

WHY DID BYRON HATE SOUTHEY?

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(A paper read to the Newstead Abbey Byron Society)

This is a massive subject, worthy of a book, and it gives an important key to Byron's life and work. My problem in preparing the paper has been how to keep it to an acceptable length. You should know that I've used only about a quarter of the documentation I have.

First of all, who was Robert Southey? Born in Bristol in 1774, he was the Poet Laureate for most of Byron's lifetime, taking over – at the suggestion of Sir Walter Scott, who didn't want the job – on the death of the previous and undistinguished Laureate, Henry James Pye, in 1813. That he should accept the post occasioned much derision, for he had been, in the 1790s, a radical, even a Jacobin. With his friend Coleridge he had planned an utopian scheme whereby they, and a crew of like-minded friends and their wives (plus a few servants – perhaps – the point was a moot one) would set up a perfect society on the banks of the Susquehanna river in the USA. They called the scheme Pantisocracy, and got as far as Bristol with it before losing conviction. Southey and Coleridge had between them penned a tragedy, *The Fall of Robespierre*, and Southey had, unassisted, written another tragedy entitled *Wat Tyler*, in which the sturdy peasants of Richard II's time are contrasted with the effete nobles of Richard's court – who, inevitably, triumph over the nobly-suffering plebs at the end. Written in the 1790s also were the excellent pacifist poem *The Battle of Blenheim*, with its refrain "But 'twas a famous victory", and an elegy on Henry Martin, one of the judges of Charles I – considered by some to be a regicide. More of these works later.

Southey, from the early 1800s, supported Coleridge's family, as well as his own, at his home, Greta Hall in Keswick, near where another friend, Wordsworth, lived. He and Coleridge, to facilitate their Pantisocratic scheme, had married two sisters, the Fricker girls of Bath. Southey was by the time Byron met him famous for having, firstly changed politics from extreme left to extreme right, and, secondly, for having written a series of ambitious and exotic epic poems, each based on a different belief-system or religion. *Joan of Arc* is another poem in which the English nobility feature as bad guys – written in the late 1790s, it was bold in centring (a) on a woman and (b) on a French woman, at a time when France was regarded as the hotbed of all the political plagues which threatened civilisation as Europe knew it. *Madoc* and *Madoc in Wales* are about the legend whereby a Welsh Prince colonised Mexico; and *Thalaba the Destroyer* and *The Curse of Kehama* are based on Islam and Hinduism. Southey planned another, based on Zoroastrianism. Judaism and Buddhism he never mentions.

Before he met him, Byron was aware of Southey as an ambitious overreacher, who needed putting satirically down. He devotes the following passage to him in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*:

With eagle pinion soaring to the skies,
Behold the Ballad-monger SOUTHEY rise!
To him let CAMOENS, MILTON, TASSO yield,
Whose annual strains, like armies, take the field.
First in the ranks see Joan of Arc advance, 205
The scourge of England and the boast of France!
Though burnt by wicked BEDFORD for a witch,
Behold her statue placed in Glory's niche;
Her fetters burst, and just released from prison,
A virgin Phoenix from her ashes risen. 210
Next see tremendous Thalaba come on,
Arabia's monstrous, wild and wond'rous son;
Domdaniel's dread destroyer, who o'erthrew
More mad magicians than the world e'er knew.
Immortal Hero! all thy foes o'ercome, 215
For ever reign—the rival of Tom Thumb!
Since startled Metre fled before thy face,
Well wert thou doom'd the last of all thy race!
Well might triumphant Genii bear thee hence,
Illustrious conqueror of common sense! 220
Now, last and greatest, Madoc spreads his sails,
Cacique in Mexico, and Prince in Wales;
Tells us strange tales, as other travellers do,
More old than Mandeville's, and not so true.
Oh! SOUTHEY, SOUTHEY! cease thy varied song! 225
A Bard may chant too often, and too long:
As thou art strong in verse, in mercy spare!
A fourth, alas! were more than we could bear.
But if, in spite of all the world can say,
Thou still wilt verseward plod thy weary way; 235
If still in Berkley-Ballads most uncivil,
Thou wilt devote old women to the devil,
The babe unborn thy dread intent may rue:
'God help thee,' SOUTHEY, and thy readers too. (CPW I 235-6)

We always have to look behind or below Byron's antagonisms for the real motive for his satire, and in Southey's case it seems clear that he read Southey's work very carefully. Another poet who did the same was Shelley, between whom and Southey there was an amazing physical resemblance, upon which everyone commented who knew both.

The reasons for Byron's hatred of Southey – he once said that there was no-one, apart from Lady Byron, that he hated more – pile up confusedly as the story progresses. I shall try and take them chronologically.

Firstly, Byron, like Shelley, was impressed by the aims of Southey's work (the aims, if not the achievement) and, also like Shelley, took it in part as a model in writing his own Eastern Tales. *The Giaour*, *The Corsair*, *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Siege of Corinth* all rush in where Southey had not feared to tread, and, Byron being a genius where Southey was not, were and still are much more often read. But The Eastern Tales were poems of which Byron became ashamed.

On August 28th 1813, he wrote to Thomas Moore:

... Stick to the East; – the oracle, Staël, told me it was the only poetical policy. The North, South, and West, have all been exhausted; but from the East, we have nothing but Southey's unsaleables, – and these he has contrived to spoil, by adopting only their most outrageous fictions. His personages don't interest us, and yours will. (BLJ III 101)

On January 10th 1815, a week after Byron's wedding, Moore receives the following further encouragement, with its self-denigration, its repetition of the advice Byron had given him in 1813 and its strange back-handed compliment to Southey:

... Now is your time; ... I have tired the rascals (i.e. the public) with my Harrys and Larrys, Pilgrims and Pirates. Nobody but Southey has done any thing worth a slice of bookseller's pudding; and he has not luck enough to be found out in doing a good thing. Now, Tom, is thy time ... (BLJ IV 252-3)

In fact Byron was, he confessed later, ashamed of the success of the Turkish Tales. In 1821 he wrote of his contemporaries

They have raised a Mosque by the side of a Grecian temple of the purest Architecture – and more barbarous than the Barbarians from whose practice I have borrowed the figure – they are not contented with their own grotesque edifice – unless they destroy the prior and purely beautiful fabric which preceded and which shames them & theirs forever & ever. -- I shall be told that amongst these – I have been – (or it may be still am) – conspicuous; – true – and I am ashamed of it; I have been among the builders of this Babel attended by a confusion of tongues – but never amongst the envious destroyers of the classic temple of our Predecessor (CMP 148: the "Predecessor" is Pope).

The first reason Byron had for hating Southey, then, was that he – Byron – had ruined English poetry in trying – successfully – to emulate him.

The two men met. On 28th September 1813, Southey wrote to his wife:

... I dined on Sunday at Holland House. In the evening Lord Byron came in. He had asked Sharp if I was "magnanimous," and requested him to make for him all sorts of amends honourable for having tried his wit upon me at the expense of his discretion; and in full confidence of the success of the apology, had been provided with a letter of introduction to me in case he had gone to the Lakes as he had intended to have done. As for me, you know how I regard things of this kind: so we met with all becoming courtesy on both sides, and I saw a man whom in voice, manner and countenance I liked very much more than either his character or his writings had given me reason to suspect.

One of the better jokes in the story is the idea of Byron turning up humbly at Greta Hall with a letter of introduction and a request, perhaps, to be taken for a walk up Skiddaw. This might have been the consequence of a suggestion Rogers had made, that they go on a crusade together to the Lakes (BLJ III 107); such a thing seems to have been a distinct possibility. However, it does seem that Byron and Southey admired one another's looks. Here is Byron's account of the same meeting: from a letter to Moore, dated 27th September 1813:

... Yesterday, at Holland House, I was introduced to Southey – the best-looking bard I have seen for some time. To have that poet's head I would almost have written his Sapphics. He is certainly a prepossessing person to look on, and a man of talent, and all that, and – there is his eulogy. (BLJ III 122)

“Almost written his Sapphics”, we notice: yet the spontaneous eulogy emerges before Byron realises that he has committed it to paper. Byron doesn’t reconsider his judgement, either; at least not of Southey’s appearance. Three days later, in a letter to James Wedderburn Webster, he says:

... I have been passing my time with Rogers and Sir James Mackintosh; and once at Holland House I met Southey; he is a person of very epic appearance, and has a fine head – as far as the outside goes, and wants nothing but taste to make the inside equally attractive. (BLJ III 127)

Late in 1814 Southey published his last epic, *Roderick, Last of the Goths*: it relates the famous tale of the ravishment of the Spanish virgin by Roderick, which led in legend to the Moorish invasion of eighth-century Spain – it had already been written about by Scott and Landor. It is at once violently anti-promiscuity and violently anti-imperialist. Its message is that illicit sex leads not only to personal but to national pollution. But the following memo from John Murray tells us:

When Southey’s poem, *Don Roderick*, was published, Lord Byron sent in the middle of the night to ask John Murray if he had heard any opinion of it, for he thought it one of the finest poems he had ever read.

Either *Roderick*, or his impending marriage to Annabella Milbanke, or both, seemed to cause Byron to adjust not simply his tone, but his opinion of Southey too, quite dramatically: consider this next, from a letter to Annabella on November 28th 1814, only a month before he married her:

... I think Southey’s *Roderick* as near perfection as poetry can be – which considering how I dislike the school I wonder at – however so it is – if he had never written anything else he might safely stake his fame upon the last of the Goths ... (BLJ IV 235)

There’s no reason why Byron shouldn’t despise Southey and his work as a whole, and keep a small reservation about one poem – particularly one such as *Roderick*, whose hero is a carnal sinner triumphant through Christian repentance and renunciation, with a strong appeal to any serious-minded young woman – above all one about to marry Byron, about whom she could say in her diary, “[I am] now additionally convinced that he is sincerely repentant for the evil he has done, though he has not resolution (without aid) to adopt a new course of conduct ...”

Nine days after the letter to Moore Byron adds a comment on *Roderick*, impugning for Moore’s benefit the insight it, and by association the *Odyssey*, show into the abilities of dogs to recognise their owners after long absences: speaking as usual as an expert in an area where Southey is but a closet-student (Southey was a cat-lover) he refers to one of Boatswain’s companions, who “bit away the backside of my breeches” and concludes “So, let Southey blush and Homer too, as far as I can decide upon quadruped memories” (BLJ IV 256).

The possibility that Byron really believed that marriage to Annabella would redeem his tendency to promiscuity, and that part of the delusion – cured rapidly once the reality of the marriage sank in – was caused by his rose-tinted reading of Southey’s *Roderick, Last of the Goths*, is one I should invite you to entertain, as a second reason for his hatred.

There is then virtual silence for a couple of years. Byron leaves for his continental exile, and seems to forget Southey and his epics. In 1816 Southey published *The Poet’s Pilgrimage to Waterloo*, one of his most commercially successful works. In its first part he gives an excellent

description of the battleground, but spoils his effect with a dark and pretentious right-wing political allegory in the second part.

Some small reminders were published throughout these months of what his politics had been in the 1790s; but in February 1817 a pirated version of his early republican drama *Wat Tyler* came out, and was a sensation. Murray wrote to Byron about it on April 12th, and three weeks later, on May 9th, Byron replied from Rome, where he had been sightseeing in the Vatican:

Southey's *Wat Tyler* is rather awkward – but the Goddess Nemesis has done well – he is – I will not say what – but I wish he was something else – I hate all intolerance – but most the intolerance of Apostacy – & the wretched vehemence with which a miserable creature who has contradicted himself – lies to his own heart – & endeavours to establish his sincerity by proving himself a rascal – not for changing his opinions – but for persecuting those who are of less malleable matter – it is no disgrace to Mr. Southey to have written *Wat Tyler* – & afterwards to have written his birthday or Victory Odes (I speak only of their politics) but it is something for which I have no words for this man to have endeavoured to bring to the stake (for such would he do) men who think as he thought – & for no reason but because they think so still, when he has found it convenient to think otherwise. – Opinions are made to be changed – or how is truth to be got at? we don't arrive at it by standing on one leg? or on the first day of our setting out – but though we may jostle one another on the way that is no reason why we should strike or trample – elbowing's enough. – I am all for moderation which profession of faith I beg to conclude by wishing Mr. Southey damned – not as a poet – but as a politician. There is a place in Michael Angelo's last judgement in the Sistine Chapel which would just suit him – and may the like await him in that of our Lord and (not his) Saviour Jesus Christ – Amen! (BLJ V 220-1)

Suddenly the indifference about Southey has lifted. Here is the letter in which Byron announces to Moore, from Venice, on September 19th 1818, the birth of a new work:

I have finished the First Canto (a long one, of about 180 octaves) of a poem in the style and manner of "Beppo," encouraged by the good success of the same. It is called "Don Juan," and is meant to be a little quietly facetious upon every thing. But I doubt whether it is not – at least, as far as it has yet gone – too free for these very modest days. However, I shall try the experiment, anonymously, and if it don't take, it will be discontinued. It is dedicated to S[outhey] in good, simple, savage verse, upon the [Laureate's] politics, and the way he got them. (VI 67-8)

The relevant parts of the Dedication to *Don Juan* run thus:

Bob Southey! You're a poet – poet Laureat, And representative of all the race; Although 'tis true you turned out a Tory at Last, yours has lately been a common case; And now my Epic Renegade! what are ye at, With all the Lakers in and out of place? A nest of tuneful persons, to my eye Like “four and twenty Blackbirds in a pye”	5
“Which pye being opened, they began to sing” (This old song and new Similie holds good) “A dainty dish to set before the King,” Or Regent, who admires such kind of food. And Coleridge, too, has lately taken wing, But like a Hawk encumbered with his hood, Explaining Metaphysics to the Nation – I wish he would explain his Explanation. –	10 15
You, Bob! are rather insolent, you know, At being disappointed in your wish To supersede all warblers here below, And be the only Blackbird in the dish; And then you overstrain yourself, or so, And tumble downward like the flying fish Gasping on deck, because you soar too high, Bob, And fall, for lack of moisture, quite adry, Bob! –	20

A “dry-bob” was Regency gentleman’s slang for coition without emission. Byron may have been helped by some sensational news he received. The rough draft of *Don Juan* Canto I is dated “July 3rd. 1818” to “Sept^r. 6th. 1818”, and the fair copy “Sept^r. 18th. 1818 to Nov^r. 1st. 1818”: here is Byron, writing to Hobhouse from Venice on the later date of November 11th 1818:

... the first Canto of Don Juan ... containing two hundred Octaves – and a dedication in verse of a dozen to Bob Southey – bitter as necessary – I mean the dedication – I will tell you why. – The Son of a Bitch on his return from Switzerland two years ago – said that Shelley and I “had formed a League of Incest and practised our precepts with &c.” – he lied like a rascal – for they were not Sisters – one being Godwin’s daughter by Mary Wollstonecraft – and the other the daughter of the present Mrs G[odwin] by a former husband. – The Attack contains no allusion to the cause – but – some good verses – and all political and poetical. – He lied in another sense – for there was no promiscuous intercourse – my commerce being limited to the carnal knowledge of the Miss C[lairmont] – I had nothing to do with the offspring of Mary Wollstonecraft – which Mary was a former love of Southey’s – which might have taught him to respect the fame of her daughter. (VI 76)

November 11th 1818 was the day on which John Hanson arrived in Venice with the deeds of transfer for the sale of Newstead Abbey to Thomas Wildman. It seems that Hanson was the man who gave Byron the information which constitutes the third reason for his hatred of Southey – that Southey had spread rumours about him. If he had not heard them when he started the Dedication, they were an important spur to creativity, for his attitude to Southey underwent, upon hearing them, a decisive change: literary and social distaste became at last personal hatred, and the urge to mock transmuted into the desire to destroy.

The question, whether Byron is right in ascribing Southey's seeming fascination with his sex-life to jealousy of Byron's supposed relationship with Mary Godwin, Southey having lusted after her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, is too complex to go into here – suffice to say that I believe the evidence suggests that Southey *had* been infatuated with Mary Wollstonecraft, and that Byron's theory – perhaps emanating from Mary Godwin – was correct. Murray assumed that the "League of Incest" rumour was true, which stung Byron to another denial; on May 20th he wrote back:

You are wrong – I never had those "two ladies" – upon my honour! never believe but half such stories. – Southey was a damned scoundrel to spread such a lie of a woman whose mother he did his best to get – & could not. (BLJ VII 202)

The third stanza of the Dedication, with the "dry bob" gag, does not appear in the rough draft; it was added vertically in the margin of the fair copy after the fair copy was finished; and the very first line is, both in draft and initial fair copy, the formal "Southey! you are a poet – poet Laureat". Received Stanza 1 line 1 ("Bob Southey! You're a poet – poet Laureat") was also substituted after fair copying was finished. It seems Byron did not at first contemplate the "dry-Bob" obscenity, and did not at first decide that a tone of grossly ironical familiarity was most appropriate. Southey's supposed indiscretion, and his nickname (unfortunate at the time) helped in both respects. The Dedication ends:

Where shall I turn me not to view its bonds?
 For I shall never feel them – Italy!
 Thy late reviving Roman Soul desponds
 Beneath the lie this State-thing [Castlereagh] breathed o'er thee;
 Thy clanking Chain, and Erin's yet green Wounds, 125
 Have voices – tongues to cry aloud for me.
 Europe has slaves, allies, kings, armies still,
 And Southey lives to sing them very ill. –

Meantime, Sir Laureat, I proceed to dedicate
 In honest, simple verse, this song to you; 130
 And if in flattering strains I do not predicate,
 'Tis that I still retain my "Buff and blue."
 My Politics, as yet, are all to educate,
 Apostacy's so fashionable too,
 To keep one creed's a task grown quite Herculean, 135
 Is it not so, my Tory Ultra-Julian? –

Byron thus felt the need, as work on the *Don Juan* Dedication proceeded, to be more ironically genial towards Southey. Southey is not just an apostate and canting rogue – he is a desexed neuter, his sexual inadequacy being a metaphor for his poetic sterility, and probably – though Byron omits to say it at this point – a lewd-tongued voyeur as well.

at any respectable bookseller's. This was particularly the case with regard to our poetry. It is now no longer so; and woe to those by whom the offence cometh! ... Men of diseased hearts and depraved imaginations, who, forming a system of opinions to suit their own unhappy course of conduct, have rebelled against the holiest ordinances of human society, and hating that revealed religion which, with all their efforts and bravadoes, they are unable entirely to disbelieve, labour to make others as miserable as themselves, by infecting them with a virus that eats into the soul!

The school which they have set up may properly be called the Satanic school; for though their productions breathe the spirit of Belial in their lascivious parts, and the spirit of Moloch in those loathsome images of atrocities and horrors which they delight to represent, they are more especially characterised by a Satanic spirit of pride and audacious impiety, which still betrays the wretched feeling of hopelessness wherewith it is allied. This evil is political as well as moral, for indeed moral and political evils are inseparably connected ... Let the rulers of the state look to this, in time! But, to use the words of Southey, if "our physicians think the best way of curing a disease is to pamper it...the Lord in mercy prepare the kingdom to suffer, what He by miracle only can prevent!"

Byron answered this in a note to *The Two Foscari*:

Mr. S., with a cowardly ferocity, exults over the anticipated "death-bed repentance" of the objects of his dislike; and indulges himself in a pleasant "Vision of Judgment," in prose as well as verse, full of impious impudence. What Mr S.'s sensations or ours may be in the awful moment of leaving this state of existence neither he nor we can pretend to decide. In common, I presume, with most men of any reflection, I have not waited for a "death-bed" to repent of many of my actions, notwithstanding the "diabolical pride" which this pitiful renegado in his rancour would impute to those who scorn him. Whether upon the whole the good or evil of my deeds may preponderate is not for me to ascertain; but, as my means and opportunities have been greater, I shall limit my present defence to an assertion (easily proved, if necessary) that I, "in my degree," have done more good in any one given year, since I was twenty, than Mr. Southey in the whole course of his shifting and turncoat existence ... I am not ignorant of Mr. Southey's calumnies on a different occasion, knowing them to be such, which he scattered abroad on his return to Switzerland against me and others: they have done him no good in this world; and, if his creed be the right one, they will do him less in the next. What his "death-bed" may be, it is not my province to predicate: let him settle it with his Maker, as I must do with mine. There is something at once ludicrous and blasphemous in this arrogant scribbler of all works sitting down to deal damnation and destruction upon his fellow creatures, with Wat Tyler, the Apotheosis of George the Third, and the Elegy on Martin the regicide, all shuffled together in his writing desk. (CPW VI 223-5)

And Southey answered back in a letter to *The Courier* on January 11th 1822. Here is a selection of passages:

I come at once to his Lordships charge against me, blowing away the abuse which which it is frothed, & evaporating a strong acid in which it is suspended. The residuum then appears to be that "Mr. Southey, on his return from Switzerland, (in 1817,) scattered abroad calumnies, knowing them to be such, against Lord Byron and others." To this I reply with a direct and positive denial ... Lord Byron's present exacerbation is evidently produced by an infliction of this kind; — not by hearsay reports of my conversation four years ago, transmitted to him from England. The cause may be found in certain remarks upon the Satanic School of Poetry, contained in my preface to the Vision of Judgement. Well would it be for Lord Byron if he could look back upon any of his writings with so much satisfaction as I shall always do upon what is there said of that flagitious school. Many persons, & parents especially, have expressed their gratitude to me for having applied the branding-iron where it was so richly deserved ... I thank him for having in this stript it bare himself, & exhibited it in its bald, naked, & undisguised deformity ... Of the work which I have done, it becomes me not here to speak, save only as relates to the Satanic School, & its Coryphaeus, the author of Don Juan. I have held up that school to public detestation, as enemies to the religion, the institutions, & the domestic morals of their country. I have given them a designation to which their founder & leader answers. I have sent a stone from my

sling which has smitten their Goliath in the forehead. I have fastened his name upon the gibbet, for reproach & ignominy, as long as it shall endure. Take it down who can!

This was shown to Byron by Thomas Medwin, who reports:

I shall never forget his countenance as he glanced rapidly over the contents. He looked perfectly awful: his colour changed almost prismatically; his lips were pale as death. He said not a word ... He paused a moment, and said: "... You have not seen *my* Vision of Judgement." (Medwin ed Lovell, 120)

The Vision of Judgement (notice Byron's confident definite article) had been written four months previously, and was to be printed in *The Liberal* in October 1822. It represents Byron's triumphant victory over Southey, whose reputation has never recovered from it, despite several recent attempts on the part of Romantic scholars, desperate for PhD material, to revive it. You will remember that just as the heavenly and hellish hosts have reached stalemate on the question, "Is George III eligible for bliss or is he not?", the devil Asmodeus brings Southey up from the Lake District as a material witness:

Now the Bard, glad to get an audience, which
 By no means often was his case below,
 Began to cough and hawk, and hem, and pitch 715
 His voice into that awful note of woe
 To all unhappy hearers within reach
 Of poets – when the tide of rhyme's in flow –
 But stuck fast with his first Hexameter,
 Not one of all whose gouty feet would stir. 720

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!"

The tumult grew – an universal cough
 Convulsed the skies, as during a debate
 When Castlereagh has been up long enough
 (Before he was first minister of state, 740
 I mean – the *slaves hear now*). Some cried "Off! Off!"
 As at a farce, till, grown quite desperate,
 The Bard Saint Peter prayed to interpose
 (Himself an Author) only for his prose. –

The Varlet was not an ill-favoured knave, 745
 A good deal like a Vulture in the face
 With a hook nose and a Hawk's eye which gave
 A smart and sharper-looking sort of grace
 To his whole aspect, which though rather grave
 Was by no means so ugly as his case, 750
 But that indeed was hopeless as can be –
 Quite a poetic felony "*de se.*" –

Then Michael blew his trump, and stilled the noise
 With one still greater, as is yet the mode
 On earth besides; except some grumbling voice 755
 Which now and then will make a slight inroad
 Upon decorous silence, few will twice
 Lift up their lungs when fairly overcrowded;
 And now the Bard could plead his own bad cause
 With all the attitudes of Self-Applause. 760

He said (I only give the heads) he said
 He meant no harm in scribbling – 'twas his way –
 Upon all topics – 'twas, besides, his bread –
 Of which he buttered both sides; 'twould delay 765
 Too long the assembly (he was pleased to dread)
 And take up rather more time than a day
 To name his works; he would but cite a few –
 Wat Tyler – Rhymes on Blenheim – Waterloo. –

He had written – praises of a Regicide –
 He had written praises of all kings whatever – 770
 He had written for republics far and wide,
 And then against them bitterer than ever –
 For Pantisocracy he once had cried
 Aloud, a scheme less moral than 'twas clever –
 Then turned a hearty Antijacobin – 775
 Had turned his coat – and would have turned his skin.

He had sung against all battles, and again
 In their high praise and glory; he had called
 Reviewing "the ungentle craft", and then
 Become as base a critic as e'er crawled – 780
 Fed, paid and pampered by the very men
 By whom his Muse and Morals had been mauled –
 He'd written much blank-verse, and blanker prose –
 And more of both than any body knows.

He had written Wesley's life – here turning round 785
 To Sathan, "Sir, I'm ready to write yours
 "In two Octavo volumes nicely bound –
 "With notes and preface – all that most allures
 "The pious purchaser – and there's no ground
 "For fear – for I can choose my own reviewers – 790
 "So let me have the proper documents,
 "That I may add you to my other Saints."

Sathan bowed, and was silent. “Well, if you
 “With amiable Modesty decline
 “My offer what says Michael? There are few 795
 “Whose Memoirs could be rendered more divine;
 “Mine is a pen of all work – not so new
 “As it was once – but I would make you shine
 “Like your own trumpet– by the way, my own
 “Has more of brass in’t, and is as well blown. 800

“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 – 805
 “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.”

He ceased, and drew forth an M.S., and no
 Persuasion on the part of devils or Saints 810
 Or Angels now could stop the torrent, so
 He read the first three lines of the Contents;
 But at the fourth, the whole Spiritual show
 Had vanished, with variety of scents,
 Ambrosial and sulphureous, as they sprang 815
 Like Lightning off from his “melodious twang.”

Those grand Heroics acted as a Spell –
 The Angels stopped their ears and plied their pinions –
 The devils ran howling deafened down to Hell –
 The Ghosts fled gibbering for their own dominions 820
 (For ’tis not yet decided where they dwell
 And I leave every man to his opinions)
 Michael took refuge in his Trump – but lo!
 His teeth were set on edge – he could not blow!

Saint Peter – who has hitherto been known 825
 For an impetuous Saint – upraised his keys
 And at the fifth line knocked the poet down –
 Who fell like Phaeton – but more at ease –
 Into his lake – for there he did not drown,
 A different web being by the Destinies 830
 Woven for the Laureate’s final wreath – whene’er
 Reform shall happen, either here or there. –

He first sunk to the bottom, like his works,
 But soon rose to the surface, like himself,
 For all Corrupted things are buoyed like Corks, 835
 By their own rottenness – light as an Elf,
 Or Wisp that flits o’er a Morass – he lurks
 It may be, still, like dull books on a shelf
 In his own den, to scrawl some “Life” or “Vision” –
 As Wellborn says, “the Devil turned Precisian.” – 840

As for the rest – to come to the Conclusion
Of this true dream – the telescope is gone
Which kept my optics free from all delusion,
And showed me what I in my turn have shown;
All I saw farther in the last confusion 845
Was that King George slipped into heaven for one –
And when the tumult dwindled to a calm,
I left him practising the hundredth Psalm.

What surprises is the relatively mild and charitable nature of the punishment Byron meets out. Southey does not end up in Hell, as Byron would if Southey had his way, but merely in Derwentwater. But then, charity was one of Byron's distinguishing traits – and he did not want to be tarred at the Last Judgement with the same brush as the hypocritical, canting, changeable, turncoat, talentless and vindictive Robert Southey.