

Nicholas Murray

Author

A Note on the Author

Nicholas Murray is a poet and literary biographer based in the Welsh Marches. Born in Liverpool and educated at Liverpool University where he read English he is the author of several literary biographies including lives of Franz Kafka, Aldous Huxley, Bruce Chatwin, Andrew Marvell and Matthew Arnold. He has written books about Liverpool and about Bloomsbury; a book about the British Victorian travellers; a book about the British poets of the First World War; six collections of poems; and two novels. His biography of Matthew Arnold was a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year in 1997 and his biography of Aldous Huxley was shortlisted for the Marsh Biography Prize in 2003. His biography of Franz Kafka has been translated into nine languages. He has been a regular contributor of poems, essays and reviews to a wide range of newspapers and literary magazines. In 1996 he was the inaugural Gladys Kriebel Delmas Fellow at the British Library Centre for the Book and he is a Fellow of the Welsh Academy. He has lectured at literary festivals and universities in Britain, Europe and the United States. From 2003-2007 he was Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Queen Mary, University London and from 2010-2011 an RLF Fellow at King's College, London where he later taught seminars on good writing. He has been a tutor in biography, travel-writing and creative non-fiction at the City Literary Institute in London. His anti-Brexit verse satire *A Dog's Brexit* was published in 2016 and in 2022 *Elsewhere: Collected Poems of Nicholas Murray* was published by Melos. *Bloomsbury and the Poets* was published in 2014 and *Crossings: a journey through borders* in 2016. He was the winner of the 2015 Basil Bunting Prize for poetry. With his wife, Susan Murray, he runs the small award-winning poetry imprint, Rack Press.



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blog: www.bibliophilicblogger.blogspot.com

Awards and Fellowships

- Inaugural Gladys Kriebel Delmas Fellow British Library Centre for the Book, 1996
- New York Times, Notable Book of the Year, 1997 (for *A Life of Matthew Arnold*)
- Marsh Biography Awards, 2003 (shortlisted for *Aldous Huxley: an English Intellectual*)

- Royal Literary Fund Fellow, Queen Mary College University of London, 2003-7
- Royal Literary Fund Fellow, King's College, University of London, 2010-11
- Literature Wales Writer's Bursary, 2013
- Robert Graves Prize (formerly Ruskin Prize) 2015 (joint second prize)
- Basil Bunting Prize, 2015 (first prize)
- New Welsh Writing Awards 2018 (runner-up)
- *Poetry London* Clore Prize 2019 (highly commended)

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Publications

Poetry

Publication Details	Notes
THE DICTIONARY SPEAKS 2023 The Melos Press	
ELSEWHERE: COLLECTED POEMS 2022 The Melos Press	
THE YELLOW WHEELBARROW 2019 The Melos Press	
ACAPULCO: NEW & SELECTED POEMS 2012 The Melos Press	

Fiction

Publication Details	Notes
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**REMEMBERING
CARMEN**

2003
Seren

This novel elegantly dissects modern romantic mores. Christopher, a successful shop fitter specializing in transforming dilapidated London buildings into swanky bistros, is romantically involved with Carmen, a one-time academic now unhappily employed as a magazine columnist. Jimmy, a millionaire and virtuoso pianist with a laissez-faire attitude to life, seems to offer the fulfillment she seeks. This novel takes the form of Christopher's "memorial" to his former love. Set in London, Nice, the Greek Isles, and Tuscany, it is a beautifully crafted and utterly convincing portrait of adultery and its repercussions. Murray tracks his characters through the worlds of classical music, journalism, fashion modeling, and architecture, and asks where contentment might be found in an increasingly complex yet superficial world.

**A SHORT BOOK
ABOUT LOVE**

2003
Seren

Love in all its many guises is the subject of Nicholas Murray's collection of short fiction. Two distinct themes are prevalent throughout the pieces. The first is a humorous take on the classic and convoluted story of Tristan and Iseult, the paradigm of medieval love stories and template for so many other literary relationships. The second is the story of Felix, growing up in postwar Liverpool, moving from boy to man and learning the hard way about love. In between are narratives on love that stretch across Italy and Greece, and through Croydon and tabloid newspapers.

Non-Fiction

**Publication
Details**

Notes

**CROSSING: A
JOURNEY
THROUGH
BORDERS**

2016

Seren

'Nicholas Murray unleashed his inner poet for his greatest nonfiction book, Crossings. An examination of borders of all kinds – cultural, political, linguistic – it is particularly poignant when he approaches liminal borders such as old age.' Martina Evans – The Irish Times

'This impressive collection of short pieces is part travelogue and part meditation on other, metaphysical borders the biographer and poet Nicholas Murray has experienced.' – The Tablet

Crossings is a book about borders. Though many of the borders it addresses are geographical, encountered on his travels, Nicholas Murray also considers less clearly defined, more abstract borders he has crossed or confronted – cultural, linguistic, social, class, religious, sexual. Whatever kind of border we encounter, they cause us both to think of how we see ourselves as individual and as members of a variety of groups. Conversely they also cause us to think about how we consider others – and the 'otherness' which results from their being on a different side of a border. Borders are markers of identity and, consequently, formers of societies.

Divided into two unequal parts, Crossings places Murray in the wider world, and locates him in his home. In the longer first section he transports the reader to Spain and North Africa, Gibraltar, Turkey, partitioned Cyprus, the cross roads that is Trieste, Hong Kong and Australia, and takes a trip along the Danube through the contested lands of the Balkans. Along the way Murray writes about Voltaire and Joyce, exile, translation, the North/South divide and the social minefield of speaking at Eton school.

In the shorter second section Murray explores his home patch, which happens to be the border between Wales and England, known as the English (or are they the Welsh?) Marches, a relatively short commute from his other home in multicultural London. Drawing on his long experience living as a kind of outsider on this historic, but also more domestic, border provides a fascinating counterpoint to the people, customs and mores encountered in the first part of the book.

**BLOOMSBURY &
THE POETS**

2014

Rack Press

Here are Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes on their wedding night in a chilly house in Rugby Street; T. S. Eliot courting his second wife with cocktails at the Russell Hotel; Charlotte Mew, born and brought up in Doughty Street and one of the major women poets of the First World War era; Harold Monro's Poetry Bookshop in Boswell Street, where the Imagist poetry school was launched; Roy Campbell in Regent Square writing his verse satire on the Bloomsbury Group; Wilfred Owen drilling in Cartwright Gardens; Andrew Marvell dying in a house on the side of the BRitish Museum; Hilda Dolittle ('H.D.') the Imagist poet living in Mecklenburgh Square; William Morris in Queen Square writing his Earthly Paradise; and Arthur Rimbaud sweltering in a Victorian guest house in Argyll Square.

THE RED SWEET WINE OF YOUTH
2011

The poetry that emerged from the trenches of WWI is a remarkable body of work, at once political manifesto and literary beacon for the twentieth century. In this passionate recreation of the lives of the greatest poets to come out of the conflict, Nicholas Murray brilliantly reveals the men themselves as well as the struggle of the artist to live fully and to bear witness in the annihilating squalor of battle.

Bringing into sharp focus the human detail of each life, using journals, letters and literary archives, Murray brings to life the men's indissoluble comradeship, their complex sexual mores and their extraordinary courage. Poignant, vivid and unfailingly intelligent, Nicholas Murray's study offers new and finely tuned insight into the - often devastatingly brief - lives of a remarkable generation of men.

REAL BLOOMSBURY
2010
Seren

Birthplace of Christian Socialism. Site of the British Museum, University College, RADA, the Friends House, the BMA, Great Ormond Street Hospital. Bloomsbury is crammed with history and with contemporary decision-making. But there is also working class Bloomsbury and, now, Bengali Bloomsbury in the east.

Biographer and novelist Nicholas Murray walks this crowded square mile or so, among the locals, the students, the tourists, alone or in the company of local characters, to give Bloomsbury the 'Real' series treatment of history, memoir, 'psychogeography' and oblique approaches to the familiar. His entertaining and informative text is accompanied by equally oblique images, the sort you won't find in either tourist guides or regular history books. All of which present Bloomsbury as it's never been portrayed before: intimate, contemporary, exploratory and occasionally downright strange.

A CORKSCREW IS MOST USEFUL: THE TRAVELLERS OF EMPIRE
2008
Little Brown Book Group

In the early 19th century there was a huge surge forward in travel of all kinds. Queen Victoria's accession in 1837 came barely a year after John Murray's first guidebook was published. Then in 1838 Bradshaw's famous portable railway timetable appeared. In 1841 Thomas Cook, the world's first travel agent, organized its first tour. The age of mass tourism had arrived, and simultaneously, another phenomenon began to exploration to wilder shores and uncharted lands. Such is the focus of this fascinating book which draws upon the extraordinary stories of Livingstone's journey across Africa; Burton and Speke reaching Lake Tanganyika; John Stuart crossing Australia from south to north; Livingstone reaching the Zambezi; Richard Burton's travels across Arabia; and countless others' extraordinary and brave expeditions.

**SO SPIRITED A
TOWN: VISIONS
AND VERSIONS
OF LIVERPOOL**

2008

Liverpool

University Press

In this highly personal encounter with his native city, renowned biographer Nicholas Murray blends literary descriptions of Liverpool across the centuries with memories of his own 1960s Liverpool childhood in order to create an original and highly nuanced portrait of the character of this remarkable city. The result is a rich mosaic of description and experience built from a range of literary sources: Swift, Defoe, Melville, Hawthorne, Dickens, Woolf, and Orwell, as well as quirky eighteenth- and nineteenth-century guide books, songs, poems, reminiscences, sermons, novels, histories, travelogues, autobiographies, essays, official reports, journalism, and jokes. So Spirited a Town is a book about how Liverpool has been seen through the eyes of others, but at the same time it is also a personal and moving record of growing up Liverpudlian in the mid-twentieth century: exploring the light-hearted meaning of coming of age “Scouse” while never forgetting that De Quincey’s “many-languaged town” is a cosmopolitan, multiracial seaport with an often tough history of poverty, industrial strife, migration, and, above all, humor.

**KAFKA: A
BIOGRAPHY**

2004

Yale University

Press

Although Franz Kafka (1883–1924) completed only a small number of works in his lifetime, perhaps no other author has had a greater influence on twentieth-century consciousness. This engrossing biography of the Czech novelist and short-story writer emphasizes the cultural and historical contexts of his fiction and focuses for the first time on his complex relationship with his father. Nicholas Murray paints a picture of Kafka’s German-speaking Jewish family and the Prague mercantile bourgeoisie to which they belonged. He describes Kafka’s demanding professional career, his ill health, and the constantly receding prospects of a marriage he craved. He analyzes Kafka’s poor relationship with his father, Hermann, which found its most eloquent expression in Kafka’s story “The Judgement,” about a father who condemns his son to death by drowning. And he asserts that the unsettling flavor of Kafka’s books—stories suffused with guilt and frustration—derives from his sense of living in a mysteriously antagonistic world, of being a criminal without having knowingly committed a crime.

Compelling and empathetic, this book sheds new light on a man of unique genius and on his enigmatic works.

**ALDOUS
HUXLEY: AN
ENGLISH
INTELLECTUAL**

2002

Abacus

The son of biologist T. H. Huxley, Aldous Huxley had a privileged background and was educated at Eton and Oxford despite an eye infection that left him nearly blind. Having learned braille his eyesight then improved enough for him to start writing, and by the 1920s he had become a fashionable figure, producing witty and daring novels like CROME YELLOW (1921), ANTIC HAY (1923) and POINT COUNTER POINT (1928). But it is as the author of his celebrated portrayal of a nightmare future society, BRAVE NEW WORLD (1932), that Huxley is remembered today. A truly visionary book, it was a watershed in Huxley's world-view as his later work became more and more optimistic - coinciding with his move to California and experimentation with mysticism and psychedelic drugs later in life. Nicholas Murray's brilliant new book has the greatest virtue of literary it makes you want to go out and read its subject's work all over again. A fascinating reassessment of one of the most interesting writers of the twentieth century.

**ANDREW
MARVELL:
WORLD ENOUGH
AND TIME**

1999

Little Brown Book
Group

**A LIFE OF
MATTHEW
ARNOLD**

1997

St Martins Pr

Years of research inform a definitive study of Victorian poet Matthew Arnold, the author of "Dover Beach," chronicling the life and work of the masterful writer, devoted family man, and impassioned critic of Victorian materialism.

BRUCE CHATWIN

1992

Seren Books
