

Lord Selkirk to Lord Le Despencer

June the 11th 1778

My Lord.

Your obliging attention in sending Lady Selkirk that strange letter of apologies which Jones wrote from Brest, has emboldened me to give you this additional trouble, & makes me take the liberty of enclosing to you my answer to him, which otherwise I should not know how to send. I presume there is no impropriety in allowing my letter to go, I leave that to your better judgment and knowledge.*¹ He is such an odd fellow by what I hear of him, (for we were perfectly unacquainted with him till his landing at my house,) that is not easy to know how to write to him, nor yet very proper to neglect answering him, since he is anxious to get one. You would see by his strange ridiculous bombast letter, that he is altogether an exotick character, I am not intirely convinced that he is the Man whom the people of this country say he is; if he is not that man, he seems to be an enthusiast, absurd & ignorant of the springs & movers of our affairs: & as such I would wish to convince him he had no business to meddle with me. But if he is the man whom the people here believe him to be, he is both a dangerous & a worthless fellow by all accounts I can here of him. He is said to be a most cruel fellow, to have committed no less than three murders, and that in absconding from the West Indies after the last one, he fled to America, & so commenced [an] heroic vindicator of the Rights of Mankind, & the Officer of fine feelings. I have made my letter to him intolerably long, but I could not well help it, unless I had given him a very short answer, which might have made him burn my house at his next trip to these Coasts, but we should give the Devil his due, he certainly, be he who he will, behaved well at my house, notwithstanding some Plate was taken away. His letter was so long and so absurd, that it has forced me to be very diffuse also, and perhaps as absurd, to think of arguing with the Captain of

¹ The asterisk appears in the draft and the sentence that goes with it is at the base of page two of the draft. That sentence is: "if you do not sent it, be so good as return it, tho I think there can be no harm in sending it." The transcript at the Clements Library place a slightly different version of this sentence ("If you do not send the letter, be no good as to return it, tho' I think there can be no harm in sending it") after the one with footnote 2 then omit the remainder of the letter except for the closing that begins "I have the honour to be....."

a Privateer.² I enclose a letter from Lady Selkirk to your Lordship, who I find instead of a line of Compliment, that she intended, has run unawares into matters I scarce ever remember speaking of. Tho' she writes in an easy manner about it, yet I believe Scotland in general begins to be very uneasy and displeas'd also, at the want of a Militia, at least I am sure I have heard many angry conversations on the subject by people otherwise well affected to Government, and whoever they are who advise the King against a Scotch Militia, they are doing him the greatest disservice they can. Scotland is at present exceeding loyal, and it will be the Ministry's own fault if it become otherwise. But from what I have seen of late, I am persuaded if a Militia is much longer withheld the King will become as unpopular in it as he is in the City of London, which no true friend to the King should wish for. But I find I am running into politicks, so no more of that.

I have the honour to be with much regard and esteem, your Lordship's most obedient and most humble servant,

Selkirk.

² A long crossed out section follows in the draft: "He is [...] daring & desperate fellow & said to be naturally clever & exceedingly vain, if he is the John Paul from this country, having add Jones only lately to his former name; [heavily lined through passage] & if he is but too well acquainted with this coast for he [heavily lined through] served his time at Whitehaven, which is only a mile from myouse. I still fear that the French & Americans together mean destruction to Whitehaven; an interruption to the coal trade from that coast would distress Dublin fully as much as that of Newcastle would London; & disturbance at Dublin would serve their designs but too well. This fellow Paul Jones has shewn how wven one ship can bid defiance to four or five of our Sloops & Frigates tho in very narrow Seas. But many people say that this might have taken her if she had not most unaccountably lost a vast deal of hands."