

## The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron

edited by Andrew Nicholson

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This book, like John Beckett's *Byron and Newstead*, is a massive contribution to Byron studies.<sup>1</sup> All interested parties should read and digest it – it has changed the lay of the land.

The only versions of Murray's letters available so far have been in Samuel Smiles's *A Publisher and his Friends*.<sup>2</sup> Andrew Nicholson asserts that Smiles includes "one or two" letters (p.xxiii): in fact he includes sections from at least eighteen, though in texts which are repunctuated, rearranged, corrected, and cut – presumably to please his publisher, who was John Murray IV. With Nicholson's transcriptions before us, what we can see about Smiles's editorial principles is striking: they're as unscrupulous as those we see in Lady Dorchester's editing of Hobhouse's diary. For example, with a view to lessening Murray's servility, Smiles (or "Smiles' amanuenses" – Nicholson pp.123, 135, 137), amends Murray's addresses to Byron, so that "Your Lordship" always becomes "you", and "... your Lordship writes" always becomes "you write".

On the other hand, on the few occasions when Murray's tone gets sharp, Smiles cuts those too. Here (in Nicholson's new text), is Murray on August 29th 1817, reacting to Byron's anger at the removal of Manfred's death-line:

I sometimes feel a deep regret that in our pretty long intercourse I appear to have failed to shew, that a man in my situation may <be> possess the feelings & principles of a Gentleman – most certainly I do think that from personal attachment, I could venture as much in any shape for your service as any of those who have the good fortune to be ranked amongst your Lordships friends – & therefore do [*sic*] cut me up at a word as if I were your Taylor (p.242)

Perhaps the omission of "not" after "do" is Freudian, but I doubt it.

Sometimes Smiles's mistranscriptions are comic, as when "Drawcansir" (p.281) becomes "Draconianism" (Smiles I 404). Nicholson keeps references to Smiles's book to a minimum; though his description of one anecdote in it from John Murray III as "profoundly questionable" (p.xvii), needs arguing, since John Murray III must have heard it from John Murray II. However, Smiles's version of Murray's letters to Byron can from now on be used only at one's peril.

Nicholson is able to transcribe – with 99.9% fidelity<sup>3</sup> – not only Murray's letters, but numerous ancillary documents, such as William Gifford's critique of the first version of the third act of *Manfred* (p.220), which spurred Byron to rewrite it, and Francis Cohen's instant critique of *Don Juan* I and II (p.279), which brought forth Byron's letter defending the ottava rima style ("we are never drenched & scorched at

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1: Andrew Nicholson makes no reference to Beckett's book, which doesn't appear in his bibliography.

2: Samuel Smiles. *A Publisher and his Friends: Memoir and Correspondence of the late John Murray with an Account of the Origin and Progress of the House, 1768-1843*. 2 vols. London John Murray 1891.

3: He preserves underlinings, but one word in his text – *Giaour* on p.81 – is in italics; and he doesn't distinguish an erased isolated syllable from a syllable which is erased beneath his current text.

the same instant whilst standing in one spot”).<sup>4</sup> Transcriptions and contextualisations of both these have appeared before,<sup>5</sup> but never within a framework which shows the whole story. Among many other documents new to me, are Isaac D’Israeli’s breathless reaction to *The Siege of Corinth* (p.148), and Murray’s letter to Blackwood (p.152), describing how he offered Byron a thousand guineas in cash for *Siege* and *Parisina*, only to be turned down – even though the poet was broke. The letters from J.W.Croker (he who “kill’d John Keats”) are especially good.

Noteworthy is the persistence with which Murray begs that he should have the original manuscripts of the poems he is marketing: CHP III (p.177) for instance, or CHP IV (p.240).

Also noteworthy – for textual scholars – is the odd glimpse we have of other people doing the poet’s punctuating for him: Dallas (p.70), or Gifford (ibid: “Lord B. uses dashes for commas – this gives the work a very singular appearance, & in some places, mars the sense”). Elsewhere (p.404), we find Murray receiving the manuscript of *Sardanapalus* on a Tuesday night, sending it to the printer on Wednesday morning, and having a proof of the first act ready to send to Byron on the Friday – with no reference to any sub-editorial interference from Albemarle Street. It looks as if here the printer was trusted with the “pointing”.

Andrew Nicholson has little time for R.C.Dallas. See Appendix 1, where, trying to throw doubt on Dallas’s role in getting Murray to publish *Childe Harold*, he finally concedes that it may have been central. As the question “who brought these two together?” is a vital one, it needs more elaboration.

Nicholson has discovered some new Byron letters, mostly notes and memos. They are on pp.6, 17, 47, 61, 398, and 441. He is also able to make several corrections to Leslie Marchand’s edition of the *Letters and Journals*;<sup>6</sup> and to correct some traditional misapprehensions – Byron did not dine with Wordsworth in 1815 (p.134), and it must have been in Scott’s presence that he felt “reverence”. Despite what Samuel Smiles says (p.302), no injunction was granted against the 1819 pirates of *Don Juan*.

Nicholson has missed one letter out. It concerns the American Scott parody, *The Lay of the Scotch Fiddle*, and should be Letter 27:

**Murray to Byron, from 50 Albemarle Street, London, December 17th 1813 (?):**

(Source: text from National Library of Scotland Ms.43494)

My Lord

I send you what will I think prove a treat in the originality of Knickerbocker – you will make allowances for its locality<sup>7</sup> – I entreat you to keep the book to yourself as if I get the other I will publish this –

Mr Gifford & Mr Rose are here  
ever Dear Sir

yrs

J M

After the other

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4: Changed by Byron to “we are never scorched and drenched at the same time” (BLJ VI 207-8).

5: See Cochran, *John Murray, William Gifford and the Third Act of Manfred, Notes and Queries*, September 1991, pp. 308-10; and Francis Cohen, *Don Juan and Casti in Romanticism* 4.1 1998, pp. 120-4. Nicholson’s transcription of the latter seems to me the better of the two.

6: They are on pages 29, 38, 59 (twice), 84, 93, 103, 159, 268, 286-7, 354, 358, 362, 387, and 462.

7: It’s not clear what B. could find offensive about the book’s “locality”; perhaps Mu. means “its relation to Scott”.

[1:2, 3 and 4 blank.]

Very striking is the number of references to Jane Austen (*Emma* on p.149, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* on p.246); and strange what we know to be the complete absence of any references to her on Byron's part. Nicholson – as if atoning for having omitted it from *The Complete Miscellaneous Prose* – includes as an Appendix the catalogue from the aborted 1813 sale of Byron's library,<sup>8</sup> which reveals him to have owned *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

We notice that Murray always capitalises “Edition”, “Copy”, and “Proof”.

There are entertaining asides about people for whom Murray has no time. For example, Shelley:

I am sure that the person who was to have been your supervisor is a perfect <wreth> wretch – without any homogenous [*sic*] qualities to compensate (p.188)

Or Mercer Elphinstone:

The report is strong that Miss Mercer – Lord Keith's daughter – is about to bestow – throw away – her hand on Fla<{au}>t – do I spell him rightly – the French general – a fit punishment for having made a fool of so many Englishmen – to be at length made a fool herself (p.207)

Or John Hanson:

I trust you will do me the favour to confide any Commissions, particularly of cutting off M<sup>r</sup> H—ns head heart or bowels he hath not – & any thing else (p.235: see also p.245)

Or Joanna Baillie:

Mrs Joanna Baillie has just put forth a Volume of Metrical Legends which is absolute trash – so much so that I hardly shall send it to you – (p.388)

The book's approach to its subject employs what is nowadays called Positive Spin, exemplified by the first sentence of the Preface: “This correspondence is the record of a relationship that lasted exactly 11 years and is unique in the annals of publishing” (p.xvii). Ignoring the implication that no other author ever enjoyed a good relationship with his publisher [*if that is what “unique” implies*], we have to say that not everyone has thought this. John Murray VI – Jock Murray – was so embarrassed by the style which Murray II found natural when writing to his most famous author, that he didn't want the letters read by anyone, let alone published. Looking at some of the tones of voice Murray II employs, one can see why not. Here he is in 1812, writing about *Childe Harold* I and II (not yet out):

I have now, however, the pleasure of sending under a separate cover, the first proof sheet of your Lordships Poem – which is so good as to be entitled to all your care to render prefect<ionate> – besides its general merits, there are parts, which I am tempted to believe, far excel anything that your Lordship has hitherto published, and it were therefore grievous indeed, if you do not condescend to bestow upon it, all the

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**8:** See <<[http://212.158.3.83/pdf\\_files/sale\\_catalogues.pdf](http://212.158.3.83/pdf_files/sale_catalogues.pdf)>> for a searchable edition of the three sale catalogues, plus a suspected fourth.

improvement of which your Lordships mind is so capable; every correction already made is valuable, and this circumstance renders me more confident in soliciting of it your further attention – There are some expressions too concerning Spain & Portugal – which however just, and particularly so at the time they were conceived, yet, as they do not harmonize with the general feeling, they would greatly interfere with the popularity which the Poem is, in other respects, so certainly calculated to excite, that, in compassion to your publisher, who does not presume to reason upon the subject, otherwise than as a mere matter of business, I hope your Lordships goodness will induce you to obviate them – and, with them, perhaps, some religious feelings which may deprive me of some customers amongst the Orthodox – could I flatter myself that these suggestions were not obtrusive I would hazard another, in an earnest solicitation that your Lordship would add the two promised Cantos, – and complete the Poem – – it were cruel indeed not to perfect a work which contains so much that is excellent – your Fame my Lord demands it – you are raising a Monument that will outlive your present feelings, and it should therefore be so constructed as to excite no other associations than those of respect and admiration for your Lordships Character and Genius (p.3).

It's Regency England, and Murray is a tradesman writing to a Lord: but does this put a frank, uncalculating tone out of the question? The problem is obvious: what Byron wants to write, and what Murray is prepared to publish, are different things. His flattery has a hidden agenda: he is asking Byron to submit to religious and political censorship. He doesn't mention the Ali Pacha stanzas in Canto II, which were cut and rewritten to remove their homoerotic subtext; presumably that matter was too delicate to commit to paper. After a time, Byron must have learned how to decode Murray's positives as negatives. Here is Murray, on January 12th 1814:

I called upon M<sup>r</sup> Gifford today & he expresses himself quite delighted with the annexed Poems most particularly with – the Song from the Portuguese & the stanzas to a “Lady weeping” the latter however he thinks you ought to slip quietly amongst the Poems in *Childe Harold* for <this is> the present work is to be read by women & the lines would disturb the poetical feeling – & as it has been already published in a Newspaper it does not accord with your character to appear to think too much of it – If you allow me, I should transfer it to *Childe Harold* & insert the Impromptu in its place (pp.70-71).

Now Byron must have known that the arch-Tory Gifford must have hated *Lines to a Lady Weeping*; it's the poem's Whig politics, not the way it will disturb the volume's “poetical feeling”, and ruin it for ladies, which makes him want it transferred to *Childe Harold*: fewer people will realise it's there.<sup>9</sup> But Murray can't say that – censure has to be conveyed as approbation.

By 1819, and *Don Juan*, Murray's balance on the tightrope is harder still to maintain, and his tone even more unctuous:

My Lord

I am very much afraid that you will be sadly out of humour with all your advising friends here – M<sup>r</sup> Hobhouse – M<sup>r</sup> Kinnaird & I have consulted & unite in entreaties that you will let us publish one magnificent Canto of *Don Juan* – about which the greatest expectations prevail & which I long to realize [...] Believe me there is no Character talked of in this Country as yours is – it is the constant theme of all classes & your portrait is engraved & painted & sold in every town throughout [*sic*] the Kingdom – I

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**9:** In fact, as Nicholson points out, though Murray told Byron three times that *Lines to a Lady Weeping* was going to be placed in with *Childe Harold*, it never was.

wish you would suffer Yourself to be fully aware of this high estimation of your Countrymen & not to run even a Slight or doubtful chance of injuring what is to be the noblest inheritance of a decendant [*sic*] who promises to be so attractive – Let me have the Second Canto of Don Juan & suffer Gifford who never swerves in his admiration of your talents – to prepare what he thinks worthy of you – This I will instantly Set up in Proof & send out for your final alteration & completion & there will yet be time to bring it out in May – (p.267)

He is desperate to publish, but – despite what he says – Hobhouse and Kinnaird have advised *against* publication, and although we don't have Gifford's immediate impression of *Don Juan*, by the time it's published he will write,

How goes on, or rather off, the Don? I read the second Canto this morning, & lost all patience at seeing so much beauty so wantonly & perversely disfigured. A little care, & a little wish to do right, would have made this a superlative thing – As it is, it is better than any other could have written – but this is poor praise for Lord Byron. What a store of shame & sorrow is he laying up for himself? I never much admired the vaunt of Drawcansir “And this I dare do, because I dared?” – yet what but this is Lord Byron's plea?<sup>10</sup>

Murray quotes this in a letter to Byron of July 23rd (p.281), but leaves out “What a store of shame & sorrow is he laying up for himself?” Nicholson quotes it in a note on p.282 – placing one of his reassuring “[*sic*]”s<sup>11</sup> after “himself?”; though *he* leaves out “How goes on, or rather off, the Don?”, which is, I take it, obscene, as in Falstaff's “No more, Pistol; I would not have you go off here”.<sup>12</sup>

Murray is often placed in the impossible position of having to please all parties, and is prepared, here as elsewhere, to make the prohibitions of Hobhouse and Kinnaird, and the moral repugnance of Gifford, into entreaties to allow publication ... of a bowdlerised text. He will turn the truth inside out if he can thereby both make a profit and keep respectable.

Occasionally we hear another voice defining the relationship in less sentimental terms: “... this Scotchman considers you as his property” (Kinnaird, quoted p.124). A still more intimate look at Murray speaking of Byron while off guard comes from Hobhouse's diary (in a passage not quoted by Nicholson). It's Tuesday April 28th, 1818:

*Childe Harold* [IV] published today ... Dined with John Murray of Albemarle Street, to usher in the birth ... Mrs Murray was at the head of the table – we had a most singular evening and sat up till near three in the morning drinking Murray's Hock – our host very tipsy – Murray has sold between nine and ten thousand of the *Childe*. He said to me, “Moore is a good fellow, *but he can't write* – there *is no man can like my man*.” He was drunk when he said this, and I was afraid would be overheard.<sup>13</sup>

If Nicholson's thesis is right (pp.93-4), then Murray is guilty of “hoodwinking” Byron at least once – when he asks for extra stanzas for the *Ode to Napoleon* in order

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10: Text from John Murray Archive / National Library of Scotland.

11: The “[*sic*]” after “I know” on p.354 defeats me.

12: Shakespeare, *Henry IV II*, II iv 127-8.

13: B.L. Add. Mss. 47235.

to avoid stamp duty. There was, writes Nicholson (as he has before),<sup>14</sup> no such duty. I should welcome another opinion here.<sup>15</sup>

Positive Spin is something against which we're on our guard these days, and it comes as a surprise when Nicholson's attempts at it are so transparent: "Murray took an *almost* fatherly interest in Byron's personal welfare" (p.xviii): it was "*almost* as if Byron were acting as Murray's agent abroad" (p.xix: my italics in both cases). Almost means not quite, and not quite isn't different from not at all.

The book's great advantage is that it enables us to understand Byron's letters to Murray – I'm tempted to say, in some cases, "at last". It certainly clarifies a number of hitherto opaque issues. The question, "Did Byron take money for his early poetry?" has more light shed on it when we read, firstly Murray's outraged letter (pp.64-5), on receiving the news that R.C.Dallas is to have, not just the copyright of *The Corsair*, but the option to sell it to another publisher. And Murray's upset on hearing, via Madame de Staël, the rumour that he had paid Byron for *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*, when he had done no such thing, is worth quoting:

And I must confess that at the *time* I stated this circumstance to Mad. de Staël I was not aware of your Lordships liberal sentiments with regard to this sum – for I did not then conceive it possible that your Lordship would have resumed your Gift of the *Giaour* to me – to bestow it on another – & therefore the "explanation" of that part of Mr Dallass Letter which refers to me is, – that although Lord Byron has not actually received anything for the "Giaour & Bride" – yet I am under an engagement to pay his Lordship a Thousand Guineas for them in May – But as <Da> M<sup>r</sup> Dallass Letter <wa> was published & as your Lordship appeared to approve of it – I said nothing – nor should I have said anything further if your Lordship had not commanded this explanation

– I declare to God I think these things are very unworthy a place in your Lordships mind – Why allow a Blight on our Blade – to prevent you from reaping & revelling in the Rich & superabundant Harvest of Fame which your Inspired Labours have created

I am sure my Lord if you will give it but a reflection my conduct towards you has uniformly been that of a very humble – but very faithful friend – [*and so on*] (p.81)

His final way of paying his seeming money-shy author – by slipping the money into his account whether he agreed to it or not – was, we now see, an act of professional pride, not just of charity. Otherwise, as Nicholson writes (p.82), it would appear "that he had got the two poems for nothing".

In later letters, when Byron is abroad, Murray relaxes more, and even gets emotional:

I have ever loved – upon my soul I believe so – by *Sympathy* all whom you have loved (in *my* time) & so I venture to offer my Love to Marianna – can I give a stronger assurance of my devotion to you my dear Lord whose faithful servant I am *ever*

John Murray (p.191)

Does this account for his friendship with Caroline Lamb? Did Murray make a strange sentimental transference, as Hobhouse did for many years (and as many have since) and live his own life through Byron's?

The question is, was John Murray the publisher Byron needed – which begs a prior question: would *anyone* have been the publisher Byron needed: what kind of

**14:** See Nicholson, *Napoleon's 'last act' and Byron's Ode, Romanticism* 9.1, 2003, p.68.

**15:** See William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge 2004), p.587.

person *would* have been his ideal publisher? Murray shows little or no independence of judgement.

Conventional himself in literary matters, he relies almost entirely on the opinions of his cabal, headed by Gifford, and they all incline towards “orthodoxy”. Gifford is heard saying challenging things from time to time – about the versification of *The Siege of Corinth*, for example (p.147)<sup>16</sup> – but they are undeveloped, and made from a conservative viewpoint. Nicholson takes what opportunities the letters offer to show Murray encouraging Byron. He suggests (p.195), that *Beppo* was written at a hint dropped early in 1817; but this ignores the fact that *Beppo* would not have been written at all if Byron had not seen *Whistlecraft*, which was read to him by Lord Kinnaird, not sent him by Murray. The massive creative shift represented by *Beppo* can in no way be ascribed to Murray’s skill at putting ideas into his unpredictable author’s head. No-one could have anticipated *Beppo* – Byron least of all. It’s true that Byron always receives the latest books and journals from Murray. Some, such as the (still under-researched) “Tully’s Tripoli” (p.169), were to be helpful in ways no-one could anticipate. To others which he was to find of value, such as Dalzell’s *Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea*, or Castelnau’s *Histoire de la Nouvelle Russie*, we find no references; the problem being that many of Murray’s letters are missing, so putting together a complete list of “Volumes sent by Murray” does not seem possible. Given that Byron was famous for never discarding a single scrap of paper that he received, we have to assume that the lost letters were destroyed after his death, by persons unknown.

Even though Byron was a mainstream Whig, and far from radical, he and Murray were a long way apart in politics. Nicholson suggests (p.196), that it is “rather extraordinary” that Murray should not explain to Byron that a current parliamentary debate was about the suspension of Habeas Corpus: it doesn’t seem to me extraordinary at all. Whatever the establishment dictated, Murray would go along with. For his jovial contempt for any radical alternatives to the status quo, see his comments on the “Burdettism” of Hobhouse and Kinnaird, on pp.252 and 257.

Without doubt he writes encouraging things to Byron; but they are always reports of what other people think. He could never have conveyed such an honest bipolar attitude to Byron’s works as Hobhouse does in the following, which was written on January 5th 1819 (and which incidentally puts Murray in a fair perspective):

The first time I read your Don Juan our friend Scrope Davies was in the room and we mutually communicated with each other from time to time on the papers before us. Every now and then on reading over the poem both the one and the other exclaimed “it will be impossible to publish this”[.] I need not say that these exclamations were accompanied with notes of admiration at the genius, wit, poetry, satire and so forth, which made us both also at the same time declare that you were as superior in the burlesque as in the heroic to all competitors and even perhaps had found your real forte in this singular style. Mr. Murray came into the room whilst we were so employed and wished incontinently to insert the names of the poems in his catalogue ... (*Byron’s Bulldog*, p.256)

For Scrope and Hobhouse, literary admiration mingles with ethical distaste: for Murray, marketing is the sole consideration. If a good publisher brings out the best in

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**16:** For Byron’s answer, see BLJ V 29. He doesn’t say that his irregular metre is borrowed from Coleridge’s *Christabel*.

an author, Murray was a poor one, because he didn't know what was the best in his author. As Byron writes (quoted Nicholson p.330),

I send you a tragedy and you ask for "facetious epistles" ...

Andrew Nicholson glosses a telling quotation from a letter by Thomas Moore (p.320), describing *his* excellent relationship with Longmans, in such a way as to show his awareness of this issue. The way the relationship between Murray and Byron disintegrated only showed an incompatibility which was there from the outset: the fact that he had John Murray as a publisher was a jinx on Byron's literary existence comparable to the jinx which his marriage to Annabella Milbanke was on his personal life. Who knows whether, with a bolder and less established publisher, he might have returned to satire earlier, and spared himself and the world the "Harrys and Larrys, Pilgrims and Pirates",<sup>17</sup> by which he later felt so embarrassed? The history of European Byronism would have been quite different if he had. There's a thought ...

R.C.Dallas – if indeed it was he who introduced Byron to Murray – has much to answer for.

However, it's true that John Hunt, who took over as Byron's publisher, had so far as I know no critical comments to make at all – he just printed the stuff he was sent, and marketed it. And as for Byron's London friends in the early 1820s, their attitude to his ottava rima work can be seen here, in a letter of Kinnaird's dated December 5th 1822:

I pretend not to judge, or obtrude any opinion of my own between you & M<sup>r</sup> Hunt – But I certainly have not heard a good word of the liberal – The Vision is not felt as it deserves – I mean its talent – The reason of this I really believe to be that the Public is sick of religious disputes – & – blasphemy & all that stuff –<sup>18</sup>

Murray was often charitable to Byron (and I don't just mean when he insisted on paying him against his inclination). The attempt he made in 1816 at rescuing Byron's library from the bailiffs (undocumented here), is an example. But that's not the same as being a positive and creative editor.

The saddest reflection strikes us when Murray writes, on July 7th 1818,

May I hope that yr Lordship will favour me with some work to open my Campaign in November with – have you not another lively tale like Beppo – or will you not give me some prose in three Volumes – all the adventures that you have undergone, seen, heard of or imagined with your reflections on life & Manners – do tell me that I may at any rate expect something by the end of September (p.257)

*Don Juan* had been started just before this date; the Memoirs, at about this time. Byron's continuations of both are thus responses to a commission. *Don Juan* is the most important thing Byron wrote, but Murray was unable to publish it beyond Canto V. And the Memoirs were burned in his front room on Monday following the Friday on which news of Byron's death was received. In responding to the publisher's request, the poet, without knowing it, prepared the way, on the one hand for his rupture with the publisher, and on the other for the destruction of the work in question

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17: BLJ IV 253.

18: John Murray Archive. Nicholson makes it clear that Kinnaird, not Murray, was responsible for the botched publication of *The Vision of Judgement*.

– a destruction which the world has been bewailing ever since. This could indeed be “unique in the annals of publishing”.

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Andrew Nicholson often employs what we might term the Universal Deluge approach to annotation: many letters have notes which exceed their texts’ length by several pages. He believes not just in belt and braces, but in two sets of each: not just in leaving no stone unturned, but in turning over several extra ones, just in case. Most of his notes are illuminating (some, even, economical – see p.122), and show his awesome, oceanic erudition, and infinite patience and cunning in transcribing and collating so many documents with such laser-like accuracy. Others notes are self-indulgent. For example, in a four-line note (it’s hardly a letter) of April 2nd 1816, Murray, referring to Hookham Frere, says

He says you always remind him of Archilochus (p.161)

Nicholson’s note is as follows:

2. Frere’s comment is extraordinarily apt. Archilochus, early 7th century BC Parian poet, was the father of iambic (i.e., abusive, scornful, bitter) poetry. His invective against his prospective father-in-law and daughter was so extreme that they committed suicide; while he himself was condemned by the Spartans for the indelicacy of his verses and banished from Sparta as a dangerous citizen. Horace regarded himself as his follower and boasts that he introduced him to Rome (see *Epodes*, 6, and *Epistles*, I, xix, 23-25; see also, the Loeb Classical Library editions of *Greek Iambic Poetry*, ed. and trans. Douglas E. Gerber [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999] 14-29 and *The Greek Anthology*, trans. W.R.Paton, 5 vols [London: Heinemann, 1927], esp. bks VII, Epigrams 69-71, 351, 352, 664 and 674, IX, Epigram 185 and XI, Epigram 20, and Anne Pippin Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho* [Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1998], 15-104). Incidentally, in his note to line 271 of *CHP* IV, Hobhouse deplores the ‘hornets and wasps’ that beset the otherwise luxuriant site of Petrarch’s tomb, adding: ‘No other coincidence could assimilate the tombs of Petrarch and Archilochus’ (*CPW* II, 231. His reference is to Gaetulicus’s Epigram on Archilochus in the Palatine Anthology, which concludes, ‘Wayfarer, pass by quietly lest you stir up the wasps that have settled on his grave’ (see *The Greek Anthology*, bk. VII 71 and *Greek Iambic Poetry* 50-51). (pp.161-2)

The note is a will’o’th’wisp, drawing us further and further away from the text into its own Slough of Remote Implication and Misdirection. We might pass over the slip which makes Archilochus cause his “prospective daughter” kill herself (it was the daughters of Lycambes, one of whom Archilochus had wished to marry, who are *said in legend* to have hanged themselves, as did their father). But then we think, “In what way does this make Frere’s parallel ‘extraordinarily apt’? Byron didn’t want either Sir Ralph Milbanke or Annabella to kill themselves – and in any case, they were his *actual* father-in-law and wife, not his *prospective* ...” and so on. If we did pass it by (and I wasn’t able to), we’d wonder why, in the long subsidiary part of the note (the main part ends at “dangerous citizen”), Nicholson has firstly to use three tautologous adjectives to describe iambic poetry itself, then refer us to two poems by Horace, and then to twenty-six further poems in four different books (plus a Hobhouse reference). Does he really expect us to spend an afternoon looking them all up, to elucidate one eight-word sentence?

Is one of them the poem which is said to have caused the unfortunate people to hang themselves, and will that prove Hookham Frere's extraordinary aptness?

Still hypnotised by "extraordinarily apt" (not yet having learned to be wary of Dr Nicholson's addiction to adverbs),<sup>19</sup> we take from the library shelves the nine books (minus *Hobhouse*), which we are confident will answer this question ... to find that Archilochus' work exists only in fragments, and that the poem in question is no longer there. We also find that Lycambes had three daughters, all of whom the disappointed Archilochus accused of unchastity: which, as this was never a charge made by Byron against his wife, lessens still more our belief in Hookham Frere's extraordinary aptness.

The poem to which Frere originally referred is *A Sketch from Private Life*. Is Nicholson implying that this is a pathological document, comparable to what we can infer about Archilochus (who, we sense, wasn't very nice)? It would be kinder to say so; but might spoil our view of Byron. Andrew Nicholson's Byron is a terrific chap, who "would never taunt another with their infirmity" (p.xxi). I expect he only wrote *Question and Answer* (a "biting satire" on p.352, a "lampoon" on p.380), in which Samuel Rogers is taunted with everything physical about him, as a sort of exercise. In this perspective, if Byron had wished to taunt Murray with being one-eyed, he'd have called him "Polyphemus"; if he'd wished to taunt him with avarice, he'd have called him "Harpagon"; the fact that he calls him (three times) an "Arimaspian", *seeming* thereby to taunt him with both being miserly *and* having only one eye (p.xxi, n\* to n2 [sic]) is merely a way of showing off his knowledge of *Paradise Lost*.

There are other examples of elongated notes. At pp.521-2 occur eight lines in which Murray refers to Lydia White: they receive a note forty-two lines long (and in smaller print). On pp.84-5 there is a fourteen-line note on a periodical (*The North British Review*), no copies of which are known to exist. The self-perpetuating pedantry of the note on the death of Blake the hairdresser (pp.368-9) is a virtual self-parody: two words ("Poor Blake") receive a note thirty-four lines long. The editorial ambition – to render all further research unnecessary – defeats itself. Soon, having learned the rules of the game (the hard way), the reader's mind wants to reject any notes more than half a page in length, in advance of reading them. This is a pity, because other notes lead into interesting places. At p.152, for example, we are referred to pp.52-3 of Mrs Oliphant's history of William Blackwood's publishing house, where we find Murray's reaction to yet another critic of the versification of *The Siege of Corinth*:

Many who "by numbers judge a poet's song" are so stupid as not to see the powerful effect of the poems, which is the great object of poetry, because they can pick out fifty

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**19:** Adverbs lean on us, and tell us how to react: they have what Keats called "a palpable design" on us. Dr Nicholson cannot use them too often: "almost certainly" (p.137); "sounds suspiciously" (p.163); "a little tactlessly" and "rather casually" (p.183); "touchingly remembered" (p.191); "disgracefully reviewed" and "utterly humourless and almost gratuitously abusive" (p.193); "somewhat euphemistically" (p.210); "opens familiarly" (p.213); "cruelly caricatured" (p.230); "told JM provocatively" (p.233); "somewhat disingenuously" (p.270); "affectionately remembers" (p.309); "truly appalling" (p.313); "very evidently belongs" (p.347); somewhat extraordinarily" and "derisively dubbed" (p.384); "firmly but graciously" (p.392); "slips delightfully" (p.396); "unexpectedly honoured" (p.398); "replied sympathetically and as philosophically" (p.404); "even more threateningly" (p.406); "unfortunately repeated" and "replied superbly" (p.412); "somewhat stiffly" (p.426); "wrote angrily" (p.428); "critically, however, he added very tactfully" (p.432); "most liberally" (p.433); "written impatiently" and "almost certainly" (p.438); "naively reported" (p.439); "very naturally" and "appropriately enough" (p.452); "glances wryly" (p.460); "written appropriately enough" and "unfortunately, though quite understandably" (p.466).

careless or even bad lines. The words may be carelessly put together, but this is secondary. Many can write polished lines who will never reach the name of poet. You see it is all poetically conceived in Lord B.'s mind.

Mrs Oliphant comments:

There is a dazzled vagueness in this comment through which one can see that the writer had a faint comprehension of what he himself meant, without much power of expressing it. It is prose expounding poetry with a general sense of something in it beyond verbal criticism.<sup>20</sup>

It is an apt comment on Murray as literary critic, and thus as a publisher of poets.

There are mistakes in Dr Nicholson's notes. It's true (p.96) that Byron had an account at Hammersley's; but Murray's payments were made into his other account, at Hoare's. The sum referred to here – a thousand guineas for *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos* – was paid in on October 25th 1815.<sup>21</sup> Whatever Johanna Southcott died of (p.113), it was not brain disease. "Luigi di Breme" (p.267) should be "Ludovico" or "Lodovico" di Breme. Hobhouse *had* been "radicalizing" at Battle Abbey in November 1820 (p.362): see *Byron at Norman Abbey versus Hobhouse at Battle Abbey, Newstead Review*, 2006, p.52.

The reason why "nothing seems to have come of" Byron's request to have Alessandro Guiccioli made Vice-Consul (p.286), was that Ravenna lay outside the jurisdiction of Hoppner, to whom Byron applied. This information is in the Murray Archive.<sup>22</sup>

Occasionally the editorial tone wanders from the disinterested to the partial. It's for the reader, not the editor, to say that "It is much to Murray's credit that he never once complains of the loss of his eye" (p.xxi); the editor's job is to make it clear to the reader that he *had* lost an eye. Why is Mackintosh's letter to Rogers, trying to raise money for Godwin, "extraordinarily ill-advised" (p.156: notice that adverb again).

The book could be shorter; though the objection doesn't detract from its immense value to all interested in Byron. Shorter notes might have permitted more documents: for instance, Murray's letters to his wife, or an appendix on the press campaign against Byron in 1816.

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There are two references to the *Newstead Review* in the notes, which is pleasant, but frustrating for those who don't have access to back numbers. For their benefit, here are the alternative sources:

The translation of the letter to Byron from the Bey of Corinth (p.80) is also to be found at *Byron and Orientalism* (ed. Cochran, 2006), pp.283-9.

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**20:** Mrs Oliphant, *William Blackwood and his Sons: Annals of a Publishing House* (1897), I p.53.

**21:** See <<[http://212.158.3.83/pdf\\_files/accounts.pdf](http://212.158.3.83/pdf_files/accounts.pdf)>>. Dr Nicholson *must* learn to use the Internet.

**22:** "I am sorry it is not in my power assist you respecting the Vice Consulship at Ravenna. My consular district extends to this side of the Po, & on the other side Mr Parkes commences. With this gentleman I have no personal acquaintance, and our only official communication has been rather of an unfriendly character. – I am told he is a great coxcomb, & I know him to be much disliked by Lord Burghersh under whose orders he is placed" – letter to Byron from Hoppner, June 29th 1819.

Byron's letter to Murray announcing *Manfred* (p.204) is also to be found in Cochran, "Nobody has seen it" – *Byron's First Letter Announcing Manfred*, *Byron Journal*, 1996, pp. 68-76.

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*The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron* is a colossal and disturbing contribution to Byron scholarship. Whatever conclusions we draw from it, we must be "extraordinarily and affectionately" grateful to Andrew Nicholson and all his associates for making all these documents available at last.