

A Quiet Adjustment by Benjamin Markovits.  
faber and faber 2008.

A Quiet Adjustment tells the story of the romance between Lord Byron and Lady Annabella Milbanke, their disastrous short marriage, and the multiple ramifications of its unravelling. It is quite beautifully written, using English of the highest quality, and is as close to being the sort of book that Jane Austen might have written had she still been living and working in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as might be imagined! That its author is a young Texan, now domiciled in London, makes his grasp of such a classic English idiom not just extraordinary but a major achievement.

A Quiet Adjustment takes Byron's story – this is the second of a Byron trilogy – from his idiosyncratic wooing of Annabella, towards the end of his scandalous affair with Lady Caroline Lamb, through to his death in Greece. The novel is short on incident but indescribably rich in conversation and interplay between the main protagonists, and the subtlety of Markovits' writing is beyond hyperbole.

Across the pages of A Quiet Adjustment stride Lady Melbourne, aunt of Annabella and mother-in-law to Lady Caroline, Annabella's parents Ralph and Judith, her ailing close friend and confidante Mary Montgomery, and Byron's sister Augusta, for whom he reserved his greatest passion.

Annabella is a wonderful character, deeply thoughtful and resourceful, generous yet steely, and a loyal and devoted daughter and, when she was allowed to be, wife. Byron emerges as a dissolute, self-centred wreck, his tragedy self-induced, his folly monumental and his style beyond compare.

I eagerly await the final volume of the trilogy and encourage all lovers of fine 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century English literature to read this superb book: you will find it impossible to forget.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh