomber in Afghanistan. It horribly scarred exactly half the face of a young squaddie called Nick who returned to Manchester bitter and, he was convinced, unloveable. What followed evolved from a depiction of civilian reactions to returning squaddies and the effects of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) into a tremendously moving disquisition on the true nature of beauty. Jimmy McGovern and Esther Wilson's script was exceptional as was Jonas Armstrong's performance as Nick. He need have no fear for his post-*Robin Hood* career. One of the beauties of McGovern's series is its subtlety, which is my only excuse for asking last week if Anna Friel's prostitute had actually, as I suspected, bonked the priest. About 100 of you, with varying degrees of courtesy, pointed out that the priest had been seen leaving her brothel earlier in the story. Thank you. I think. At least we all agree on this drama's quality.

Coincidentally, perhaps, **Panorama's** subject was also PTSD, although its concern was not that suffered by our soldiers in Afghanistan but the 220,000 cases the NHS treats at home and those thousands seeking compensation for it. These have included a primary school teacher harassed by her governors, a nurse whose taxi got bumped ("that was my war") and a fireman hit by a hose. Such claims have done wonders for the £7-billion personal injury business, heavily promoted in info-commercials



by celebrities such as Esther Rantzen, for in each case the symptoms are impossible to disprove. In his intelligent film, the BBC war correspondent Alan Little, who suffered PTSD himself after one of his cameramen was killed, made the point that pursuing litigation gave sufferers an explicit or else subconscious reason not to get better. Outside Little's remit was the question of whether even if each instance were genuine, there was always a case for compensation. Once upon a time most of us would have said, as Rantzen used to: "That's life."  
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