BYRON AND DRAMA: AN E-MAIL EXCHANGE
Bernard Beatty and Peter Cochran

The following is an e-mail discussion which came out of the blue and has been developed and polished up in three or four days. It doesn't flow like a logical argument, but stops starts has interjections and jumps about like a real one. It arises out of differences of opinion visible though not explicit in our recent book ***Byron at the Theatre*** (purchasable on line at http://www.c-s-p.org), and serves as a useful introduction or appendage to that volume.

On 05/02/2008, Peter Cochran <cochranpeter@hotmail.com> wrote:

COCHRAN: Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth, Iago persuades Othello, Volumnia persuades Coriolanus, everyone persuades Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and most brilliantly, while Antonio tries to persuade Sebastian to kill Alonzo, Sebastian in fact persuades Antonio to kill him. Drama is about people influencing one another. Byron didn't like influencing others via words and tones and moods and arguments – he preferred getting them into a corner where they had of their own volition, seemingly uninfluenced by anything he said, to do what he wanted. He refused to acknowledge that he was a member of the human race. Hated the idea that he was one of us. Having this distaste or fear of relating, he avoids depicting it. Are there any examples in his work, narrative or dramatic, where anyone persuades someone else, successfully? Francesca does her best with Alp but (a) she's a ghost and (b) she fails anyway. There are three ways of proving that you exist – killing someone, ****ing them, or getting them to change their mind. The third is the hardest, and Byron neither did it nor dramatised anyone doing it. That's why his plays are so boring. P.

On 06/02/2008, Bernard Beatty <bernard.beatty@gmail.com> replied:

BEATTY: **Dear Peter,**

I agree that Byron's plays don't centre in multiple persuasions within the play but I don't find them boring at all. I would argue that counter-persuasions of different kinds are perceived by, and trouble, the audience more than the characters themselves and this is a legitimate way to use drama. For instance, I like Dryden's plays a lot but I am not sure that persuasion is the centre of drama in the way that he thought it was. In particular, Dryden placed a very high premium on argument – the greatest of all arguers in verse – as in parts of *Absalom* and the whole of the *Hind and the Panther* …

> **[COCHRAN:** THEY'RE NOT PLAYS!
>
> BEATTY: **True but the argument at the moment is whether Byron / Dryden argued. Most of Dryden's plays argue and involve constant changing of sides that is their virtue but also their limitation. No one is persuaded to do anything in Racine's *Phedre* who has a similarly Calvinist view of character.]**

… whereas Byron (see *His Very Self and Voice* for hundreds of examples) disliked argument and avoided it.

COCHRAN: YES BUT THAT WAS LIFE – I'M TALKING ABOUT ART – AND ANYWAY WHAT SORT OF MAN AVOIDS ARGUMENT? DID HE HAVE NO POSITIONS TO DEFEND? …

BEATTY: **Byron did not defend intellectually argued positions since argument only uses a bit of you and to any argument there is a counter-argument. Byron did have 'positions' to defend and did so – e.g Catholic emancipation or not killing Luddites, defending Greeks, attacking the Congress of Verona etc. etc. he was quite clear about actions and causes but did not mistake this sort of clarity for that derived from argument where one minute you might reason yourself in this direction and then in another as all too often happens.**

COCHRAN: … ("WELL, NO, NOT POSITIONS EXACTLY – HIS SENSIBILITY WAS TOO FINE FOR ANY MERE POSITION TO VIOLATE IT")

BEATTY: **He did so for two reasons – one that you could reason yourself into a position that the whole of you didn't agree with – argument is a thinning of what you know and are in touch with (Shelley pays him this tribute when Maddalo says that Julian could make his argument 'refutation-tight / As far as words go') and secondly because once you have made an argument you can in the process (Byron said this happened to him) instantly want to move to the opposite side.**

COCHRAN: ONLY A WEIRD PERVERSE SORT OF PERSON WOULD DO THAT. ONE INCAPABLE OF JUDGEMENT OR DECISION – ENDLESSLY POSTPONING IT, LIKE OLIVIER'S HAMLET ("*This … is the tragedy … of a man … who could not … make up … his mind*".) LIKE A MAN I KNOW WHO NEEDS A COMPUTER BUT SAYS HE'LL WAIT UNTIL ALL THE UPGRADING HAS STOPPED BEFORE BUYING ONE. HE'S BEEN WAITING TWENTY YEARS, AND IT'S CLEAR THAT HE WILL NEVER BUY A COMPUTER BECAUSE REALLY HE DOESN'T WANT TO. COMPUTERS SCARE HIM. BYRON HOVERED OFF DECISIONS ENDLESSLY – UNTIL FINALLY HE HAD TO ACT SUDDENLY, ON IMPULSE, ALWAYS WITH DISASTER.

BEATTY: **Byron certainly dithered, he disliked the idea of moving house and yet he did so. I don't think that his impulsive decisions were disastrous – his first travels, or the 1816 decision – virtually forced on him – or his courting of Teresa and move into her ambit, or his final move to Greece. A less disastrous life than Shelley's or Keats's or Coleridge's.**

COCHRAN: HE WROTE A LOT MORE INTERESTING POETRY THAN THEY DID, WE CAN'T DENY THAT.

BEATTY: **His worst decision was marrying Anabella and this was not on impulse but semi-rationalised. His impulses to write, how to write, what to put in and leave out, when to change, etc., were all excellent ones.**

COCHRAN: YOU DON'T "DECIDE" TO WRITE A POEM ANY MORE THAN YOU "DECIDE" TO GO TO THE LOO. AND I DON'T THINK HE "DECIDED" TO GO ABROAD IN 1816. HE CERTAINLY DIDN'T "DECIDE" TO WRITE IN

OTTAVA RIMA – KINNAIRD READ HIM *WHISTLECRAFT*, AND TWO NIGHTS LATER, THERE WAS *BEPPO*!

BEATTY: **I don't agree that he was weird and perverse. Byron hated cliché. To state an argument properly is always to fully understand the other person's point of view and be able to state it clearly (Newman and Aquinas take great pains over this for instance and both are superb arguers) but the inhabiting of the other side and its demolition always brings into view the possibility that some part of your argument might be countered – this is as likely to occur to you as to your opponent. Thus for instance, many years ago I wore a CND badge. I did so even though I disliked most of those who did so but I could not get round a certain argument which went – the use of a weapon whose effects are indeterminate in extent must be immoral since one of the necessary criteria for distinguishing between good and bad wars (Byron did this and we should do so in my opinion) is that the action must be appropriate (not in excess) in relation to the offence and the putting right of whatever is wrong. But atom bomb effects are always disproportionate and their full effect cannot be properly predicted in advance. So these weapons are immoral. To have them is to intend to use them, thereby immoral, so their possession is immoral. I could not get round this argument and thus supported the CND not at all by instinct or a judgement made up of many factors (both of which would have been better) but purely by argument. Many years later, I found loopholes in this argument and switched. Byron would never have got himself into this position or that where silly Lefties went round chanting "Ho! Ho! Ho Chi Minh!"**

COCHRAN: "FREE ANGELA DAVIES!"

BEATTY: **Any argument – if it becomes the dominant mode of deciding something – always opens the possibility of counter-argument. Burke is quite right to say that prejudice is very helpful here – the soup of things that makes up our presuppositions though murky is wiser because fed by more tangible and intangible things. It is not at all perverse therefore to be intensely suspicious of too readily settling important choices by purely rational argument. Maddalo is right and Julian (who has 'a creed' which can be stated) is wrong.**

Byron is dialectical in this sense, he is in opposition, not least to himself, to the thing proposed, in this sense he is a sceptic but not an ordinary sceptic (this re-opens our discussion or my dogmatic insistence on dogma and its freedom) for he does not repose with self-satisfaction in scepticism as most sceptics do – rather he is always in the middle, moving about. He writes plays because he is in this position …

> **COCHRAN:** HE'S NOT IN THAT POSITION – IF HE WERE HE'D WRITE BETTER PLAYS.
>
> BEATTY: **Evidence?**
>
> **COCHRAN:** HE'D CREATE MORE DIALECTICALLY CONTRASTING SITUATIONS – AS HE DOES, ALMOST, IN *THE VISION OF JUDGEMENT*, (HIS BEST PLAY) WHERE SATHAN MAKES A TERRIFIC PROSECUTION SPEECH, BUT IS NEITHER COUNTERED BY A DEFENCE SPEECH, NOR SUPPORTED BY HIS WITNESSES, AND SOUTHEY ARRIVES TO NEUTRALISE ALL THE DIALECTICAL POSSIBILITIES IN THE SITUATION. THE COMEDY LIES IN

THE COLLAPSE OF THE COURTROOM DRAMA. BYRON AVOIDS SYNTHESIS OR CLOSURE ALL THE TIME.

BEATTY: **Yes there is something in this point, I grant. But not all drama is of this kind – Racine, *Everyman,* Mystery plays, *Waiting for Godot,* Noh plays. Moreover, and this is a very important point I think, Byron does not want, does not believe, is not ultimately interested in putting a prosecution speech against a defence speech as Dryden might do. Thus, reviewers complained that Byron did not put an orthodox reply to Lucifer's powerful arguments in *Cain*¸ but they missed the point entirely (as do those myriads who think that Byron and the play are whole-heartedly behind Lucifer's arguments) – it is the third act, the action of the play, Cain's move from intellectual argument to sudden murderous action – which is the counter to Lucifer's argument. There is nothing wrong with Lucifer's arguments as such. What is wrong is the idea that argument will take you to the deepest level of understanding and be the same as the commitment of the whole person. Byron understands and dramatises this brilliantly. In exactly the same way, the intellectual and political arguments against George III as a good king and political success are strong. They are not countered by the case that could, in fact, quite reasonably be made for George, but by accident, farce, and above all forgiveness. The point of the poem is to make Southey's confident unforgiving ascription of judgement look as ridiculous (and unchristian) as it is – you can't do this by argument. It is accomplished by the action of the poem and its own working through from extreme hostility to George to one of fellow-sympathy. Your insistence on counter-argument would ruin the poem (and, in the end, poetry).**

COCHRAN: NO NO I AGREE THAT IT'S THE ABSENCE OF A COUNTER-ARGUMENT IN *THE VISION* WHICH IS THE MAKING OF THE POEM. SOUTHEY'S VISION OFFERS ITSELF AS A COUNTER-ARGUMENT BUT ITS POOR STYLE IS SUCH THAT NO-ONE CAN LISTEN TO IT.

BEATTY: **It is true that there can be successful poems made up of argument like *De Rerum Natura,* or *The Owl and the Nightingale,* or *The Hind and the Panther* but Byron is never going to write a poem like this.**

COCHRAN: RACINE AND BECKETT ARE FULL OF PEOPLE PERSUADING AND RELATING, OR TRYING AND FAILING TO DO SO! "Mais, Narcisse, dis-moi, que veux-tu que je fasse?"[1] – "On the other hand with regard to –"[2]

BEATTY: **Yes I grant this too and I agree that Byron is not a dramatist of this sort. He doesn't begin from the observation of dramatic interchange between people (bits of *Werner* perhaps come closest to this). When I first read *Marino Faliero* and *The Two Foscari,* I remember wanting to direct the play so that there was no depth on the stage. I thought of a black velvet set of curtains and the actors would emerge sometimes fully, sometimes still half contained within the black background, and speak out of this black depth in the way that Rembrandt portrait figures often seem to only half way meet the eye, they are still encompassed by the depths from which they emerge. I think that Byron's assertion that he got the idea for writing *Marino Faliero* from seeing the blacked out portrait of him in the Doge's Palace is linked to this. The voices are pitched out to us from this sustaining blackness rather than directly interacting with one another. I like rather than deplore this. It is a possible form of drama. The conflict is transferred to the audience who cannot determine how they should respond or what they should think about the struggle between unjust but magnificent dark histories and splendid but tainted struggles for freedom.**

1: Racine, *Britannicus*, IV iii; Théatre Complet, ed. Maurice Rat, (Classiques Garnier), p.283. Néron finally yields to the persuasion of Narcisse.

2: Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* Act I (Faber 1973), p.42. Lucky tries without success to persuade the universe.

Byron is genuinely puzzled by questions of order and freedom, whether injustice can be got rid of without incurring the very taint that is to be eliminated, that women and men reason and judge and know in different ways, that the past imprisons us but we depend upon it for our depth and even for our capacity to critique it, etc., etc. This is the stuff of drama and his plays are dramatic but centred in a sort of paralysis (as after all is Aeschylus). These impossible conflicts are clearly shown outwards to us but are not argued to and fro within the stage space. We both agree on this but interpret it differently. Drama can work in many different ways.

COCHRAN: YOU'RE DEFINING A THEATRE WHICH APPEALS ONLY TO THE CEREBELLUM – WHAT BRECHT SAID HIS THEATRE WAS ABOUT ALTHOUGH WHEN HE GOT THE POWER TO DIRECT IT, IT TURNED OUT NOT TO BE.

BEATTY: **Dryden has fairly clear political positions and within them can show how clever people on a side that he does not agree with (Shaftesbury for instance) can produce specious but powerful arguments that persuade others. There is no doubt that the Charles II Tories are right (though they don't have the best arguments), and to make them appeal to the reader Dryden introduces not argument but an elegiac lament for the death of Ormonde's son that the Whig side could not possibly do …**

COCHRAN: BUT THAT AIN'T IN A PLAY EITHER!

BEATTY: **… but what happens is confused. Byron isn't like this. He does not know whether in Marino Faliero's position, he should lead a revolution or not.**

COCHRAN: YOU BETCHA HE DOESN'T – HE HAS NO POLITICAL IDEALS, EVEN IN 1819-20! HE'D SIDE WITH CASTLEREAGH AND LEGITIMACY IF SOMEONE ARGUED STRONGLY ENOUGH AGAINST THEM!

BEATTY: **Well that wouldn't have been stupid. Metternich was not a fool or evil. Byron is like Pope – 'for forms of government let fools contest'. He is always against manifest forms of injustice, hypocrisy, cant in government, but he finds the same elements in revolutionary and radical movements (thinks of Orator Hunt as a fool for instance).**

COCHRAN: AND OF HOBHOUSE … AND BURDETT … AND COBBETT … AND PAINE … HE CAST HIS NET QUITE WIDE THERE. WHAT, HAD HE SURVIVED TO 1832, WOULD HE HAVE THOUGHT OF GREY?

BEATTY: **Anyone can have political ideals. Nothing easier. Byron's political ideals are liberty, justice, and good sense but even these can become cant and where to find them in concrete situations is not always easy. Where the path is clear, then you can act, but it is not always clear. Napoleon for instance is monstrous to Canning, a permanent hero to Hazlitt, but for Byron he is an enigma who gets under his skin. Not at all silly this.**

COCHRAN: I THINK PARLIAMENTARY REFORM WAS A CLEAR ENOUGH ISSUE.

BEATTY: **He sympathises with Marino's aims, likes and articulates his 'not rash equality but equal rights' …**

> **COCHRAN:** THAT'S A BIT OF JESUITICAL TWITTERING ON FALIERO'S PART, LIKE SELIM'S *So let them ease their hearts with prate / Of equal rights, which man ne'er knew* – WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? THE TWO-FACED WHIG! "MAN NE'ER KNEW" IT BECAUSE MAN WAS NE'ER GRANTED IT, OR NE'ER GRABBED IT, OR NE'ER SAT ON COMMITTEES FOR IT!
>
> BEATTY: **Don't AGREE. The rhetoric of equality – which means sameness – is intrinsically opposed to the rhetoric of liberty – which means difference – so somewhere there must be a distinction of the Byronic sort. There is Robespierre's liberty and Burke's. I prefer Burke's. It has the advantage that you keep your head.**
>
> **COCHRAN:** GEORGE BUSH IS THUS ROBESPIERRE POSING AS BURKE (OR WOULD BE IF HE KNEW WHO EITHER OF THEM WERE).
>
> BEATTY: **He is neither surely. His conservatism is not Burke's (Burke would have strongly disapproved of the Iraq war) and he has no abstract rationalism like Robespierre. He is like Robespierre in that he has an image in his mind and acts in terms of its simplifications thus he genuinely believed that Iraqis – most of them – would jump with joy when offered American styles models of freedom and government just like the world at large like Coca Cola etc. He really believed this. In this he is like Robespierre who thought that his version of reality was universally valid and obviously so.**

BEATTY: **… but distrusts what would happen if Marino / Bertuccio would win – in the first instance secrecy, then lots of bloodshed, then no strong possibility that it will be a better regime since the conspirators, *à la* Nietzsche, prate of rights but simply want the same sort of power that the oligarchs have but on the plebians' behalf. It is not argument as such that counts here – easy to make arguments about justice and equality and so on but what is the point of that? So – whereas Dryden shows skilful acts of persuasion because this is what actually goes on in politics and also because he wishes to counter strong rational arguments by poetic means – Byron's object in his political plays is more abstract – to render the sphere of politics problematic …**

> **COCHRAN:** "RENDER THE SPHERE OF POLITICS PROBLEMATIC"? DOES THAT MEAN "TRY AND SHOW THAT NO POLITICAL SOLUTIONS ARE POSSIBLE, SO LET'S GO ABROAD AND MAKE EMPTY GESTURES INSTEAD"?

BEATTY: **… to the reader/audience – and to convey kinds of pain (Dryden is less good than Byron at the latter though he can do it). Byron here is like Fielding or D.H.Lawrence – a practical Calvinist**.

COCHRAN: "FIELDING OR D.H.LAWRENCE"? EXPLAIN, PLEASE.

BEATTY: **You ask me to explain it – simply that what we are, especially our deep down ethical self which makes fundamental choices – is predetermined. Birkin and Gerald Crich will always be as they are, so will Tom Jones and Blifil. Byron says that poetry assails it does not argue. Though I like argument in verse, it is not primary. You distinguish properly between intellectual argument and psychological and emotional change. For the reason above ('Calvinist' used**

loosely and culturally) Byron is more interested in being stuck with yourself rather than change. And he is more interested in consequences than he is in choices. He is genuinely puzzled and undecided whether we are fully responsible for our choices but that we are (Byronic heroes are) guilty, through consequences suggest that we are responsible whether or not we are free. This is a permanently interesting issue (grace versus free will, nature versus nurture, etc., and the very stuff of drama and especially tragedy. The disappearance of the sense of puzzlement about this problem is why tragedy stopped and why Byron's tragedies are more like tragedies than those of his contemporaries.

People don't really change (Manfred's dying moment is the closest he gets to depicting change …

> **COCHRAN:** AND IT'S PINCHED FROM CALEB WILLIAMS: "the task of dying is not so difficult as some imagine. When one looks back from the brink of it, one wonders that so total a subversion can take place at so easy a price" – *Caleb Williams*, Chap. 5.

BEATTY: **– they act out what they are …**

> **COCHRAN:** AND BECAUSE THEY CAN'T CHANGE THEY'RE BLOCKS OF WOOD ...
>
> BEATTY: **Doge Foscari is not a lump of wood. I can't think of any character between Samson Agonistes and him who suffers as much.**
>
> **COCHRAN:** OR SUFFER LESS DRAMATICALLY: HE MIGHT AS WELL *BE* A BLOCK OF WOOD. ALL HE CAN MANAGE IS "No more – no more of that", the same line as GEORGE III HAS IN *THE VISION OF JUDGEMENT*.
>
> BEATTY: **Doge Foscari moves me – more so than Lear who never leaves his circle of self-deception even when he is prison with Cordelia.**
>
> **COCHRAN:** LEAR'S BECOME A BIT MORE LOVEABLE BY THEN.
>
> BEATTY: **'I kill'd the wretch that was a hanging-thee' – and he dies on a misunderstanding – as he has lived. It is harrowing but also Shakespeare at his most manipulative.**
>
> **COCHRAN:** VERY SKILFUL MANIPULATOR, SHAKESPEARE. CUNNING FELLOW. BE ON YOUR GUARD AGAINST HIM.

BEATTY: **… No one in Dryden changes, for instance. Phedre can't change, Macbeth can't change. Yes I agree, I like *The Winter's Tale* too. I am a Christian and that involves (pace Calvin) the possibility of change. But Byron changes post-*Manfred* and gets into new territory which is closely allied with forgiveness (*Beppo, The Vision of Judgement, Don Juan*). A real change, in new territory. In this new territory the classical tragedies re-visit the old Byronic hero fixed will territory as a dark puzzle inherent in our actual dark history. Byron cannot dramatise the change from the one to the other, since he has not a specific experience or master vocabulary to explain it – the obvious one for him is Christianity, which he accepts insofar as it says that we are trapped in sin but can't accept that we can jump into newly constituted life. He largely transfers this to eros, which jumps Torquil across into new life, and even Mazeppa. *The Vision of Judgement* and *Beppo* are the closest he comes to Christian or para-**

Christian forgiveness. Byron associates this strongly with the resurrection of the body properly (Byron's theological thinking is always acute though instinctive) and his later verse is littered with it. The classical tragedies derive their force from the complete exclusion of this. They are just suffering. The hidden parallel to the resurrections and dramatised forgetfulnesses elsewhere. It would be difficult to write of any of Byron's contemporaries in these sort of terms. They don't think like this at all. You see wooden people and dramatic situations compared to other examples, I see the reopening up of huge puzzles and pain.

Lucifer does not persuade Cain …

COCHRAN: THAT'S TRUE. HE TEACHES HIM NEW IDEAS – DOESN'T ALTER A PREVIOUS ONE. WHICH SUPPORTS MY MAIN POINT.

BEATTY: **… he is an echo of what Cain has already half thought. The only real change (and Byron is intensely, intensely interested in this) is the act of discovery when Cain realises what he has done, is guilty but not penitent (the normal condition of the Byronic hero …**

> **COCHRAN:** NO INDEED – IF YOU REPENTED, YOU MIGHT CHANGE.
>
> BEATTY: **True, but repentance is not easy or within grasp just like that. The romantics muff it, bypass it. You couldn't repent if you didn't first think that it was an impossible thing to do. Leontes has to undergo time, Paulina's thrashing. The manipulations of Shakespeare as god/playwright, terrible misfortune, before anything can happen.**

… and then has to live in his knowledge of his twistedness which he can't get at but is him. This is as profoundly and specifically HUMAN an understanding as anything in literature and Byron is superb at it.

COCHRAN: GIVE ME *THE WINTER'S TALE* ANY DAY. IT'S A LOT FUNNIER.

BEATTY: **In the play Cain is set between Lucifer and Adah whose views are the same as their being. He is not persuaded by either but is aligned (a good word here) with Lucifer, accompanies him into space (where else?) and then as he exits at the end of the play he is aligned with Adah and accompanies her into real painful time (where else?). The reader is in a tissy between impossibly different forms of viewing life, and feels the pain in 'But with me'. That is it and a very good "it" it is. This is what I mean by the persuasions and counter-persuasions being transferred to the audience.**

We could put this conversation onto your website. You like controversy and I never took up properly your invite to reply to your attack on *The Corsair*.

COCHRAN: "****".[3]

BEATTY: **As to are there any acts of persuasion at all in Byron – Zoe persuades Haidee to attend to his material needs when she is not doing so. Johnson persuades Juan not to escape since they stand no chance and instead to have a meal, Juan's sea-sick stomach persuades him to forget Julia, Juan is persuaded**

3: This sentence has been deleted by the website manager.

to dress up as a woman though he initially hates the idea, and also to stint his somewhat manly stride. The Sultana's tears persuade Juan into erotic sympathy for her (but the Sultan arrives), Ulric persuades his parents initially, Conrad's acts of persuasion consist in maintaining a carefully cultivated air of superiority (when he slows down his stride in front of his men) …

> **COCHRAN:** THAT AIN'T PERSUASION, THAT'S THEATRICAL BLUFF: THESE ARE SMALL INCIDENTS COMPARED WITH THE SHAKESPEAREAN ONES I QUOTED AT THE START – NONE OF THEM ARE LIFE-ALTERING, AND NONE OF THEM ARE FROM THE PLAYS.

BEATTY: **… Juan persuades Johnson (initially not interested) to join him in preserving Leila's life and making arrangements for her – there are lots and lots of examples like this – Byron is not though mainly interested in open mainstream acts of persuasion of the Dryden kind since he does not think that major events are caused by intellectual change …**

> **COCHRAN:** IT'S PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL CHANGE I WANT – "I HAVE TOO MUCH BELIEVED MINE OWN SUSPICION".

BEATTY: **… but by all kinds of multiple factors pressing in including pure accident, and by his sense that something innate in us has already chosen a path that we can't change (either some deep buried dark thing as in the Byronic hero, or the force of sexual instinct which causes so many patterned events to take place though apparently in wholly contingent situations).**

I could go on but won't. I think you begin with some underlying prejudice against his nibs …

COCHRAN: WHO, ME?

BEATTY: **… and therefore find things to support it.**

COCHRAN: LOTS AND LOTS OF THINGS!

BEATTY: **You may well say that I do the opposite and you may be right. But if this is so, does it not fit exactly Byron's view of things as I have described it?**

I think you have a clear idea of Byron based on your initial liking of *The Vision of Judgement* – someone sane, witty, balanced, liberal, detesting establishment cant, irreligious etc. – but then you find that there is an awful lot of Byron – the Tales and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, for instance, that discloses something else.

COCHRAN: NO NO SEE MY COMMENT ABOVE – THIS ARGUMENT HAS CONVINCED ME THAT *THE VISION OF JUDGEMENT* IS IN FACT A CENTRAL BYRON TEXT, NOT A WITTY ABERRATION. IT'S WHERE HE EXPLOITS HIS BIGGEST WEAKNESS TO BEST EFFECT.

BEATTY: **That he is anyway, constantly shifting etc., etc., etc. You have a strong passion for the theatre and the actor and Byron gives this more than most English poets, but his idea of the theatre is not yours at all and seems quite at odds with what you admired in *The Vision of Judgement*. Then you find things**

not to admire in Byron and you veer in a Blake-like way from one extreme to another. Byron is perhaps not the poet you took him for as the author of *The Vision of Judgement* but an aristocrat who plays games, is not a paid-up liberal at all, takes seriously all kinds of dark things that you think of as a sort of Ken Russell tosh, and he is in some sense as religious as he is irreligious. SO I think (I am thinking like Hercule Poirot or at least David Suchet) that you construct a monstrous Byron who is not a human being in your phrase (when I first read Marchand's three-vol biography all through I thought in so many words that it was the first biography of a human being that I had read. I used to read biographies compulsively).

So when we have this argument, it always seems to me that the foregrounded argument is not the real one. It is this strong secret sense that Byron is REALLY X that gets in the way.

This is the best that I can do. It may be boloney. What larks Peter what larks.[4]

Bernard

COCHRAN: WATSUME'ER THE FAILINGS ON HIS PART, REMEMBER READER HE WERE THAT GOOD IN HIS HART.[5]

PETER

… but which is which?

4: Dickens, *Great Expectations*, Ch.26; orthography corrected from Ch.7.
5: Ibid., Ch.57.