

PARSON AUSTEN'S TASTE FOR VERSE, 1751-1784

FROM HOO TO DUNEDIN by way of Christchurch and Auckland, this is the brief history of a little book of eighteenth-century English verse now in the University of Otago Library.¹ It was one of the few pre-nineteenth-century items in the sale by John Cordy Limited on 25 March 1970 of 'Rare Books, First Editions, Press Books from the library of the late Sir Arthur Donnelly and the late Mr Ian Donnelly both formerly of Christchurch'.² Of the six pieces in the volume, five had been printed between 1748 and 1752. What about them had caught the eye of the notable New Zealand soldier, lawyer, and cricketer, or that of his journalist brother? Could it have been the poems, by authors long since classified as minor, or was it (I like to think) the abundant annotations made by the original owner, one who frequently signed himself 'Tho: Austen'? 'How intimately and personally he chats to the books he's reading, and how confident he is of his proprietary rights to revise them!', remarked a modern reader over my shoulder. The copping of some entries and the placing of others showed that Austen must have bought each poem separately and had them bound up probably not long after their purchase, and also that the work of annotation began early and continued over the years.

Who was this opinionated scribbler with a fondness for mid-century verse? A little search identified him as a rank-and-file country parson, of Kentish extraction, the Reverend Thomas Austen, vicar of All Saints at Hoo, near Rochester, from 1751 to 1790, the year of his death.³ Born at Chatham in Kent about the year 1721 to Thomas Austen, gentleman, the young Thomas was schooled at Maidstone and Canterbury. On 21 June 1740 he was admitted pensioner at St. John's College, Cambridge; he graduated B.A. in 1744, and proceeded to the M.A. degree in 1747. Meanwhile, on 23 September 1744, he had been ordained deacon, and priest on 5 October 1746. The life is characterised by its very ordinariness. Unlike that other Austen, ten years his junior, also a clergyman and of Kentish origin, this Thomas had no famous daughter to shed a half-light on those around her.

Just a common reader! Yet did not Dr. Johnson himself 'rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtilty and the dogmatism of learning, must finally be decided all claim to poetical honours'!⁴ Thus Johnson sealed the popular reputation of Gray's *Elegy written in a country churchyard*. The notion is ancient. The great Longinus had long ago declared that sublimity is to be found in 'such works as please all men at all times'.⁵ And Horace tells the boys at Piso that 'Sometimes the Vulgar see, and judge aright.'⁶ Note the touch of professional condescension which determines whether the public is right or wrong! This democratic idea was congenial to the eighteenth-century. Joseph Addison had begun his paper on 'Chevy Chase' by quoting this very passage.⁶ For all Addison's insistence on applying one standard to the criticism of poetry, learned or lewèd, he chose to praise a work of the common people, and to offer this

praise to his readers, no longer aristocratic amateurs, but coffee-house 'gents', persons of plain commonsense, neither affecting superiority in taste, nor boorishly ignorant, middle-class members of a reading public rapidly emerging in the early eighteenth-century to parallel the rise of periodical journalism.

What did such people think? Can the high-priests of literature be trusted to interpret the indistinct voice of the popular oracle? More direct and undeniable evidence has been sought by endeavouring to estimate the quantity of popular approval. A recent student of 'Early eighteenth-century best sellers in English prose fiction' has supposed that 'in the absence of any other information the sole criterion for establishing a best seller in this period must be the number of editions published'.⁷ However, as Fielding long ago remarked, 'editions (are) very uncertain lights to judge of books by' (*The life and death of Tom Thumb the Great*, 1737). This would be at the least to suppose that editions were regularly and consecutively numbered, or otherwise readily distinguishable one from another. Of course this has never been so. The four so-called editions of *Robinson Crusoe* dated 1719, testifying to its popularity, were not long ago distinguished as six.⁸ But how many copies to each edition? The ledgers of the London printer William Bowyer give 1000 as the edition quantity for each of three editions. Even such precise figures cannot reveal the number of readers per copy, let alone the nature and quality of their literary response.

How welcome therefore the rare chance of intruding on the private thoughts of a common reader of the eighteenth century as he reads some contemporary authors. But first, is Austen such a man? Virginia Woolf has defined her common reader: 'he differs from the critic and the scholar. He is worse educated, and nature has not gifted him so generously. He reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others. Above all, he is guided by an instinct to create for himself, out of whatever odds and ends he can come by, some kind of whole — a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of writing . . .'.⁹ Woolf was doubtless thinking of herself in contradistinction say to her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, though she would be most people's idea of a most uncommon reader. The heart of her definition seems to lie in the essential privacy of the act performed by the reader. He does not publish his opinions to the world at large, however loquacious with family or friends or on the margins of his own books.

Austen is not known as a published author. His confession on the outer margins of Blair's *Grave* that he had once unsuccessfully dispatched a proposal of marriage in verse vouches for some lack of power to convince, as will most certainly the sample of his own composition given in the postscript to this paper.

It has to be conceded that Austen did not read only for pleasure. His professional interests as parson were never far from his mind. It is not just that this volume is (rather misleadingly) labelled 'Tracts' on the spine, and that four of the six poems are irreproachably pious and the others undeniably improving in

tendency. Austen himself is quite explicit about this matter: 'I think this poem wou'd have been more useful or complete, had there been more frequent ejaculations or pious apostrophes made to God in it, as the author was well able to do, by diverse instances very Devoutly. At least, it wd. have served *my* Turn & use, & inclination more; but That is no rule for other people's Liking' — this in relation to *Deity* by Samuel Boyse. Moreover, he marks passages for their Christian sentiments, as if for possible use in sermon or prayer. One such passage is indeed marked 'Pr', no doubt for 'Prayer'.

Yet the conscientious parson is scarcely to be distinguished from the serious-minded layman, expecting as always moral profit in his reading as well as amusement. Austen explains that while the poems were still unbound, and so quite new, his habit was to 'set off with Pen, the topics on wch each paragraph discoursed upon; but binding up, has cut them off' — well, not quite, for enough remains to show the sober student intent on moral gain and practising a habit learned at college. Still there is something more.

Had Austen been content with rational discourse tending to moral profit he need not have resorted to verse. Had he been indifferent to kinds and styles of verse he might have preferred moral essays in heroic couplets after the established manner of Pope. Instead he chose poems in newer styles and subjects: three pieces are blank verse meditations by night in lonely church-yards — quite the mid-century thing. And his comments: 'picturesque & pleasing', 'very natural, & very affecting' show by their collocation of epithets a changing system of values. Reason is no longer the very voice of God, and nature a reflection of the divine order, as seventeenth-century divines had preached and Pope put into verse. There is a discernible movement away from Augustan good sense to a Romantic sensibility. Such large assertions will gain in substance from a closer consideration of each poem in turn and of Austen's comments upon them, beginning with the first item in the volume. All are in octavo.

1. James Thomson. *The castle of indolence. An allegorical poem. Written in imitation of Spenser. The second edition.* London: printed for A. Millar, 1748. (This is described as T 183 in D.F. Foxon, *A catalogue of English verse 1701-1750*, 1975. Foxon records the publication dates of the first and second editions as May and September respectively.)

Thomson's imitation, long in the composition, kept up the ambiguous early eighteenth-century affair with Spenser, which was light-hearted enough in its resort to deliberate archaism, yet capable of achieving an often happy freedom from the prevailing fashion for the heroic couplet. However, Thomson's ostensible argument that indolence is a bad thing, where he might instead have insisted that it gave time to cultivate the artistically valuable pleasures of the imagination, falls back on the traditional view of art as serving moral ends. This orthodox moral lesson was no doubt one reason for Austen's purchase.

The parson in him is revealed in his care to mark the merest hints of

impiety. The whole line 'Dire-muttered Curses and blasphem'd high Jove' (in Book II canto lxvi) is heavily cancelled; similarly (in II, xl) 'cursed Carle' is changed to 'wretched Carle'. The methodising student is shown in Austen's provision of subject headings, though he eventually tires of this. The amateur of verse is occasionally to be glimpsed in his attention to the picturesque and archaic diction. He underlines 'beetling' in the phrase 'beetling cliffs' (II, xviii), surely hearing the echo of Hamlet: 'the dreadful summit of the cliffs, that beetles o'er his base into the sea'. No doubt he approved this usage, but why did he also underline 'bouncing' in 'wild deer bouncing through the glade' (II, xviii)? Again the word is picturesque, yet its unfortunate suggestion of 'whopping' — as in 'she gave birth to a bouncing boy' — he probably thought too 'low'. Certainly, traditional warnings against indulgence in familiar diction in verse were still being uttered by Dr Johnson in 1780. Austen's word for it is 'vulgar', which he overfussily applies to 'Unrest' in the Spenserian phrase 'whate'er smack'd of noyance, or Unrest' (I, vi). Austen's annotations of Thomson were few and unsurprising, though showing him to be an attentive reader. The great thing is that he evidently *liked* to read this modern poem. His motive for buying and keeping the second piece needs little explanation.

2. Edward Baynard, M.D. *Health, a poem. Shewing how to procure, preserve, and restore it. To which is annex'd, The doctor's decade. The eighth edition, corrected.* London: printed and sold by J. Roberts, 1749. (Foxon B 120; first edition 1716.)

This is the odd one out, a medical homily in verse, exemplifying the ancient method of putting practical advice into easily remembered verse:

Of exercises, Swimming's best,
Strengthens the Muscles of the Chest.

It need scarcely be said that the advice is much better than the verse. Austen's ticks or crosses approve some lines, as in the Preface: 'Unerring Nature learn to follow close, For quantum sufficit is her just Dose'. He brackets the last three of the following lines on pure water, no doubt to approve this warning against papish superstition.

Such as will lather cold with Soap,
Tho' ne'er was sainted by the Pope,
(As Bridget, Anne, and Winifred:
For 'tis the Water does the Feat,
The Saint's the Varnish, and the Cheat.

3. James Ralph. *Night: a poem. In four books.* London: printed by C. Ackers, for S. Billingsley, 1728. (Foxon R 18.)

Ralph's bad eminence is to have been among the first of the eighteenth-century poets to utter night thoughts in blank verse. 'My design', he writes, 'is only to justify mine own, and to abate if possible, the aversion abundance have conceived against *blank verse*, as wanting the harmonious beauties of

rhime.' His matter is orthodoxly moral, his style turgidly grand. However, Austen saw more in him than did Alexander Pope, as appears from the character of Austen's annotations. Some time after the piece was bound up, Austen wrote as follows, on the verso of Ralph's title-page.

Mr Pope in his *Dunciad*, Book 3d. Line 159th. has a cast of Wit against our author thus:

"Silence, ye Wolves! while *Ralph* to Cynthia howls,
and makes Night hideous—Answer him, ye Owls!

[But notwithstanding *Pope's malignant Spite*, so oft thrown upon undeserving Poets, I think there are many very picturesque & pleasing Lines in this Poem; tho' I cannot say so pensively engaging as those of *Thompson's Seasons*, wch. surpass every thing in Blank verse, but *Milton*. Dr Akinside's Pleasures of Imagination, I also admire; together with Blair's Grave; and many Passages in Dr Armstrong's Art of preserving health (perhaps ye best model for Blank verse that is modern). Also I esteem most valuable, all *Mr Smart's Prize Poems* at Cambridge, on the Divine Attributes, printed in Quarto.]
Thos: Austen.

These interesting judgments have a doubt thrust. Dr Johnson, in his *Life of Pope*, published in 1781, was also to object to Pope's 'malignity', yet he noted as literary critic that it was justly enough directed against bad writers. Austen finds literary qualities in Ralph that Pope had overlooked, qualities beginning to be valued by a new generation of writers and readers. Austen's enthusiasm embraces the new poets of the 1740s: the poems by Blair, Aken-side, and Armstrong first appeared in 1743–4, Smart's five prize poems spanned 1750–55, while Thomson's *Seasons*, first published as a whole in 1730, were being revised and extended up to 1746.

It may be supposed that Austen's literary taste was formed in the late 1740s and early 1750s. The date 'August: 23. 1752' is written on three of the poems, running down the outer margin, so as to suggest that they were bound up by then, or perhaps at this very time. By contrast, Johnson's criticism in *Lives of the poets*, 1779, 1781, is that of an older man, his taste settled way back in the 1730s. Johnson, for instance, while conceding Thomson's originality, is only lukewarm in his praise: in *The Seasons*, he says, blank verse 'seems properly used'. Akenside he considers 'perhaps Superior to any other writer of blank verse', but it is a form whose use Johnson is temperamentally unwilling to approve in a modern author. Austen's preference for Armstrong is shared by the twentieth century: 'he can rise as a blank-verse poet was expected to rise' (John Butt, *The mid-eighteenth century*, Oxford History of English Literature, 1979, p.92).

Austen's particular attention to *Night*, apart from his setting down of 'Topics', is shown by underlining. He thus marks a passage describing Aetna's 'horrid splendour' as, erupting, it sends a 'fiery deluge' on the fertile plans beneath, with horrifying results:

The ripen'd harvest crackles in the blaze,
 And all the ruin'd towns, in floods of fire,
 Rent from their deep foundations burn.

No doubt these lines appealed to Austen as an example of the touchingly picturesque; yet at the same time he cannot resist drawing the obvious moral parallel with the deserved destruction of Sodom. Sense and sensibility thus combine.

To prove that manner as well as matter was of interest to Austen, it may be added that he underlines the first syllable in 'wall' wing' (for wallowing), surely objecting to the author's desperate attempt to restrict the line to the regulation ten syllables. (Yet in his own poem, given below, he is not too ashamed to reduce *impetuous* to *impet'ous*.)

4. [Samuel Boyse]. *Deity: a poem*. London: printed for C. Corbett, 1749. (Foxon B 361.)

The special appeal of this poem for Austen lay presumably in the contrast between its politely enthusiastic praise of the Deity and the actualities of the poet's own wretched existence. Austen thought this worth separate mention, on the front fly-leaf of the volume, as follows.

As to Boyce's poem called *The Deity*, Mr Pope wished himself author of it, or said, he shd. not have been ashamed of composing it as it is here. Mr Sam. Boyce suffered every Species of misery to which man cou'd be subject: destitute of the most common necessaries of Life, without food, or Lodging. It is said, he Formed in the fields & streets this poem; and wou'd ask at a shop in London &c. for the momentary use of pen & Ink; to set down his present Thoughts as they occur'd. He endured his sufferings with amazing fortitude & waited death, which came soon after the Work appear'd in print, with Exemplary Patience. Mr Tho. Kirby, Clerk of Chatham Yard, told me he knew him, & was witness to the wretched condition of his private Life.
 [Born in 1708.] T.A.

The anecdote about Pope is alas not new. It may well have come from Theophilus Cibber's *Lives of the poets*, published in 1753.¹⁰ Cibber has it as follows: 'Mr. Boyse said, that upon its first publication, a gentleman acquainted with Mr. Pope, took occasion to ask that poet, if he was not the author of it, to which Mr. Pope replied, "that he was not the author, but that there were many lines in it, of which he should not be ashamed"'. Pope's compliment was no doubt intentionally vague. He could not but have approved Boyse's religious sentiments, without necessarily wishing to admire their derivative Popean manner.

That Austen was not solely struck by the moral example is shown by the lit. critical comment written against lines 23-40: 'Pope imitated'. The lines are as follows.

[Deity] lines 233–40:

Nor want his shining images below,
 In streams that murmur, or in winds that blow,
 His spirit broods along the boundless flood,
 Smiles in the plain, and whispers in the wood;
 Warms in the genial sun's enliv'ning ray,
 Breathes in the air, and beautifies the day!
 Steals on our Footsteps wheresoe'er we go,
 And yields the purest Joys we taste below.

No doubt Austen and Boyse were recalling passages from near the end of Epistle I of the *Essay on man*, which celebrate the Great Chain of Being. Compare especially lines 211 ff. (editorial italics):

What modes of sight betwixt each wide extreme;
 . . . from the life that fills the *flood*
 To that which warbles through the vernal *wood*.

and 267 ff:

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
 Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;
 That, changed through all, and yet in all the same;
 Great in the earth, as in the ethereal frame;
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
 Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees;
 Lives through all life, extends through all extent . . .

Both expert and common readers once approved Boyse's now forgotten poem, as a further note by Austen shows: 'See Fielding's *Tom Jones* Book VII Chap 1, where he quotes lines 625 to 636 of this poem page 35 of the Copy in this volume as "a very noble" passage "from a poem called the Deity long since buried in Oblivion. A proof that good Books, no more than good Men do not always survive the bad" TA'.

5. Robert Blair. *The Grave. A poem. . . . The third edition*. London: printed and sold by J. Waugh, 1749. (Foxon B 274.)

The Grave is a striking instance of a poem long valued by the common reader before it earned the respect of the serious critic. Boswell records that 'so long ago as 1748 [Johnson] had read "The Grave, a Poem", but did not like it much'.¹¹ Boswell predictably differed from him. *The Grave* evidently appealed to Austen primarily for its serious message. However, for a poem on the first of the four last things, it looks not too gloomily on the attractions of the life which must be left behind. Sentiments, images, and language are not far removed from average human experience. The tardy school-boy runs fearfully after dark through the church-yard; the widow tearfully revisits the new dug grave. The sensibility is by no means ultra-refined. There are a few lines only that aim to be sensational in the new 'gothic' manner:

The sickly Taper,
 By glimmering thro' thy low-brow'd misty Vaults,
 (Furr'd round with Mouldy Damps, and ropy Slime),
 Lets fall a supernumerary Horror,
 As only serves to make thy Night more irksome.

Austen's comments, gathered on the verso of the title-page, offer an

adventitious interest by seeming to recall a whimsical verse proposal of marriage, made long ago.

This is a very solemn poem; very natural, & very affecting; the Church-yard, & the School-boy is truly unaffected & full of innocent Simplicity. *Miss Wall* sent me a little wooden Church from Stroud Fair in the year 1755, & I told her in verse, in return, that her farthing Toy, was but a poor Emblem of what a *Parson* expects in reality, where there was only *Church & no Land* with it; however, if she was disposed to be *Parson'd* at the altar, the Clerk shd. take care to wait on her, together with his master, and that I was afraid, in ye mean time, if she did not make haste for matrimony, as ye church had *no door to shut or open*, Thieves might come in & steal the Pulpit, the surplice, the book & every thing used in the marriage ceremony. I sent her *Blair's poem* as a present, & told her if she rather chose to *die* than *marry*, I had then sent her a *Grave to lie in* (especially as she was of a contemplative *grave* Temper & disposition of mind; and relished nothing better.)

Tho: Austen.

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she lives now at *Cambridge*; an old maid.

48 [? 1784].

It seems likely that the date both here, and again in *Deity*, has been written idiosyncratically in clock-wise manner. If so, then Austen's annotations spanned thirty years. Perhaps in old age he was consoling himself by reopening a favourite volume of his youth. He then would discover that his 'grave' friend had marked certain passages — this must have been the very copy he had sent her! One passage in particular describes the disconsolate widow, and how in memory she 'musters up the past endearments of their softer hours'. Twice Austen goes to the trouble of noting here and there 'Miss Wall's marks'.

6. *The noctuary: or, an address from the tombs. A poem in blank verse. To which is added, An ode on the Last Day.* London: printed for W. Owen, 1752.

The title makes it clear that this was a derivative exercise in the new sub-genre of grave-yard verse. Gray's *Elegy wrote in a country church-yard* had come out the year before, but the seminal work was Edward Young, *The complaint: or, night-thoughts on life, death, & immortality*, 1742-6. The reason for the vogue is given in a letter written by William Mason in 1755 while on his Continental tour. He informs Gray that Madame Belch of Hamburg had read 'La Petite Elegie dans la Coemeterie Rustique . . . Elle est bien Jolie et Melancholique', she tells him, 'mais elle ne touche point La Coeur comme mes tres chers Nitt toats'. 'Very affecting' was as much as Austen would admit to.

He read *The noctuary* with his usual attentiveness, but found in it chiefly occasion for this forced witticism.

This I suppose, written by some pensive soul, when half asleep one dark dismal night, without one mental ray, or either pen, ink, or paper to make use of unless the Printed-Tax upon Window Lights. T.A.

He liked the joke so much that he repeats it on the title page, with a helpful date: 'very fit to be read when shutting up *windows* to save Taxes for Michaelmas 1784'.¹² Apparently no-one since has identified the author, who refers in his Preface, with justifiable modesty to his 'unskilful' hand, as well as to the 'excellent Performances ... of a very recent Date' which have stimulated him, or her, to write.¹³

Postscript

Naturally I had wondered what else Austen had written, if not published. So willing a pen had surely sought other outlets. A tantalising note in red ink on the margins of Blair's *Grave* 'Entd in my Diaries' made me wonder if Austen were another Parson Woodforde. A belated check in the *National Union Catalog Pre-1956 imprints*, which normally records only printed materials, brought surprise and momentary confusion. Harvard University was reported as having no fewer than eleven volumes of the 'Commonplace-books of Rev. Thomas Austen of Rochester, England. 1760-1784' (NUC serial number NA 0507796). Had these or any of their contents ever been published? If so, what price my notion of Austen as common reader? My good friend Dr Hugh Amory of Harvard College Library came to my help. The entry in *NUC Pre-1956* he declared to be 'thoroughly misleading'. His own description makes it clear that only one of the commonplace books contains much of Austen's own composing in verse or prose.¹⁴ The rest amount to a vast compilation of quotations culled industriously from the writings of others. Volume 2, however, declares itself to contain 'Little Fragments of Essays & Detach'd Pieces of Poetry, Prose Reflections, & The like performances, (being mostly originals), purposely Calculated for an Occasional Supply to the Monthly Magazine Writers. A great many written or composed by T. Austen of Rochester.' Before I rushed off to search the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the like, I read the further note Austen had characteristically added vertically in the margin: 'NB. I have not sent any to the Press as yet, & never design so to do. Feb. 1765'. I was content to accept his assurance, at least for the time being.

That Austen's reluctance to publish was well founded may be guessed from the following piece extracted from his commonplace book.¹⁵

Description of a Shower of Rain which forced my Friend & I into a Coffee-house in Exchange Alley, London, in 1750.

And now around the busy Change a Show'r
 Did its impet'ous torrent pour:
 That drove each merchant to a wish'd-for Shed,
 And forc'd them all abrupt to shroud their Head.
 And we among the rest full big with fear,
 Ran to a Coffee-house adjoining near.
 Each Beaux & Merchant sat in busy chat
 Of Stocks & Cargo great, of This & That.
 Coffee & Tea with News were handed round,
 While some with scandal did their neighbours wound.
 We too regal'd unknown a smoking cup,

While Rain our Pleasures still did interrupt.
 Our Business was to talk how to Expend
 Next afternoon, & the Evening End!
 Our Pocket books we next extracted forth,
 Consulting our affairs of East & North.
 How stood our Cash, & what of Each we spent.
 And what was still reserv'd for merriment!
 The pressing Show'r agst the Casemts drove,
 While lulled in Ease, we scarce knew how to move,
 The Gloomy sashes 'fore the smoky fire
 Did scarce permit us freely to perspire.
 Our Coffee drank'd, & all the Show'r withdrawn,
 We issued forth t' enjoy the Morn.
 Around the Change full carelessly we prole
 To mark how Commerce did its tricks unfold!
 Strange Apects there & strangelike Garbs we view'd
 Each Passion was alone to Gain subdu'd.
 Fir'd now with noise we forced our distant way
 To Dine & spend the Remnant of the Day.

T.A.

NB. This to be made more Smooth & Correct.

It would be pointless to comment on Austen's evident anxiety to force rhymes or to count syllables. Rather more interesting is the uneasy range of diction, from middling high to middling low. 'Shed', for instance, which seems inappropriately rustic, surely derives from Milton. Compare *Paradise regained*, II 72-4:

In such a season born when scarce a Shed
 Could be obtain'd to shelter him or me
 From the blear air...

Austen may be supposed to have had an equal fondness for Milton's *II Penseroso*, which Austen's contemporary Shenstone is reported as saying 'has drove half our Poets crazy'. However this may be, the mid-eighteenth-century taste for rustic gloom, sought out and approved by common readers of the time, as represented by Parson Austen, was essential to the formation of a new post-Augustan kind of verse.

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NOTES

¹ A shorter version of this paper was presented at the Sixth David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar in Eighteenth-century Studies, held in Melbourne in August 1983.

² I am much obliged to John Maconie, Manager of John Cordy Limited, Auckland, for giving me a duplicate copy of 'Cordy's Catalogue' of this important sale. (The University of Otago Library seems not to have kept its sale catalogue.) The volume in question is item 414; all six titles are listed, but not the presence of annotations. The catalogue gives brief particulars about what is called 'The Donnelly Collection', as follows: 'Sir Arthur Telford Donnelly, K.B.E., C.M.G., Crown Solicitor in Christchurch from 1920, Chairman of the Bank of New Zealand from 1937 until his death [on 1 February 1954]. Sir Arthur and his brother Ian Donnelly, a bibliophile, and literary staff member of the 'Sun', Christchurch, jointly formed the library which was considered amongst the finest in New Zealand. A considerable part of the collection was disposed of in Christchurch at the death of Sir Arthur and other parts have been retained by the family.'

³ The facts are extracted mainly from J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*. I am much obliged to the County Archivist, Kent Archives Office, for a photocopy of Austen's induction mandate to All Hallows on 27 June 1751, and for suggesting that 'Thomas Austen may not have resided in his parish, at least towards the end of his incumbency'.

⁴ Samuel Johnson, 'Life of Gray', *Lives of the poets*, 1781.

⁵ *Classical literary criticism*, ed. T.S. Dorsch (Harmondsworth, 1965), p.107.

⁶ *The Spectator*, no.70, 21 May 1711.

⁷ Charles C. Mish, 'Early eighteenth-century best sellers in English prose fiction', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 75(1981), 413-18.

⁸ K.I.D. Maslen, 'The printers of *Robinson Crusoe*', *Library*, 5th ser., vii (1952), 124-31; and 'Edition quantities for *Robinson Crusoe*, 1719', *Library*, 5th ser., xxiv (1969), 145-50.

⁹ Prefatory note to *The common reader*, 1st series, 1925.

¹⁰ 'Life of Mr. Samuel Boyse', *Lives of the poets*, v(1753), pp.172-3. These *Lives*, once attributed to Theophilus Cibber, are now ascribed to Robert Shiels.

¹¹ *Life of Johnson*, 1791, ed. G.B. Hill, revised L.F. Powell, 1934, iii, 47-8.

¹² The Window Tax, first levied in 1697, was increased yet again in a bill which received royal assent on 20 August 1784. The graduated tax imposed an extra tax which amounted to an extra 3s. for houses with fewer than seven windows, but for those with 180 or more an extra £20.

¹³ The *British Museum General Catalogue of Printed Books* enters what it calls a later issue with a variant title *Night thoughts among the tombs*, London, W. Heard, 1753, and this Halkett and Laing, *Dictionary of anonymous and pseudonymous English Literature*, iv, 1928, attribute, perhaps rashly, to Edward Young.

¹⁴ Dr. Amory's descriptions, reproduced with his kind permission, are as follows.

MS Eng 611, v.1: lettered on spine "Miscellaneous Poetry/v.1/1760." This and the other 10 volumes at Harvard have the bookplate of John Newington Hughes, some of whose library, at least, was sold at Sotheby, 29 Feb. 1848 and 21 Apr. 1877, but I do not know if these volumes were among the lots. Harvard acquired them 27 Apr. 1929, from a New York bookseller. E.H. Wells.

title-page: Scraps of Poetry on Winter... all collected chiefly from borrowed Books Begun April 7th 1760 and finished May 20th 1760. with index in v.2 — we don't have vol.2.

MS Eng 611, v.2: lettered on spine as on v.1 above, but it is not the vol.2 that belongs to it, and has nothing to do with Winter.

t.-p.: Little Fragments of Essays & Detach'd Pieces of Poetry, Prose Reflections ... (being mostly originals) purposely Calculated for an Occasional Supply to the Monthly Magazine Writers. A great many written or composed by T. Austen of Rochester.

— a note states that none of them were in fact published.

[inverted, at end] Thesaurus Concionatorius ... begun Octob. 22d. 1759.

v.3 lettered on spine as on v.1 above, but it is unclear whether it belongs to it or not (perhaps there is a kind of MS Eng 611, series?)

drop-title: An abstract of curious ... Passages from old Plays ... begun Novembr. 1767.

drop-title: [inverted]: some Hymns ... taken from Cennicks Sacred Hymns.

drop-title: [reverted]: Abstracts from various Prose writers.

MS Eng 612 lettered on spine Drama / v.1-2 / 1766.

— contains extracts from plays, mostly in verse.

MS Eng 613 lettered on spine Meditations / 1782

— contains extracts from Moral writers, in prose.

MS Eng 614 lettered on spine Religious Poetry / 1783

drop-title: A Collection of Religious Poetry ... Begun ... October ye 7th 1770 — "Finis Apr. 13.1783."

MS Eng 615 lettered on spine Divinity / 1783-1784 2v. (v.2 unfinished).

t.-p (v.1): Collections from various ... Divines collected ... January 30, 1783.

MS Eng 616 v.1: lettered on spine Miscellaneous Poetry [n.d.]

drop-title: A Dictionary of Poetry [W — XANTIPPE].

MS Eng 616 v.2: lettered on spine Miscell. [n.d.]

drop-title: The last scene of human life [extracts]

drop-title: Useful abstracts from Books of Divinity ... 27 Jan. 1782.

— another hand has added "addenda to maniacal Cases", consisting of medical observations.

These are only a few volumes of what must once have been a gigantic common-place book. What we have is in small quarto, uniformly bound in vellum and lettered in gilt in a style that I would say was ca. 1810. There is no question that the writer is your man; he identifies himself as being "of Rochester" and the handwriting is strikingly similar. One would like to know of any other volumes surviving from the collection.

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