

WILLIAM YOUATT AND BYRON'S 'FAVOURITE' DOG

Rod Preece and John Clewlow

Among the great literary personages of the Georgian era, George Gordon, Lord Byron, stood out as a controversial figure whose flamboyant public presence attracted constant attention. Today he is revered as one of the pre-eminent men of letters of the Romantic Age. In his own day, that lustre already shone but was tarnished by public condemnation of his incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh. He escaped ignominious prosecution only by the skin of his noble lineage. Yet Byron's illicit affair served to foster the mystical aura that attached to his person.

As an undergraduate at Trinity College, Cambridge, the noble lord ostentatiously promenaded his pet bear along King's Parade while his fellow Cambridge student Samuel Taylor Coleridge – a man of less audacious habits but destined to become an equally famous poet – far more mundanely kept a pet cat in his quarters at Jesus College. When Byron lived in a sumptuous villa at Ravenna in 1821 he shared his Italian abode with five monkeys, five cats, ten horses, eight dogs and eleven birds, including five peacocks. In his early maturity he presented himself as a committed and steadfast vegetarian, refusing flesh, fish and even wine, although the more consistent vegetarian Percy Bysshe Shelley reported Byron's excesses of exotic flesh dishes shortly thereafter. Upon being asked how long he thought Byron would continue his abstemious dietary habits, the banker and poet Samuel Rogers replied to the Irish poet Thomas Moore, 'just as long as you continue to notice it'. The restricted diet did not continue long. In 1808, on the death of his dog Boatswain from rabies, Byron wrote a moving poem to honour him, including the memorable lines about his dog's 'Beauty without vanity, Strength without insolence, Courage without Ferocity; and all the Virtues of Man without his Vices'. In short, Byron's relationship with the animal realm was one of unabashed self-glorification tinged by sincere animal sensibilities, especially when judged by the standards of his own time. The animal sensibilities became a part of his public persona.

Having committed himself to support Greek independence from Turkish imperialism, Byron died in his quest at Missolonghi in 1824, aged thirty-six. Some of his property, including one of his dogs, was bequeathed to the politician and memoirist John Cam Hobhouse. Hobhouse, who was two years older than Byron, had first met his later travelling companion when they were fellow students at Trinity College. While at Trinity, Hobhouse founded the Cambridge Whig Club

which proved a portent of his introduction to Radical politics. In 1809, the year after graduation, he accompanied his equally radical friend Byron on a tour of Spain, Greece and Turkey. Hobhouse demonstrated his radical bent when, following Waterloo, he declared publicly in favour of Napoleon over the newly installed Bourbon Louis XVIII. In 1820 he was elected to the House of Commons as member for Westminster as a Radical. He undertook a further continental trip with Byron, helped with some of the notes for his poetry, and, on Byron's death, proved his will and superintended the arrangements for his funeral. Later, Hobhouse inherited his father's baronetcy, returned to his earlier Whig loyalty and served as a minister in the administrations of Earl Grey, Viscount Melbourne and Lord John Russell before being elevated to the peerage as Baron Broughton.

There was considerable status involved in being bequeathed a dog of the famous poet and animal lover, and considerable pride in caring well for his friend's dog on whom such attention and affection had been apparently lavished. There was also status in being selected as the veterinarian to look after the dog. The fact that William Youatt was chosen reflects both his stature in the young veterinary profession and the exalted circles in which, if he did not move, he was known and respected. Three dogs had accompanied Byron's body from Greece. Lyon, a descendant of the famed Boatswain whom Byron had immortalized in verse, though some have suggested that Hobhouse was the author of the epitaph, was a great black and white Newfoundland dog. The second dog was Moretto, an Italian bulldog, that went to be cared for by Washington Irving at Newstead Abbey, the ancestral home of the Byrons in Nottinghamshire. The third dog was Geone, about whom nothing is known. Given Byron's affection for Boatswain, the 'favourite' dog that Hobhouse inherited and Youatt treated, we may speculate, was more likely than not Lyon.

Two letters¹ have come to light from William Youatt to John Cam Hobhouse which illuminate an unfortunate episode concerning the death of the supposedly 'favourite' dog. The letters also reflect something of William Youatt's personality and raise questions about his potential authorship beyond the realm of veterinary science. It is remarkable that Youatt had been chosen as the veterinarian. In the early summer of 1825, when these letters were written, Youatt had not yet achieved any of those hallmarks of distinction which were later to adorn his exemplary career. He was not yet editor of *The Veterinarian*; he did not yet lecture at University College, London; he had not yet written any of his groundbreaking veterinary books; he was not yet Honorary Veterinary Surgeon to the SPCA and not yet associated with the London Zoological Society. He practised in Nassau Street, and was evidently beginning to make that reputation that later brought him so many honours; being the choice of John Cam Hobhouse was one of the first.

It would appear, then, that Hobhouse had employed Youatt to treat what Youatt called ‘the late Lord Byron’s favourite dog’, that Youatt had treated the dog for some unknown ailment, that the dog had been returned to Hobhouse apparently cured, and that the dog had mysteriously died shortly thereafter. Of these facts we can be moderately confident. What emerges from an interpretation of the remainder of the two letters must be in considerable part conjecture.

Sometime after these events, Youatt sent his servant to the Hobhouse home in Albany Court Yard to collect his veterinary fee for medical treatment of the dog – the customary process at that time. According to the servant, Hobhouse berated Youatt with a number of insulting epithets. Whether the bill was paid we do not know. But we can readily surmise that Hobhouse felt the account should not have been submitted. In the first letter, Youatt explains how pleased he was to have been entrusted with the animal and how especially concerned he was to see the dog recover well. He advises Hobhouse that it was a ‘complicated case’, writes of the difficulties of the veterinary art, concedes that the case had not gone as he expected, and in general he points out the esteem in which he is held in the young veterinary profession. He was, in effect, denying any malpractice or incompetence in the face of what Hobhouse apparently felt to be such.

Two matters which arise in the correspondence are of exceptional interest; first, the indications of Youatt’s impetuous nature, and, second, the question of unknown books that Youatt may (or may not have) written. Youatt opens the first letter with a surprising degree of mordant sarcasm to a person of such rank as Hobhouse. In the class-ridden society of that era such a breach of etiquette would not have been well regarded. It is, of course, not surprising that being scolded as ‘fool, ass, dolt,’ and not directly but via an underling, had aroused Youatt’s anger. However, his criticism of Hobhouse’s behaviour went beyond what would normally have been considered acceptable. His behaviour was unacceptable by the standards of the old world in decline and the new world in its rise. By the standards of the old world Youatt should have known his place and maintained himself discreetly within it. By the standards of the world about to rise his behaviour was unprofessional, if nonetheless readily comprehensible.

In the second letter, written just one day after the first, Youatt concedes that he should not have expressed himself as he did in the first, and that he felt considerable misgivings about having done so. In the first letter we see a proud man quick to anger. In the second letter we see a conciliatory man, now calm and business like. They would appear to be opposing elements of Youatt’s character.

The third paragraph of the first letter is certainly the most intriguing. The first

sentence alludes to the common Whig orientations and West England origins and loyalties of both Hobhouse and Youatt (Hobhouse being born in Bristol and possibly Youatt hailing from even further West). It would appear that Youatt had long been aware of Hobhouse and his family, perhaps that they had had some minor connection sometime in the past. Youatt goes on to say that he was in a neighbouring country – probably France, possibly Belgium – at the same time as Hobhouse, that they encountered each other but were not introduced. Youatt refers to a short book written by Hobhouse in 1816 that became notorious in its disloyalties to British policy and Britain's Bourbon allies, entitled in full *The substance of some letters written by an Englishman resident at Paris during the last reign of Emperor Napoleon*². The pamphlet caused some consternation in England at the time and contributed to Hobhouse's radical reformist reputation. Of interest to veterinary historians and Youatt scholars is that Youatt refers to a book he himself had written around the same time under an assumed name – a common practice at the time – that concurred with statements made by Napoleon, entitled *The Second Usurpation of Bonaparte*³. In fact, a book of that title was published in 1816. The author's name given on the title page is Edmund Boyce. This Edmund Boyce was also the translator from French of two books written on the Russian and French campaigns and the author of a travel book on Belgium which was in its sixth printing by 1835. Either, we must assume, Youatt was author and translator of these works or his claim to have written *The Second Usurpation of Bonaparte* was an idle boast. The Title Page of the *Usurpation* gives the full title as *The Second Usurpation of Buonaparte; or the History of the Causes, Progress and Termination of the Revolution in France in 1815: particularly comprising a minute and circumstantial account of the ever-memorable Victory of Waterloo*, published in two volumes. The author's name is given as 'Edmund Boyce, author of the Belgian Traveller⁴, translator of Labaume's Campaign in Russia⁵, and Giraud's Campaign of Paris, &c.'⁶ The book was published by Samuel Leigh of the Strand, London.

One factor argues strenuously against Youatt as the author/translator of these books. In the first letter to Hobhouse, Youatt spells the Buonaparte of the book's title without the 'u'. Prima facie, we would expect the author of a work to know the title under which it was published. On the other hand, the publisher, or his copy editor, could have changed the spelling to what was then deemed the correct spelling. Making such changes without the author's concurrence are still to be encountered in the publishing industry today. It is also possible that the strictly correct Buonaparte was giving way in popular parlance to the now almost universal Bonaparte. (Napoleon was born on the French island of Corsica which has strong Italian roots. The most common language spoken is a form of Italian dialect – hence Buonaparte.)

In favour of Youatt's authorship is the great difficulty of finding any evidence of a real person called Edmund Boyce who wrote and translated books. Moreover, in March 1836 Youatt wrote in an article on 'Palsy' (Lecture III) in *The Veterinarian*, claiming that:

'Some of the most appalling accounts on record of the rigidity suddenly produced by excessive cold are contained in Labaume's History of the disastrous campaign in Russia, translated some twenty years ago [i.e., 1816] by the author of these lectures in order to wile away idle hours.'

Youatt said further on 14 August, 1839:

'Although I confess that I was early attached to literary pursuits, and gave to them many a leisure hour which ought, perhaps, to have been otherwise employed, and, under a feigned signature, added one or two books to our stock of general information, which were not unfavourably received, but which I am pledged not yet to acknowledge.'

Sir Frederick Smith⁷ said, Youatt admitted translating Labaume in 1816 while ill.

It would have been at considerable risk to Youatt's reputation if it were discovered that he was claiming achievements that were not rightly his. It would be strange that a prolific author/translator in the years 1814-1816 would suddenly produce no more. It is one thing to make an idle boast in a private letter, quite another to proclaim the matter to the veterinary community. Without any certainty, the preponderance of evidence allows us to be reasonably confident that Youatt was the author of these historical volumes.

The quarrel between Hobhouse and Youatt seems to have been quelled by the response of Hobhouse to the first Youatt letter, of which to date no copy has been found. It would appear that a donation and subscription from Hobhouse to the Western Philanthropic Institution, that had been founded in 1811 and of which Youatt was a committee member, was enough to douse Youatt's ire. The fact that both erstwhile adversaries were of Western stock made the contribution quite appropriate.

If the books on Anglo-European politics were indeed the products of Youatt's active pen, and the evidence is in favour, there is yet another arrow to add to the eminent veterinarian's already bulging quiver. At the very least there is a further avenue of inquiry available into the investigation of the life of one of Britain's most outstanding early veterinarians.

REFERENCES

1. British Library Manuscript Collection. Broughton Papers: correspondence and papers of John Cam Hobhouse. Shelfmark: Add. 36461 ff. 132 and Add. 36461 ff. 135.
2. HOBHOUSE, John Cam, (1816), *The substance of some letters written by an Englishman resident at Paris during the last reign of the Emperor Napoleon*. 2 Vols. London: Ridgways.
3. BOYCE, Edmund [William Youatt?] (1816), *The Second Usurpation of Buonaparte; or the History of the Causes, Progress and Termination of the Revolution in France in 1815: particularly comprising a minute and circumstantial account of the ever-memorable Victory of Waterloo*. 2 Vols. London: Samuel Leigh.
4. BOYCE, Edmund [William Youatt?] (1815), *The Belgian Traveller: a complete guide through the United Netherlands ... To which is prefixed a brief sketch of the history ... and the manner & customs of the inhabitants ... With a large map and a plan of Brussels*. London: Samuel Leigh.
5. BOYCE, Edmund [William Youatt?] (1815), *A circumstantial narrative of the campaign in Russia: embellished with plans of the Battles of the Moskwa and Malo-Jaroslavitz. Containing a faithful description of the affecting and interesting scenes, of which the author was an eye-witness* 2nd Ed. London: Printed for Samuel Leigh ..., by W. Clowes. [Translated from the 1st French Ed. of LABAUME, Eugene].
6. BOYCE, Edmund [William Youatt?] (1816), *The Campaigns of Paris in 1814 & 1815 ... or a brief,, relation of events from the invasion of France ... in 1914 to the capitulation of Paris ... With a concise history of the 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th of June, 1815 ... Translated by Edmund Boyce* 2nd Ed.. London: Samuel Leigh. [Translated from *The Campaign of Paris in 1814* by GIRAUD, Pierre François Félix Joseph].
7. SMITH, Sir Frederick (1930), *The early history of veterinary literature and its British development*, Vol. 3 p. 139. London: Baillière, Tindall & Cox.

Authors' Addresses:

Rod Preece, Professor Emeritus, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

John Clewlow BVSc, MPhil, MRCVS, 1 St James Court, Grange Park Drive, Biddulph, Staffordshire Moorlands, ST8 7XX, UK.
