

THE DEVIL'S DRIVE

edited by Peter Cochran

The Devil's Drive was drafted on December 8th 1813 and fair-copied the day following. This was less than a week after the publication, on December 2nd, of *The Bride of Abydos*, a poem, three admirers of which (Canning, de Staël, and Mackintosh) *The Devil's Drive* satirises. It was unpublished in Byron's lifetime – perhaps because of such allusions to the living. It is not a good poem – it is unfinished, its versification often seems deliberately bad, and its structure is back-to-front, with the climax at the Battle of Leipzig in the early sections 5 to 9, and all the rest a slow, unplanned slither into triviality. Its Devil is inconsistent, being sometimes a cruel fiend, sometimes an amused Whig gentleman. But it has great interest in the way it anticipates some much better poems (especially *The Vision of Judgement*) and in the insight it gives us into Byron's thoughts about the social and political milieu in which he lived during his years of fame. Indeed, it is the only one of his poems of any ambition, written between his return to England in 1811, and his departure in 1816, which refers to contemporary events and personalities.

His only reference to the poem is this, from his Journal entry of December 17th / 18th 1813: *I have lately written a wild, rambling, unfinished rhapsody, called "The Devil's Drive," the notion of which I took from Porson's "Devil's Walk" (BLJ III 240). He never mentions it again.*

Copytext for this edition is Byron's own fair copy in the British Library.

The Devil's Drive – a sequel to Porson's Devil's Walk¹

1.

The Devil returned to Hell by two,
 And he staid at home till five,
 When he dined on some homicides done in *Ragout*,
 And a rebel or so in an *Irish* stew,
 And sausages made from a self-slain Jew, 5
 And bethought himself what next to do;
 And quoth he, "I'll take a drive –
 I walked in the morning – I'll ride tonight –
 In darkness my children take most delight,
 And I'll see how my favourites thrive." 10

2.

"And what shall I ride in?" quoth Lucifer then –
 "If I followed my taste indeed,
 I should mount in a waggon of wounded men
 And smile to see them bleed;
 But these will be furnished again and again, 15
 And at present my purpose is speed –
 To see of my Manor as much as I may,
 And watch that no Souls shall be poached away."

3.

1: Richard Porson (Trinity classicist, 1759-1808) never wrote a poem with this title. Coleridge and Southey wrote one called *The Devil's Thoughts* in 1799; then Shelley wrote one, called *The Devil's Walk*, in 1812, but withdrew it before publication.

And a feast for the fowls of the Air!⁹

7.

But he turned aside and looked from the ridge,
 Of hills along the river,
 And the best thing he saw was a broken bridge 55
 Which a Corporal chose to shiver;¹⁰
 Though an Emperor's taste was displeased with his haste,
 The Devil thought it clever,
 And he laughed again, in a lighter strain,
 O'er the torrent swol'n and rainy, 60
 When he saw, "on a fiery steed," Prince Pon.,¹¹
 In taking great care of Number *One*,
 Get drowned with a great *many*.

8.

But the softest note that soothed his ear
 Was the sound of a widow's sighing 65
 And the sweetest sight was the icy tear
 Which horror froze in the blue eye clear
 Of a maid by her Lover dying,
 As round her fell her long fair hair
 And she looked to Heaven with that phrenzied air 70
 Which seemed to ask if a God were there!
 And stretched by the side of a ruined hut
 With its hollow cheek, and eyes half shut,
 A child of famine dying –
 And the carnage *begun* when *resistance* is done, 75
 And the fall of the vainly flying!

9.

Then he gazed on a town by besiegers taken,
 Nor cared he who were winning,
 But he saw an old maid for years forsaken
 Get up and leave her spinning, 80
 And she looked in her glass, and to one that did pass,
 She said, "Pray, are the rapes beginning?"¹²

10.

But the Devil has reached our cliffs so white,
 And what did he there, I pray?
 If his eyes were good, he but saw by night 85

9: Compare *The Siege of Corinth*, final section.

10: B. uses the story of a corporal who, at Leipzig, blew up a bridge too early, trapping a large number of his own side.

11: The Russian Prince Poniatowski, upon seeing the bridge destroyed, rode his horse into the river and was drowned.

12: Compare *Don Juan VIII*, 132, 1-4: *Some voices of the buxom middle-aged / Were also heard to wonder in the din / (Widows of forty were these birds long caged) / "Wherefore the ravishing did not begin?"*

What we see every day,
 But he made a tour, and he kept a journal
 Of all the wondrous sights nocturnal,
 And he sold it in shares to the *Men of the Row*,¹³
 Who bid pretty well – but they *cheated* him, though! 90

11.

The Devil first saw, as he thought, the *Mail*,
 Its coachman and his coat;
 So instead of a pistol, he cocked his tail
 And seized him by the throat –
 “Aha!” quoth he, “What have we here? 95
 ’Tis a new Barouche, and an ancient Peer!”

12.

So he set him on his box again,
 And bade him have no fear,
 But be true to his club, and staunch to his rein,¹⁴
 His brothel and his beer – 100
 “Next to seeing a lord at the council board,
 I would rather see him *here*.”

13.

Then Satan hired a horse and gig,
 With promises to pay,
 And he pawned his horns for a spruce new wig 105
 To redeem as he came away,
 And he whistled some tune – a waltz, or a jig –
 And drove off at the close of day.

14.

The first place he stopped at, he heard the Psalm
 That rung from a Methodist Chapel – 110
 “’Tis the best sound I’ve heard,” quoth he, “since my palm
 Presented Eve her Apple,
 When *Faith* is all, ’tis an excellent sign
 That the *Works* and *Workmen* both are mine.” –

15.

He passed Tommy Tyrwhitt,¹⁵ that standing jest, 115
 To princely wit a Martyr;
 But the last joke of all was by far the best,
 When he sailed away with ‘the Garter’!¹⁶
 “And,” quoth Satan, “this embassy’s worthy my sight,
 Should I see no-one else to amuse me tonight 120

13: Paternoster Row, home to several London booksellers. See BLJ III 169: *More work for the Row ...*

14: Refers to the so-called Four-Horse Club, an elite institution founded in 1808.

15: Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt (1762-1833) Private Secretary to the Prince Regent.

16: Tyrwhitt was charged with the Garter Commission to the Russian Tsar in 1813.

With no-one else to bear it, but Thomas à Tyrwhitt
This ribband belongs to an 'Order of Merit!'"

16.

He stopped at an Inn, and stepped within
The Bar, and read *The Times*,
And never such a treat as the epistles of one "Vetus"¹⁷ 125
Had he found, save in downright crimes –
"Though I doubt if this drivelling encomiast of War
Ever saw a field fought, or felt a scar –
Yet his fame shall go further than he can guess,
For I'll keep him a place in my *hottest Press*,¹⁸ 130
And his works shall be bound in *Morocco d'Enfer*,
And lettered behind with his *Nom de Guerre*."

17.

The Devil gat next to Westminster,
And he turned to "the room" of the Commons,
But he heard, as he purposed to enter in there, 135
That "the Lords" had received a summons,
And he thought, as a *quondam* Aristocrat,¹⁹
He might peep at the peers, though to *hear* them were flat,
And he walked up the house so like one of our own
That they say he stood pretty near the Throne. 140

18.

He saw the Lord Liverpool,²⁰ seemingly wise,
The Lord Westmoreland²¹ certainly silly,
And Jockey of Norfolk²² – a man of some size –
And Chatham,²³ so like his friend Billy,
And he saw the tears in Lord Eldon's²⁴ eyes 145
Because the Catholics would *not* rise
In spite of his prayers and his prophecies;²⁵
And he heard – which set Satan himself a-staring –
A certain Chief Justice²⁶ say something like *Swearing* –
And the Devil was shocked, "And," quoth he, "I must go, 150
For I find we have much better manners below;
If thus he harangues when he passes my border,
I shall hint to friend Moloch to call him to Order".²⁷

17: "Vetus" was a man named Edward Sterling. His post-Leipzig letters to the *Times* recommended that England should conquer as much of Europe as possible.

18: B. plays with the phrase "hot-press" referring (a) to high-quality paper and (b) to Hell's torments.

19: Satan had been a leading archangel in Heaven.

20: Robert Banks Jenkinson, second Earl of Liverpool (1770-1828); Prime Minister from 1812.

21: John Fane (1759-1841) tenth Earl of Westmoreland, Lord Privy Seal.

22: Charles Howard (1746-1815) eleventh Duke of Norfolk. The nickname comes from *Richard III*, V iii 304.

23: John Pitt (1756-1835) second Earl of Chatham, general.

24: John Scott (1751-1839) first Lord Eldon, Lord Chancellor.

25: Echoes Moore, *The Two Penny Post Bag* (1812) Letter I.

26: Edward Law (1750-1818) first Baron Ellenborough, Lord Chief Justice.

19.

Then the Devil went down to the humbler house,
 Where he readily found his way, 155
 As natural to him as its home to a Mouse –
 He had been there many a day –
 And many a vote and soul and job he
 Had bid for and carried away from the Lobby –
 But now there was “a Call,” and accomplished debaters 160
 Appeared in the glory of hats, boots, and gaiters,
Some paid rather more – but *all* worse dressed than Waiters.

20.

There was Canning²⁸ for War, and Whitbread²⁹ for Peace,
 And others as suited their fancies,
 But all were agreed that our debts would increase, 165
 Excepting the Demagogue *Francis*,³⁰
 That rogue – how could Westminster chuse him again,
 To leaven the Virtue of these honest men!
 But the Devil remained till the Break of Day
 Blushed upon Sleep and Lord Castlereagh;³¹ 170
 Then up half the house got – and Satan got up
 With the drowsy to snore, or the hungry to sup,
 But so torpid the power of some speakers, 'tis said,
 They sent even him to his brimstone bed.

21.

He had seen George Rose³² – but George was grown dumb, 175
 And only lied in thought;
 And the Devil has all the pleasure to come
 Of hearing him talk as he ought
 With the falsest of tongues – the sincerest of men –
 His Veracity were but deceit, 180
 And Nature must have unmade him again
 Ere his breast or his face or his tongue or his pen
 Conceived, uttered, looked, or wrote down letters ten
 Which Truth would acknowledge complete.

22.

Satan next took the Army List in hand, 185
 Where he found a new “Field Marshal”;
 And when he saw this high command

27: *First MOLOCH, horrid King besmear'd with blood / Of human sacrifice, and parents tears, / Though for the noyse of Drums and Timbrels loud / Their childrens cries unheard, that past through fire / To his grim Idol – Paradise Lost I, 391-6.*

28: George Canning (1770-1827) Tory politician; later Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister. B. reacts positively to his praise for *The Bride* at BLJ III 173.

29: Samuel Whitbread (1758-1815) brewer. Killed himself after Waterloo.

30: Sir Francis Burdett (1770-1834) radical M.P. for Westminster.

31: Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh (1769-1822) Foreign Secretary at the Congress of Vienna.

32: George Rose (1744-1818) Treasurer of the Navy.

Conferred on his Highness of Cumberland,³³
 “Oh, were I prone to cavil, or were I not the Devil,
 I should say this was somewhat partial, 190
 Since the only wounds that this warrior gat
 Were from God knows whom, and the Devil knows what.”³⁴

23.

He then popped his head in a royal Ball,
 And saw all the Haram so hoary –
 And who there besides but Corinna de Staël,³⁵ 195
 Turned Methodist and Tory!³⁶
 “Aye, aye,” quoth he, “’tis the way with them all
 When Wits grown tired of Glory –
 But thanks to the weakness that thus could pervert her,
 Since the dearest of prizes to me’s a deserter: 200
Mem. – whenever a sudden conversion I want,
 To send to the school of Philosopher Kant. –
 And whenever I need a critic who can gloss over
 All faults – to send to Mackintosh to write up the Philosopher.”³⁷

24.

The Devil waxed faint at the sigh of this Saint, 205
 And bethought himself of eating
 And began to cram from a plate of ham
 Wherewith a Page was retreating,
 Having nothing else to do (for “the friends”, each so new,
 Had sold all their souls long before); 210
 As he swallowed down the bacon he wished himself a Jew
 For the sake of another crime more –
 For Sinning itself is but half a recreation
 Unless it ensures most infallible damnation. –

25.

But he turned him about, for he heard a sound 215
 Which even his ear found faults in –

33: Ernest Augustus, Duke of Cumberland (1771-1851) fifth son of George III. Made a Field-Marshal in 1813.

34: A murder attempt had been made on Cumberland in 1810 by his valet Joseph Sellis; it had caused a great scandal, but Cumberland got off the charge of an unnatural liaison.

35: B. dines with Madame de Staël on 2 Oct 1813 (BLJ III 131); on 10 Nov he tells Annabella that “her tongue is the perpetual motion” (BLJ III 160). He writes a confused account of her book *de l’Allemagne* in his Journal for 17 Nov 1813 (III 211), though on 5 Dec he writes, “I like it prodigiously” (BLJ III 231). At BLJ III 181, suffering from insomnia, he wonders if the book “will act as an opiate” (letter to Murray, 29 Nov 1813). The next day he writes very politely to de Staël, thanking her for a note she has sent him about *The Bride* (BLJ III 184-5, 226). de Staël is guest at a fancy dress party at Carlton House on 8 Dec 1813. By 10 Dec B. writes, “We are now very good friends” (BLJ III 236).

36: B. writes of de Staël, *I don’t like her politics – at least, her having changed them* (BLJ III 227). He probably disliked it that Staël, whom he had believed liberal, associated with Tories as well as Whigs.

37: Sir James Mackintosh reviews *de l’Allemagne* in the *Edinburgh Review* for October 1813 (see BLJ III 224). In his essay he praises Kant, among other philosophers. B. dines with Mackintosh on 2 Oct 1813 (BLJ III 131) and Mackintosh praises *The Bride* (BLJ III 177).

For whirling above, underneath, and around,
 Were his fairest disciples, Waltzing –
 And quoth he, “Though this be the *premier pas*³⁸ to me,
 Against it I would warn all – 220
 Should I introduce these revels among *my* younger devils,
 They would all turn perfectly carnal –
 And, though fond of the flesh, yet I never could bear it
 Should quite in my kingdom get the upper hand of *Spirit*.”³⁹

26.

The Devil (but ’twas over) had been vastly glad 225
 To see the new Drury Lane,
 And yet he might have been rather mad
 To see it rebuilt in vain,
 And had he beheld their *Nourjahad*,⁴⁰
 Would never have gone again; 230
 And Satan had taken it much amiss
 They should fasten such a piece on a friend of his.⁴¹
 Though he knew that his works were somewhat sad,
 He never had deemed them quite so bad;
 For this was the book, which of yore Job, sorely smitten, 235
 Said, “Oh, that *mine Enemy, mine Enemy* had written!”⁴²

27.

Then he found sixty scribblers in separate cells,
 And marvelled what they were doing –
 For they looked like little fiends in their own little hells,
 Damnation for others brewing; 240
 Though their paper seemed to shrink from the heat of their ink,
 They were only *coolly* reviewing!
 And as one of them wrote down the pronoun “*We*”,
 “That Plural,” says Satan, “means *him* and *me* –
 With the Editor added to make up the three
 Of our Athanasian Trinity,⁴³ 245
 And render the believers on our “*Articles*”⁴⁴ sensible
 How many must combine to form *one Incomprehensible*.”

28.

[*The fair copy ends here.*]

38: B. uses this phrase to Lady Melbourne of 14 Oct 1813 (BLJ III 144). He quotes Madame du Deffand: “La distance n’y fait rien; il n’y a que le premier pas qui coûte”.

39: Echoes B’s *Waltz* (1813) especially lines 216-29.

40: *Illusion, or the Trances of Nourjahad*, a melodrama by Frances Sheridan, was played at Drury Lane on 23 and 27 Nov 1813. *The Morning Post* and *Satirist* both said that B. had written it (BLJ III 175, 224, 225). B. wrote of it, *The dialogue is drowsy – the action heavy – the scenery fine – the actors tolerable* (BLJ III 226).

41: That is, on B., who compares himself to Satan at BLJ III 131.

42: Job, 31, 35: *Oh that one would hear me! behold, my desire is, that the Almighty would answer me, and that mine adversary had written a book.*

43: The Athanasian Creed is authorised on certain occasions by the Book of Common Prayer.

44: The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England.