

THE VISION OF BLASPHEMOUS JUDGEMENT

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The Vision of Judgement is among the most Shakespearean of Byron's poems in at least one respect: it's impossible to write about it in any way that is satisfactory. No matter which angle you approach it from, and no matter how thoroughly you work at it, it will always be found, on rereading, to have been somewhere else all the time, thumbing its nose at you and at your elaborate analyses. One would love to read the fifty-odd pages, including a lengthy critical comment on the poem, which Macmillan's cut from John Nichol's *English Men of Letters* study of Byron,¹ and which seems to have been the most elaborate account of *The Vision* yet penned: but Nichol's text is lost, and one may wonder whether Nichol was able to define the effect of this most elusive and commentator-proof work, any more successfully than have modern critics.²

The great bulk of these write post-1960: the willingness to write about the poem in detail at all is a phenomenon of our own day. Between 1822 and 1960 – even between 1922 and 1960 – there seems to have been a general, unspoken need to avoid writing about it, and the commonest way to doing so was via evasive condescension:

The Vision is probably greater than any single canto of *Don Juan* because of its homogeneity of theme and sureness of tone, but both this poem and *Beppo* are most profitably considered as annexes to *Don Juan* ...³

... the *Vision of Judgment* comes nearest [among all Byron's poems] to being a thing done and complete, an object for criticism by itself and in itself; and the *Vision of Judgment* is hardly a great creative work.⁴

The Vision of Judgment is superb fun.⁵

1: See *The Swinburne Letters*, ed. Lang (Oxford/Yale 1959-62) IV 162-3. Nichol was Professor from 1862 to 1889. For his *Byron*, see also William Knight, *Memoir of John Nichol* (Glasgow 1896) pp.242-6.

2: Students may be interested in a selected list of useful books and articles containing, or about, *The Vision*:

EDITIONS: *The Works of Lord Byron, with his Letters and Journals, and his Life* ed. T. Moore (J. W right) 17 vols, John Murray 1832 (see Vol. XII, pp.231-296). *The Works of Lord Byron: A New, Revised and Enlarged Edition with illustrations. Poetry*, ed. E. H. Coleridge, 7 vols, John Murray 1898-1904 (see Vol. IV pp.473-525; should be read with *Letters and Journals*, ed. Prothero, Vol VI Appendix I). *Byron's Vision of Judgment*, ed. E. M. Earl, O.U.P. 1929. (This excellent edition – never reprinted – is the only one to include, as an appendix, Southey's *Vision*.) *Byron, the Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller, 7 vols Oxford 1980-92 (see Vol. VI pp.309-45 and 667-78). By me on this website.

BOOKS: BERNARD BEATTY: *Byron: Don Juan and other Poems*, Penguin 1987, pp.56-68. FREDERICK L. BEATY: *Byron the Satirist*, Northern Illinois University Press 1985, pp.180-195. BERNARD BLACKSTONE: *Byron: A Survey*, Longman 1975, pp.279-285. EDWARD E. BOSTETTER, *The Romantic Ventriloquists*, Seattle 1963, pp.289-91. ANGUS CALDER: *Byron*, Open University Press 1987, pp.49-65. VINCENT CARRETTA: *George III and the Satirists from Hagarth to Byron*, University of Georgia Press 1990, *passim*. CLAUDE M. FUESS : *Lord Byron as a Satirist in Verse*, Columbia University Press 1912, pp.188-201. IAN JACK: *English Literature 1815-1832*, Oxford 1963, pp.72-5. M. K. JOSEPH: *Byron the Poet*, Victor Gollancz 1964, pp.136-40. J. D. JUMP *Byron*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1972, pp.152-65. MALCOLM KELSALL: *Byron's Politics*, The Harvester Press 1987, pp.119-145. ANDREW RUTHERFORD: *Byron, A Critical Study*, Oliver and Boyd 1962, pp.215-37.

ARTICLES: PETER COCHRAN: *The Vision of Judgement and the Waverley Novels*, Notes and Queries, June 1992 pp.168-72. Also *The Transmission of the Texts of Byron's The Vision of Judgement*, Notes and Queries September 1994 pp.344-7. EMRYS JONES: *Byron's Visions of Judgment*, Modern Language Review, January 1981, pp.1-19. T. J. MATHESON : 'A Strange Melange of Good and Evil': *Tolerance and the Moral Nature of Man in Byron's The Vision of Judgment*, Byron Journal 1992, pp.59-70. PETER T. MURPHY: *Visions of Success: Byron and Southey*, Studies in Romanticism, Fall 1985, pp.355-73. STUART PETERFREUND: *The Politics of Neutral Space in Byron's Vision of Judgment*, Modern Language Quarterly, vol 40, 1979, pp.275-91. H.R.STEVENS: *Southey and the Satanic School of Poetry: The Apocalyptic Tradition in Byron's Vision of Judgment*, UNISA English Studies VI (1968) pp.37-46. WILLIAM WALLING: *Tradition and Revolution. Byron's Vision of Judgment*, Wordsworth Circle, Autumn 1972, pp.223-31. SUSAN WOLFSON: *The Vision of Judgment and the visions of 'author'* in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed Bone (2004), pp.171-85.

3: Ronald Bottrall, *Byron and the Colloquial Tradition in English Poetry* in *The Criterion* Vol. XV III No LXXI (1939) p. 215; the essay is reprinted in M. H. Abrams, *English Romantic Poets* (Galaxy Books 1960) pp.210-17.

4: W.W.Robson, *Byron as Poet*, in *Critical Essays*, (1966) p.151.

5: Paul West, *Byron and the Spoiler's Art* (Chatto 1960), p.17.

The appendix given to it by F.R. Leavis in *Revaluation*⁶ seems motivated by the critic's desire to get his Byron section over as quickly as possible: and it is not, as we proceed backwards in time, until 1923 that we discover, in Sir Herbert Grierson, a scholar bold enough to make some essential comments about Byron's achievement in the poem:

... as a satirical poem *The Vision of Judgment* seems to me unrivalled – except it be by Holy Willie's *Prayer*, and that is a slighter production – greater than Dryden's or Pope's, not in this or that individual feature – power of portraiture, weight of stroke, pointed epigram – but in variety of mood, invention, and the gaiety of spirit which lifts the poet above his victims as completely as Dryden's scornful magnanimity.⁷

Grierson's magnanimous judgement provides a reminder of John Nichol:

Readers of our day [1880] will generally admit that the "gouty hexameters" of the original poem, which celebrates the apotheosis of King George in heaven, are much more blasphemous than the *ottava rima* of the travesty, which professes to narrate the difficulties of his getting there. Byron's *Vision of Judgment* is as unmistakably the first of parodies as the *Iliad* is the first of epics, or the *Pilgrim's Progress* the first of allegories. In execution it is almost perfect. *Don Juan* is in scope and magnitude a far wider work; but no considerable series of stanzas in *Don Juan* are so free from serious artistic flaw. From first to last, every epithet hits the white; every line that does not convulse with laughter stings or lashes. It rises to greatness by the fact that, underneath all its lambent buffoonery, it is aflame with righteous wrath. Nowhere in such space, save in some of the prose of Swift, is there in English so much scathing satire.⁸

It is perhaps the comprehensive scathingness of the satire which has unsettled generation after generation of commentators: so, as a prelude to writing down a few thoughts about one aspect of *The Vision* (I will not claim to have found the key to it) I feel it necessary to determine exactly what Byron is angry with. The answer gives us a clue as to why critics were so abrupt with the poem, and it is simple: he is angry with God the Father Almighty. The poem's central target is God – not George III, not Southey, not even Southey's supposed God (the "Moloch God" as Andrew Rutherford calls him)⁹ but the being Byron perceived, after several years' thought, as central to the whole Christian tradition.

This idea is by no means new. When, in 1919, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch lectured on Byron at the then University College, Nottingham (the lecture was published in *Studies in Literature* three years later) he complained early on of the "positive reluctance" shown by English critics to allow Byron's claim to attention; and, a few pages later, said, perhaps by way of explanation:

... Through torment and bitterness he [Byron] had attained to 'know the heavenly powers'; to know them – if I may conjecture his own addition – a devilish sight too well. Henceforward he stands opposed to them; but he stands up. You may smile at any man – small bi-forked creature that he is – standing up, questioning, arraigning, denouncing the higher powers; but you must acknowledge the right of the challenge. If God created man in his image, man has a right (shall we not even say, a duty?) to erect himself to the fullest inch of that image, and ask questions. Does it not, at any rate, argue a certain nobility of mind (if exorbitant) in one betrayed by his fellow-creatures, that he walks straight up and has it out with the Creator himself?

That is what – in *Manfred*, in *Cain*, in *Heaven and Earth*, in *The Vision of Judgment*, in *The Deformed Transformed* – substantially in every line that he wrote after that Spring of 1816, informs his purpose. He hates Castlereagh, and all jackals; Brougham, and all sham opponents of tyranny. He disdains its stupidity in George III, its fungoid growth in George IV, the heartless and brilliant expertise of Wellington in saving the world for the benefit of a class. He sees War for what it is, or at any rate for what he believes it to be – a piratical hand of the powerful, cruelly employing the unreasoning but agonising

⁶: F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation* (Chatto 1936) pp.148-153.

⁷: Herbert Grierson, *Poems of Byron* (Chatto 1923) p. xxi.

⁸: John Nichol, Byron, in *English Men of Letters* (Macmillan 1880) p.154. Notice that Nichol styles *The Vision* simultaneously a parody and a travesty; it is, strictly, a travesty. See Claud M. Fuess, *Byron as a Satirist in Verse* (Columbia 1912) pp.188-191.

⁹: Andrew Rutherford, *Byron, A Critical Study* (Oliver and Boyd 1962) p.226.

mass of mankind as dupes and victims. And, proud rebel that he is, he carries the question (Shelley, too, carried it) up past your George the Third, Wellington, Castlereagh, to hand it, with Lucifer's own politeness, to the Almighty in session. 'Your pardon, Sire, – but with such agents, is the judge of the Earth, just now, doing right?'"¹⁰

Quiller-Couch pays *The Vision* no more attention than he does in this section, which dwells, as can be seen, more on ideology than on poetry (influenced doubtless by "Q"'s understanding of World War I): but on its own grounds the statement is striking, coming from an establishment academic born in 1863. For fifty years or more, few cared to get any nearer to the heart of Byron's religious position: *The Vision of Judgement* takes as its implicit centrepiece a God who rules through boredom, violence and hatred:

The Angels all were singing out of tune
And hoarse with having little else to do ... (St. 2, 1-2)

As soon as we have smiled at this – it is placed very early in the poem – we are implicated in the critique of a deity of ugliness and fear; one who does not mind whether or not the heavenly choirs are harmonious, as long as they are singing obediently, as Southey would offer to sing:

But ere the spavined Dactyls could be spurred
Into recitative, in great dismay
Both Cherubim and Seraphim were heard
To murmur loudly through their long array –
And Michael rose ere he could get a word 725
Of all his foundered verses under way,
And cried, "For Godsake! Stop, my friend! 'twere best –
'*Non Di, Non homines*' – you know the rest." –

A general bustle spread throughout the throng,
Which seemed to hold all verse in detestation – 730
The Angels had of course enough of song
When upon service, and the Generation
Of Ghosts had heard too much in life not long
Before, to profit by a new occasion;
The Monarch, mute till then, exclaimed, "What? What? 735
"Pye come again! – No more – no more of that!" (Sts. 91-2)

Compare *Cain*:

... I have heard	
His Seraphs sing; and so my father saith.	
Lucifer:	They say – what they must sing and say, on pain Of being that which I am, – and thou art – 135 Of Spirits and of men.
Cain:	And what is that?
Lucifer:	Souls who dare use their immortality – Souls who dare look the Omnipotent tyrant in His everlasting face, and tell him that His evil is not good! (I, i, 132-40)

Cain was written in the interval between Byron's commencement and temporary shelving of *The Vision* – on May 7th 1821, the inks in the manuscript would suggest, he wrote the first twenty-six Stanzas – and its taking-up and rapid finishing in September and early October

¹⁰: Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Studies in Literature II* (Cambridge 1922 pp.17-18.)

(the last fifty-six stanzas of the poem appear to have been written in three days).¹¹ It is as if, having been made to think about what Southey's *Vision* implied about Christianity, Byron found that all sorts of issues needed articulation before he could write his own creative answer: and writing *Cain* was one way of clarifying those issues in his mind.

Heaven does not, as Southey claims in his *Vision*, bless an earthly attempt at perfection, as seen in England under the Hanoverians. Rather it reflects, much more accurately, an earthly imperfection, which is made in its image. (Blake's *Holy Thursday* poems are immediately relevant here: it is not the only time where Blake and Byron seem to be thinking alike).¹² In Heaven, there is no free will. In Stanzas 91 and 92, quoted above, this is shown by the reaction of the audience to Southey's poem. The Laureate's drone reminds them of what – in the case of the angels – they are forced, within the gates of Heaven, to do all day, every day; of what, in the case of the devils, they hoped they had escaped from by dying and going to Hell; and of what, in the case of King George, he was forced, humiliatingly, to listen to from his subjects when alive.

It has never been pointed out that George's line

“What? What?
“Pye come again! – No more – no more of that!” (St. 92, 7-8)

is a sign that, now he is dead, he is no longer mad: his famous way of repeating words would, in real life, disappear when he lost his reason, and hearing him employ it again was a welcome sign to his physicians, courtiers and family that his sanity was returning.¹³ It was a way of filling the embarrassed silence which ensued whenever he asked one of his subjects a direct question, and thus a sign of his regality:

“Was there ever,” cried he, “such stuff as great part of Shakespeare? only one must not say so! But what think you? – What? – is there not sad stuff? What? – what ?¹⁴

It has also never been pointed out that George's line in the poem has been incorrectly punctuated ever since 1822, when the *Liberal* text¹⁵ had

. . . “What! What!
“Pye come again? No more – no more of that!”

In the manuscript,¹⁶ Byron places question marks after *What ... what* and an exclamation mark after *Pye come again*; George is not asking a question – there is no doubt in his mind – this is another wretched Laureate reciting, and he must be shut up. Even the King whose salvation Southey's poem celebrates – perhaps he especially – is unable to tolerate Southey's sycophancy.

Still less able to tolerate it is St. Michael:

. . . “For Godsake! Stop, my friend! ’twere best –
“*Non Di, Non homines*’ – you know the rest.” – (St. 91, 7-8)

11: On October 1st 1821 Byron tells Moore that he is at Stanza 50: see *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (John Murray 1973-94: hereafter BLJ) VIII 229-30. In his next surviving letter, to Douglas Kinnaird, on October 4th, he reports the despatch of the completed poem: see BLJ VIII 230.

12: See my essay on this website. Compare the blush of St Michael at the *Vision*, stanza 61, with the blushing angel at *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plates 22-3. (Byron's conscious echo may be *Paradise Lost* VIII 618-19).

13: A point well made in Alan Bennett's *The Madness of George III* (Faber 1992); see Bennett's introduction, pp.xi-xii.

14: Fanny Burney, *Diaries*, ed. M. Masefield (Routledge 1931) p.99.

15: In setting up the *Liberal* text, John Hunt may have used as copy-text both the manuscript, and an uncorrected proof given to him by Murray. An uncorrected proof survives in the John Murray Archive (see McGann and Weller, *op. cit.*, VI opposite p.304); but we do not know that it resembles the one Hunt used. The corrected proof has never been found.

16: Byron's manuscript is at the John Murray Archive; I am very grateful to the late Mr John G. Murray and Virginia Murray for their assistance. The manuscript (the only one) is neither rough nor fair, but a mixture of both; all quotations from the poem in this article are edited from it by me.

His words are here printed more precisely from the manuscript than usual (I have regularised the inverted commas, placed a comma after “Stop”, and a dash after “best”). It will be seen that they too have been neutered since 1822 by all editors, who insist on the more polite

. . . “For God’s sake stop, my friend! ’twere best –
Non Di, Non homines – you know the rest.”

The Liberal takes a standard Byronic vulgarism (*For Godsake!*)¹⁷ and smoothes it over. St Michael loses his self-possession in the face of Southey’s poem, because it reminds him of his own servitude. God, as implicitly pictured by Byron, would accept *A Vision of Judgement* automatically. Michael finds the thought embarrassing, but Southey’s poem demonstrates just the kind of self-prostitution which God expects from his creatures. God is in this analysis a very poor literary critic – he only has one criterion: “Does this poem, or this person, show adequate respect for me?” The standards he looks for are not love, compassion, wit, imagination, versifying skill, or magnanimity. He measures poems by one standard only: the poet’s willingness to deaden all these qualities in the interest of maintaining his – God’s – status in the midst of all. Southey’s *Vision* answers this monolithic standard perfectly – God would not be interested in the fact that it failed as a poem, as long as he felt that it worked as a hymn; which is why St Michael (who has better taste than his master) cannot listen to it. It’s too close to home. Southey exclaims

“But talking about trumpets – here’s my ‘Vision’!
 “Now you shall judge – all people – yes – you shall
 “Judge with *my* Judgement! – and by my decision
 “Be guided who shall enter heaven or fall!
 “I settle all these things by intuition –
 “Times present, past, to come, Heaven, Hell, and All,
 “Like King Alfonso! When I thus see double
 “I save the Deity some Worlds of trouble.” (St. 101)

He speaks more precisely than, in his inane complacency, he realizes. God would indeed say to everyone, “Judge with *my* Judgement!”. In the manuscript Byron underlines “my”, demanding – but not until now receiving – italics; and the monosyllable exemplifies perfectly what he most objects to in both Southey and in God the Father: the irredeemable self-centredness of their judgements. (This is his only use of the word *judgement* – to which he always gives two “e”s – in the whole poem). Both God and Southey, because of their double vision – one eye on the object, the other on their own advantage¹⁸ – are very poor judges, especially, of literature. The supposed subject of their current judgement, George III, is, “by intuition”, much better at judging poetry than they. A scholastic definition of “intuition”, the O.E.D. informs us, is “the immediate knowledge ascribed to angelic and spiritual beings, with whom vision and knowledge are identical”,¹⁹ Southey, in claiming such knowledge, is making an ass of himself: and God would appear not to possess it either.

How to deal with such a tyrant, and such an over-reacher? T. J. Matheson, in his excellent article in the 1992 *Byron Journal*, draws our attention to Byron’s lack of faith in the concept of judgement; he claims Byron’s answer to be that “the best way to deal with such stupid priggishness ... is to laugh at it”.²⁰ I would query this: what happens is more brutal, and apparently final, than it would imply. Robert Southey was cast by *The Vision of Judgement* into a critical and historical limbo, in which, despite all the efforts of Professor Butler²¹, he still seems stuck. Byron’s poem is a major statement

17: For examples of Byron’s use of this contraction, see the last line of the rejected *Hock and Soda Water Stanza to Don Juan* Canto I in McGann and Weller, op. cit., V p.88; or a letter to John Hanson at Marchand, op. cit., IV p.248. Byron’s own fair copy of *Don Juan* Canto I, last line, employs it too.

18: Travis Looper, in *Byron and the Bible* (Scarecrow Press 1978, p.266) gives as the reference here Matthew 6, 22-24.

19: This is the only use of the word *intuition* in all of Byron’s poetry.

20: T. J. Matheson, ‘A Strange Melange of Good and Evil’, *Tolerance and the Moral Nature of Man in Byron’s The Vision of Judgment*; 1991 *Byron Journal* pp.59-70.

21: See *Literature as Heritage* (Cambridge 1988). Perhaps the new edition of his longer poems (ed. Lynda Pratt, 6 vols., Pickering and Chatto 2004), will help his reputation.

about at least one kind of judgement: the literary kind. His is *The Vision* of [that is, “written with”] *Judgement*; and its effect has been to paralyse all subsequent attempts (not that there have been that many)²² at evaluating Southey’s work. Laughter could not alone have accomplished such an end.

I would suggest that Byron achieves his end – to make Southey irredeemably ridiculous to all future ages – via a blasphemous joke still more disconcerting than that involved in his depiction of God the Father: a joke involving one of the traditional roles of God the Son.²³

Byron had no belief in the Atonement. On September 13th 1811 he had written to Francis Hodgson (who was about to take orders) :

... the basis of your religion is *injustice*; the *Son of God*, the *pure*, the *immaculate*, the *innocent*, is sacrificed for the *guilty*. This proves His heroism; but no more does away with *man’s* guilt than a schoolboy’s volunteering to be flogged for another would exculpate the dunce from negligence, or preserve him from the rod. You degrade the Creator, in the first place, by making Him a begetter of children; and in the next you convert Him into a tyrant over an immaculate and injured Being, who is sent into existence to suffer death for the benefit of some millions of scoundrels, who, after all, seem as likely to be damned as ever.²⁴

As Lucifer remarks to Cain (in lines which William Gifford cut from the play’s first edition):

... But *He!* so wretched in his height,
So restless in his wretchedness, must still
Create, and re-create – perhaps he’ll make
One day a Son unto himself – as he
Gave you a father – and if he so doth
Mark me! – that Son will be a Sacrifice. (I i, 161-6)

Whether faithless, diabolical, or just uninstructed,²⁵ Byron could not discover in the suffering of God The Son anything other than further proof of the tyranny of God the Father: and there are no examples in his work of this most moving of Christian concepts being used imaginatively (as it is used by Shakespeare in *The Winter’s Tale*, or in *King Lear*). What he does instead is surreptitiously to mock it, in the figure of Southey – who is made to “redeem” George III.

George is proven neither guilty nor guiltless. There is no direct implication of his guilt, as opposed to his frailty,²⁶ anywhere in the poem outside Stanzas 39 to 49 – Sathan’s prosecution speech. There is an element of deceptive rhetoric in Byron’s presentation of this, for the early stanzas, describing the bloodshed in Europe and America during George’s reign, seem to proclaim him guilty by association, and the huge build-up to the appearance of the witnesses, plus Stanza 61, describing Michael’s blush of discomfiture when they arrive, lead us to believe the case against him to be overwhelming: but it’s not. We may feel that much of Byron’s Whig and pacifist feeling is to be heard in Sathan’s speech; but the speech is in fact firmly distanced by the poetic context in which it is placed. The narrative voice does not support Sathan’s words, and neither do either of his witnesses (remote echoes of the two witnesses at *Revelations*, 11, 3-5). No-one testifies against George; and no-one testifies in his favour. So, while the strict “legality” of the heavenly procedure makes it seem likely that he will get into Heaven, the rhetorical drift of the poem suggests that, at the least, he doesn’t deserve to. Byron is expertly having his cake and eating it. Dark and Light (or Good and Evil) are at a stalemate.

To introduce the idea of Christ’s sacrifice at the point where Junius melts away (Stanza 84) would go severely against the grain, not only of Byron’s belief, but also of both his old and new

22: The best book on Southey that I know is by Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch: *Robert Southey* (Boston, Twayne 1977). The best biography is Jack Simmons’ *Southey* (Collins 1945); and there is no *Collected Letters*. The texts published by Cuthbert Southey (Longman 1849-1850) are very suspect indeed; much better are those in Kenneth Curry’s *New Letters of Robert Southey* (Columbia 1965).

23: My attention was first drawn to this idea by Bernard Blackstone’s *Byron A Survey* (Longman 1975) p.284.

24: BLJ II 97.

25: I was told recently that in order to sympathise with Christianity I had to enlarge my concept of the *possible* to include the *impossible*.

26: This reading assumes the adoption of the January 1823 *Liberal* erratum for Stanza 81line 6: *A weaker king ne’er left a realm undone* for *A worse king never left a realm undone*; see McGann and Weller, op. cit, VI p.315.

poetic habits. In the old habit (his pre-ottava rima period) redemption was rejected: in the new, it is being comically redefined.

Junius has already alluded to the beginnings of the Passion – putting himself simultaneously in the roles of Pilate and the Jerusalem mob, and George into the role of Jesus – with his exit lines:

“What I have written, I have written – Let
“The rest be on his head or on mine!” (St. 84, 1-2)²⁷

... and has melted away at once, taking Suffering and Atonement with him into “celestial smoke”.

But George cannot be left in limbo, because Byron has referred to no such place. Some new development, unanticipated by anyone, is needed to break the deadlock. The situation calls for some sign of God’s grace, or of someone’s grace – it calls for a miracle – or something. This is the great brilliance of the piece, for who constitutes the miracle, or the something, but Bob Southey, the hymn-maker of whose work God really would approve, the one *sincere* sycophant present?

Southey meets with universal distaste: he is despised and rejected of men, saints, angels, and demons; a man of vanity, complaisance and irredeemable mediocrity, acquainted primarily with ink. He has given his back, firstly to the Jacobins, latterly to the Tories, and has hidden not his face from shame and scribbling. He is the only one present with nowhere to lay his head: Peter has his eternal role at the gate, Michael his eternal role within the gate, Sathan his without the gate. The peripatetic damned have their community, as do the cloistered damned – Fox and Pitt enjoy the most intimate relationship (see Stanza 73) and the cherubs theirs; all the other characters apart from Southey (and, while the stalemate lasts, George) unambiguously *belong*. Southey proclaims a universal prostitution of mind; he begs leave to write, now Sathan’s biography, now Michael’s: his hack values qualify him for community nowhere. He has no soul either to damn or save. To Dante, he would be one of the great mass seen in Canto III of the *Inferno*:

le genti dolorose,
ch’hanno perduto il ben dello intelletto ...

[“the wretched people, who have lost the gift of the intellect ...”]

Cacciarli i ciel per non esser men belli,
ne lo profondo inferno gli riceve,
che alcuna gloria i rei avrebber d’elli.

[“Heaven chased them forth to keep its beauty from being spoilt, and deep Hell does not receive them, for the wicked would have no glory from them”.]²⁸

He is the last person who could conceivably, in any moral scheme, be acceptable as a Sacrificial Lamb: so Byron makes him into one. As the universal scatter caused by his self-advertisement (“When I thus see double, / I save the Deity some worlds of trouble”) obliterates all attempts to assert divine order, as the trial is wrecked, as St Peter takes drastic critical action, and knocks Southey down into his lake – as Southey does exit into limbo – the taper-lit, tea-drinking limbo which exists under Skiddaw – George slips into heaven. Southey’s humiliation leads to, even though it may not relate morally to, George’s salvation. The Laureate gets ducked, and the king simultaneously (*perhaps* coincidentally, we don’t really know) makes preparations for what he thinks will be eternal bliss – singing psalms in Heaven. For the transgressions of his King, Southey is doused; and with his wetting, George is healed. George’s salvation is a temporary triumph for George alone (although, he is only seen *practising* the hundredth psalm) : for everyone else, it is the final statement of a poem in which the universe is depicted as a never-ending cycle of anti-climaxes (perhaps a more pointed and interesting

²⁷: See John 19, 22 and Matthew 27, 25. The omni-referentiality of the figure of Junius has yet to have critical justice done to it.

²⁸: Dante, *Inferno*, III 17-18.

analysis of the universe than the Entropy Theory outlined by Tom Stoppard in *Arcadia*, accompanied by amusing references to readers of and writers for *The Byron Journal*).²⁹

It is the ultimate, never-to-be forgiven insult. Byron wrecks Southey's reputation by placing him (discreetly) in the travestied role of Sacrificial Lamb; the climax of the poem constitutes an inversion of every value that Southey says he believes in, and Southey – aptly, for it was he who with a perfectly straight face first claimed to be able to read God's mind – is put centre-stage in the blasphemy, for posterity to deride. This, surely, is far better than doing what Byron had previously wanted to do, which was to kill his man in a duel.

29: See Stoppard, *Arcadia* (Faber 1993), pp.23 and 29.