

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Peter Cochran

This online edition of Byron's major poems has been made according to the principles which I evolved in my 1993 PhD at the University of Glasgow, under the supervision of Drummond Bone.

In the introduction to the first volume of his Clarendon Byron, Jerome McGann writes

The opinion is still widespread that (in the words of P.E.More) Byron 'was perfectly reckless about [punctuation and other accidental] matters, and printed texts represent the taste of Murray's advisers rather than that of the poet' (*More*, V). This judgement is seriously misleading and should be allowed no further currency.

It is clear that Byron had no clear *principles* of punctuation and that he increasingly looked for help with them to friends like R.C.Dallas, Francis Hodgson, or, finally, to the house editors of his publisher, most notably to William Gifford. Thus, in matters of accidentals the manuscripts carry small authority, at least in most cases. Byron's characteristic method of publication was to submit a manuscript which was only irregularly or tentatively punctuated, to await the establishment of an accidental system (by Gifford, for example) in the course of printing, and then to make changes in the proofs or revises, often with the help of others.¹

I took note, on first reading this, of the extreme confidence shown in the last sentence of the first paragraph.

I had been struck by the expressive quality of Byron's instinctive uppercasing and punctuation in manuscript, and had noticed how, in the transition to print during his lifetime, a great deal had been lost in the printer's endeavour to make the poet's capitalisation and punctuation "correct". My PhD was an edition of *The Vision of Judgement*, with as much attention paid to Byron's manuscript "accidentals" as to his "substantives". Most editions, in basing themselves on the printed editions, either from habit or from a theory that text was socially engendered and thus could not be altered, perpetrated what I saw as the fault of ignoring his "accidentals".

I have tried as far as possible to emulate Andrew Nicholson, who, in the introduction to his edition of Byron's prose, writes

Where a manuscript is the copy text, I have reproduced it exactly as Byron wrote it, not only to the letter, but – following his own splendid punctuation, or lack of it – to the dash. I hope this needs no apology, and that it captures and conveys some idea of the manner and style of his writing.²

All printed versions of Byron's poetry show a huge series of departures, not so much from what he wrote as the way in which he wrote it. They deluge his free periods with semi-colons, colons, semi-colons / dashes, commas / dashes ... anything to make it seem respectable. The conservative punctuator – probably the printer, not, as Jerome McGann argues, an editor – "tries it by technical rules", as Hazlitt asserts (see quotation below), and insists on exclusive syntactical clarity where Byron seems to call for a more unsettling ambivalence. The excitement of looking at Byron's manuscripts (for you don't just read them), is at once lost. As Andrew Nicholson writes,

There is a bond, a tactile intimacy, between Byron and his writing materials, even a respect for them, even a fury with them. He treats the inanimate as if it were animate, almost human, and what he composes is to a certain extent conditioned thereby.³

1: *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller (7 vols Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980-93), vol I, p.xxxvi.

2: *Lord Byron the Complete Miscellaneous Prose* ed. Nicholson (Clarendon 1991), p.xvi.

3: Andrew Nicholson, *Byron's prose*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron* (ed. Bone), Cambridge 2004, pp.193.

Print, alas, cannot reproduce this “tactile intimacy”: the only way in which you can experience the “respect” and the “fury” of which Nicholson speaks is to see – and handle – the manuscripts. But I have attempted to free as much of it as print can, and free Byron’s subversive tone, especially in ottava rima, from the attempt at institutionalisation which conventional punctuation represented in the early nineteenth century, when, according to Marilyn Butler,

The Enlightenment appeal to universals was insistently rebuked by an emphatic traditionalism, a fussy insistence on the rules of grammar and metre, and knowledge of the classics. In its motivation the appeal to standards of correctness was not as superficial as afterwards it tends to look, since it proclaimed that cultural authority was vested in those with a genteel and clerical education.⁴

John Murray’s front room overflowed with genteel clerics. They did not just assert cultural authority: gentility, and a talent for Latinism, gave confidence that one was in a better position to read the political signs of the times. Here is Burke:

Though human eyes cannot trace them, one would be tempted to think some great offences in France must cry to heaven, which has thought fit to punish it with a subjection to a vile and inglorious domination, in which no comfort or compensation is to be found in any, even of those false splendours, which, playing about other tyrannies, prevent mankind from feeling themselves dishonoured even whilst they are oppressed. I must confess I am touched with sorrow, mixed with some indignation, at the conduct of a few men, once of great rank, and still of great character, who, deluded with specious names, have engaged in a business too deep for the line of their understanding to fathom; who have lent their fair reputation, and the authority of their high-sounding names, to the designs of men with whom they could not be acquainted; and have thereby made their very virtues operate to the ruin of their country.⁵

Burke speaks with authority. Although human eyes may not be able to trace France’s offences, and although the line of the revolutionaries’ understanding may be too short to fathom the business in which they are engaged, his style of expressing his sorrow (“mixed with some indignation”) would convince us that his eyes are more than human, and his line more than deep enough. Compare Gifford on satire, and on vice:

To raise a laugh at vice, however, (supposing it feasible,) is not the legitimate office of Satire, which is to hold up the vicious, as objects of reprobation and scorn, for the example of others, who may be deterred by their sufferings. But it is time to be explicit. To laugh even at fools is superfluous; – if they understand you, they will join in the merriment, but more commonly, they will sit with vacant unconcern, and gaze at their own pictures: to laugh at the vicious, is to encourage them; for there is in such men a wilfulness of disposition, which prompts them to bear up against shame, and to show how little they regard slight reproof, by becoming more audacious in baseness. Goodness, of which the characteristic is modesty, may, I fear, be shamed; but vice, like folly, to be restrained, must be overawed.⁶

Neither writer feels himself implicated in the evil he describes: each man’s style proclaims him apart, in a Godlike security for which his Latinate prose is both the qualification and the evidence. Only the self-consciously virtuous can express themselves so. Byron’s enemy Southey writes like this in his Preface to *A Vision of Judgement*. Now compare Paine:

Many things in the English government appear to me the reverse of what they ought to be, and of what they are said to be. The Parliament, imperfectly and capriciously elected as it is, is nevertheless *supposed* to hold the national purse in trust for the nation: but in the manner in which

4: Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (Oxford 1981), p.76.

5: Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. O’Brien (Penguin 1968), p.313.

6: William Gifford, *The Satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis*, p.xlviii. Compare *Don Juan* XIII 1-4, where Byron seems to answer.

an English parliament is constructed, it is like a man being both mortgager and mortgagee; and in the case of misapplication of trust, it is the criminal sitting in judgement upon himself. If those who vote the supplies are the same persons who receive the supplies when voted, and are to account for the expenditure of those supplies to those who voted them, it is *themselves accountable to themselves*, and the Comedy of Errors concludes with the Pantomime of HUSH. Neither the ministerial party, nor the opposition, will touch upon this case. The national purse is the common hack which each mounts on. It is like what the country people call, "Ride and tie – You ride a little way, and then I!" – They order these things better in France.⁷

Paine's is a different sort of confidence: not the sort that comes from a sense that one is nearer to God than revolutionaries or vicious fools; rather the sort that comes from facing a large, slow-moving target. Pantomimes and common hacks would be out of place in the periods of Burke or Gifford; neither writer would so clearly place himself on the side of mortgagers and country people: their style is too lofty. On which side of this fence does Byron stand?

God help us all! God help me too! I am
 God knows as helpless as the Devil can wish –
 And not a whit more difficult to damn
 Than is to bring to land a late-hooked fish,
 Or to the butcher to purvey the lamb –
 Not that I'm fit for such a noble dish –
 As one day will be that immortal Fry
 Of almost every body born to die. –⁸

Burke speaks of heaven's wrath, and his own indignation, in English which disdains vulgar colouring, and seems to pride itself on its ability to keep the sentence rolling on for as long as possible. Byron, however, like Paine, gets to the point at once, and, far from wondering, with Gifford, whether it is feasible to laugh at vice, announces his own depravity in terms which put it on the same boring everyday level as fishes, butchers, lambs, and fry-ups: things, like his idea of Hell, from a world as real as Paine's horse-sharing countryside. Byron and Paine speak as men speak to men, not as prophets hold forth to the converted. Where for the conservative writers the will of God is an open book, for the prose radical it is a matter of indifference, and for the verse radical a matter for jocularly which springs from a unique mixture of horror and disbelief. Where the radicals storm the citadel with ridicule, the conservatives try and involve us in a conspiracy to keep its image immaculate and whole.

I take the Murray house-style of "accidentals", whether masterminded by Gifford or by Thomas Davison, Murray's printer, to be a minor arm of this conspiracy, and am certain that Byron was, by 1821, not at all happy about his connection with its clerical gentility. Gifford was to Byron in letters what Lady Melbourne was to him in affairs of the heart – a more acceptably benign parent-figure,⁹ but the substitute father was nowhere near as well matched as the substitute mother. See the following, which, though it is from Hazlitt and is therefore to be taken as biased, does not actually convey a bad idea of Byron's "literary father",¹⁰ as his nature can elsewhere be inferred:

He stands over a contemporary performance with all the self-conceit and self-importance of a country schoolmaster, tries it by technical rules, affects not to understand the meaning, examines the hand-writing, the spelling, shrugs up his shoulders and chuckles over a slip of the pen, and keeps a sharp lookout for a false concord and – a flogging. There is nothing liberal, nothing humane in his style of judging: it is altogether petty, captious, and literal. The Editor's political subservience adds the last finishing to his ridiculous pedantry and vanity. He has all his life been a

⁷: Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, ed. Foner (Penguin 1969), p.76.

⁸: Byron, *The Vision of Judgement*, stanza 15.

⁹: A very good account of Byron's relationship with Gifford will be found in R.B.Clark's *William Gifford, Tory Satirist, Critic and Editor*, (Columbia 1930) pp.201-10. See also Itsuyo Higashinaka, *Byron and William Gifford*, *Byron Journal* 2002, pp.21-8.

¹⁰: BLJ XI 117.

follower in the train of wealth and power – strives to back his pretensions on Parnassus by a place at court, and to gild his reputation as a man of letters by the smile of greatness.¹¹

“There is nothing liberal ... in his style of judging”. To imagine such a mind solemnly setting about editing, for example, *The Vision of Judgement*, is comical, even if we allow for Hazlitt’s animus. There is in fact a document which allows us a brief moment with Gifford, as he may very well have reacted when faced with the task: the following is an undated memo from the John Murray Archive:

It is a dreadful picture – Caravaggio outdone in his own way. I have hinted at the removal of one couplet – if its sense be amended it may be compressed into one of the other lines. Its powers are unquestionable – but can any human being deserve such a delineation?

I keep my old opinion of Lord Byron – he may be what he will – why will he not will to be the first of poets and of men? I lament bitterly to see a great mind run to seed, & waste itself in such growth. Ever yours,

W. G.¹²

This document could be about *The Vision* (although in fact it is about *A Sketch from Private Life*), and if we sense such a distaste lying behind the punctuation with which this and other poems have been clad for over a century and a half, we may feel impelled to try some alternative. Verse being a more finely-structured utterance than even the most formal prose, still requires internal consistency in its informality, and I have tried to provide it.

The Clarendon *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, edited by Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller, bases itself on printed texts until its sixth volume, from whence it says it bases itself on manuscripts (see Vol. VI pp.xiii-xv), but does not do so whole-heartedly or consistently. Byron’s upercasing, especially, is often ignored.

For a fuller statement of my arguments, see my forthcoming essay *Byron: The Politics of Editing*, in *Byron Studies*, ed. Jane Stabler (Palgrave, 2006), pp.34-59. Further thoughts will be found in my introductory essay to *Beppo*, *Why we need a new text of Beppo*, on this website.

My method of establishing text may be illustrated with reference to *Don Juan*, Dedication, stanza 3. I begin by transcribing the rough draft, which is in the British Library:

<wh> <s/>rather
You Bob – are <some> insolent you know –
As being disappointed in your wish
warblers
To supersede all <poets> now below –
And be the only blackbird in the dish – 20
then
And <so> you overstrain yourself or so
fish
And tumble downward like the flying <flish>
too
Gasping on deck – because you soar <so> high Bob –
lack
And fall for <want> of moisture quite a dry Bob! –¹³

¹¹: William Hazlitt, *Mr Gifford in The Spirit of the Age: Works*, ed. Waller and Glover (Dent 1902), Vol. IV p.299.

¹²: John Murray Archive / National Library of Scotland.

¹³: B.L.Ashley A 326 f.188 recto.

From this, on the PC, I then remove all Byron's deletions, and place the interlineated words in their correct places, thus:

**You Bob – are rather insolent you know –
 As being disappointed in your wish
 To supersede all warblers now below –
 And be the only blackbird in the dish – 20
 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 a dry Bob! –**

I then place next to it a transcription of the fair copy, which is in the John Murray Archive / National Library of Scotland, Sheet 1 side 1:

3.

[Written vertically in right margin]

**You Bob! are rather insolent you know –
 A<s/>t being disappointed in your wish
 To supersede all warblers here below
 And be the only Blackbird in the dish, 20
 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 <l/>Lack of moisture quite adry, Bob! –¹⁴**

I notice that Byron has placed a new exclamation mark after “Bob” in line 1, and has uppercased the “b” of “blackbird” and the “l” of “lack” in lines 20 and 24. He has also put a hyphen between “flying” and “fish” in line 22, and changed the three words “a dry Bob!” to the more covert insult “adry, Bob!” in line 24.

In my text, I decide to retain all four fair copy emendations: “Blackbird”, “adry, Bob!”, “flying-fish”, and even – as Byron has inked-in the uppercasing so clearly – “Lack”. I then repunctuate with commas and one semi-colon:

3.

**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; 20
 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! –**

The immediate aim is twofold: to preserve the conversational flow of the invective, but to provide a longer, dramatic pause at the end of line 20, as if Byron is stopping for breath. The semi-colon (in manuscript, Byron uses semi-colons far more often than colons), also breaks up the sentence syntactically, into two main clauses, and still allows the comic effect of Byron

In this way he ensures that his pen is again at the bottom of the page in the printer's copy. This joke only works in one place, namely the manuscript on which the poem is being copied. One place where, contrariwise, I have used a bigger font, is in stanzas 15 and 16 of the Dedication to *Don Juan*. Here Byron enlarges one word only in each stanza:

15.

If we may judge of matter by the mind,
 Emasculated to the marrow, **It**
 Hath but two objects – how to serve, and bind, 115
 Deeming the chain it wears even men may fit;
 Eutropius of its many masters – blind *
 To Worth as Freedom, Wisdom as to Wit –
 Fearless, because *no* Feeling dwells in Ice,
 Its very Courage stagnates to a Vice. – 120

* Stanza 14. For the character of Eutropius the Eunuch and minister, see Gibbon.

16.

Where shall I turn me not to *view* its bonds?
 For I will never *feel* them – **Italy!**
 Thy late reviving Roman Soul desponds
 Beneath the lie this State–thing 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. –

Byron was very fond of dashes, and sometimes uses them with great enthusiasm: the best discussion of his use of them is by Andrew Nicholson in his essay on Byron's prose.¹⁶ Here is *Don Juan* IV, stanza 78, where he expresses unwilling scepticism about the historical truth of Troy:

Troops of untended horses; here and there
 Some little hamlets with new names uncouth,
 Some Shepherds (unlike Paris) led to stare
 A Moment at the European Youth 620
 Whom to the spot their schoolboy feelings bear,
 A Turk with beads in hand and pipe in mouth
 Extremely taken with his own religion,
 Are what I found there, but the devil a Phrygian. – – – – –¹⁷

He really does write six dashes, one of them doubled, to show his frustration at the lack of evidence for Troy's existence, and the imperative he feels to record his own consequent scepticism.

Byron uppercased (often by inking-over, thereby making his intention unambiguous), by an eighteenth-century instinct which most early nineteenth-century printers had abandoned: though John Hunt, in the cantos of *Don Juan* which he printed, was more faithful to Byron's

¹⁶: *The Cambridge Companion to Byron* (ed. Drummond Bone), Cambridge 2004, pp.192-3.

¹⁷: A photo-facsimile will be found at *Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics Byron VIII*, ed. Andrew Nicholson (Garland 1992), pp.102-3.

capitals than Davison, Murray's printer. Where the uppercasing is clear in manuscript, I have preserved it.

I also have been keen to undo any damage which Murray's editorial board – Gifford, especially – did to Byron's poems by censoring them. This is especially true in the cases of *Childe Harold* I and II, where I have put several deleted stanzas back, and *Heaven and Earth*, where I have restored the original name of one character. Had Gifford's will been acted upon, much of Byron's later work would not even have been written: yet Byron regarded him with a strange indulgence.

The following poems have been edited with reference to the manuscripts, using the method outlined above, either from the actual manuscript or as reproduced in Donald Reiman's *Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics* (Garland, 1988-95):

Fugitive Pieces
The Devil's Drive
Hebrew Melodies
Poems of Separation
Napoleonic Poems
Manfred
The Prisoner of Chillon
Childe Harold III
Mazeppa
Beppo
The Vision of Judgement
Don Juan
The Irish Avatar
The Prophecy of Dante

During the assembly of this online edition it has not always been possible to keep to the principle "manuscript first", because I have a limited travel budget, and because not all the manuscripts within travelling distance were available. I was not able, for reasons of travel cost and storage, to see the manuscripts of the remaining poems, so these editions must, as far as the text goes, be regarded as provisional, though still serviceable. They have been edited with reference to the earliest Murray editions and the John Hunt editions, both of which do seem to me to employ a punctuation system closer to Byron's own than do the later Murray ones. Hunt, especially, has far more regard for Byron's eighteenth-century uppercasing.

The enormous advantage of online publishing is that revision can occur. Where an edition has been updated, this is signalled. The 2005 Nottingham Trent conference, *Byron and Orientalism*, caused me to update all my editions of the Turkish Tales.

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