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Catalog of the Peal Exhibition: English Literature before 1800

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English Literature before 1800

98. JOHN FLETCHER. *Monsieur Thomas: A Comedy*. London: Thomas Harper, 1639.

Although regularly coupled with Francis Beaumont, his collaborator for some five years on a number of dramas, John Fletcher (1579-1625) also worked with such playwrights as Massinger, Rowley, and Shakespeare, with whom he is said to have shared in the composition of *Henry VIII*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and the lost *Cardenio*. Fletcher also enjoyed a career as sole author of no fewer than fifteen dramas, many of them performed at the Blackfriars private theatre. After the Restoration his plays proved more popular than Shakespeare's.

Monsieur Thomas is ascribed with general assent to Fletcher alone. He wrote the play at some time between 1610 and 1616, but did not live to see its publication in 1639. Identified on the title page as "A Comedy," the work in fact consists of two contrapuntal plots, a vigorous English farce and a tragicomic love story. In the former action, Thomas, returned from his travels, shocks his father Sebastian by pretending to have grown virtuous, a way of life quite out of the family tradition. In private, Thomas displays his true character in his robust pursuit of Mary, who plays various tricks on him before confessing her readiness to have him as a husband.

In the second plot, the elderly Valentine is engaged to his own ward Callida, but his friend Francesco also falls in love with her. When Valentine discovers this attraction, he offers to release Callida, but she takes offense at this generosity, refusing both men. Francesco subsequently flees from Valentine's house and Callida retires to a convent. In time Valentine learns that Francesco is his long-lost son, and he gives his blessing to the young lovers.

The plots are casually related by the character of Monsieur Thomas's Mary, who is also Valentine's niece. A similarity in themes provides a stronger link. In the seventeenth century the play was also known as *The Father's Own Son*, a title which applies equally to Thomas and Sebastian and to Francesco and Valentine. Both offspring come home disguised and both dissemble their love

for women who themselves conceal their true feelings behind aggressive manners. In turn the parents find the children they thought they had lost, either metaphorically or literally.

The Henry Huth-Arthur Greenhill copy. Peal 7,279.

99. JOHN SUCKLING. *Fragmenta Aurea*. London: Humphrey Moseley, 1646.

After travels and military adventures on the Continent, the Cavalier poet Sir John Suckling (1609-1642) seems to have divided the last decade of his brief life between prodigious dissipation and letters. The anecdotal antiquarian John Aubrey referred to him as "the greatest gallant of all time," and "the greatest gamester, both for bowling and cards." In this latter context he is the reputed inventor of cribbage. Charged with high treason in a plot to rescue the Earl of Strafford from the Tower of London, Suckling fled to Paris where, according to Aubrey, he took poison, "which killed him miserably with vomiting."

Fragmenta Aurea ("Golden Fragments"), "published by a Friend" in 1646 "to perpetuate his memory," collected many of Suckling's "Incomparable Peeeces" [sic], consisting of poems, letters, plays, and tracts. In his "Sessions of the Poets," first printed in 1637, various writers of the day contend for the laurel. The work is especially valuable for its intimate expressions of contemporary opinion on such "wits of the town" as Ben Jonson, Thomas Carew, and Sir William Davenant. A country bumpkin humorously describes aristocratic nuptials in "A Ballad upon a Wedding." Suckling's play *Aglaure* (1637) has two fifth acts, one tragic, one not, and contains the famous song, "Why so pale and wan, fond lover? / Prithee, why so pale?" In the lively comedy *The Goblins* (1648), thieves disguise themselves as devils and behave rather in the manner of Robin Hood and his men. *Brennoralt*, an expanded and revised version of Suckling's tragedy *The Discontented Colonel*, throws an interesting light on the author's own character. These plays are chiefly remembered, however, less for their plots than for their good lyrics. By contrast, Suckling cast his treatise on natural religion, *An Account of Religion by Reason*, in sober prose. Along with Herrick, Carew, Lovelace, and other Cavalier poets around the court of Charles I, Sir John Suckling wrote in a variety of lyrical forms and genres, excelling in graceful, polished, colloquial

verse. For Congreve's Millamant (in *The Way of the World*), as for the Restoration generally, the ideal court poet was "natural, easy Suckling."

The Harold Greenhill copy. Peal 7,293.

100. GEORGE WITHER. *Speculum Speculativum; or, A Considering-Glass*. . . . London, 1660.

In his long career George Wither (1588-1667) wrote upwards of one hundred books in an extraordinary range of styles and genres: Spenserian pastorals, prose satires, amatory lyrics, emblematic poetry, instruction manuals, political diatribes, moral tracts, and hymns. The publication of his final work nearly coincided with his death.

As a student at Magdalen College, Oxford, Wither "made some proficiency with much ado in academical learning," according to Anthony Wood, "but his geny being addicted to things more trivial," he abandoned the groves of academe about 1605 for the world of letters. His *Abuses Stript and Whipt* (1613), on such topics as revenge and lust, painted so satirical a picture of the age that it led to his imprisonment. He went to jail several times subsequently, first for writings that piqued the Stuarts, then for his high positions in the Commonwealth.

Executing a political assignment against the Crown in 1642, he was captured by a troop of royalists but had his life spared through the intercession of Sir John Denham (author of *Cooper's Hill*) with the plea that "so long as Wither lived, Denham would not be accounted the worst poet in England." Pope dismissed him as "wretched" Wither, but Lamb praised his "homely heartiness of manner."

When the King and Cavaliers took up arms against subjects, Wither concluded to his own satisfaction that Parliament favored Law and true Religion, and that if the King oppressed his people they were obliged to oppose him with all their power. In *Speculum Speculativum*, written on the eve of the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy, Wither impressively states that the King is essentially the servant of those he governs:

The Essence of a *Kingly interest*
Doth *in*, and *by* the *Common good* consist,

Ev'n in the *whole*, and not in any part
(Although as noble as the *Head* or *Heart*)
And to indulge ought further then it shall
Tend really unto the good of all;
Destroys the whole, turns *Royalty* to *Faction*,
And breeds at length a general Distraction.

The copy displayed is a first edition, the first of three issues, known as the "Bee" variant. In the first line of the couplet "Fiat Justitia" on the title page, that verb is spelled with two e's instead of one.

The Herschel V. Jones-J.L. Clawson-Harold Greenhill copy. Peal 7,821.

101. JOHN DRYDEN. *Eleonora: A Panegyric Poem*. London: Jacob Tonson, 1692.

Eleonora, wife of James Bertie, first Earl of Abingdon, died unexpectedly in her thirty-third year on Whitsunday night, 31 May 1691. The following March appeared *Eleonora: A Panegyric Poem Dedicated to the Memory of the Late Countess of Abingdon*, by John Dryden. As the poet admits in his Epistle Dedicatory addressed to Abingdon, he never knew or even saw the lady whom he had been commissioned to memorialize. But Abingdon enjoyed dispensing part of his wealth on poets, and he and Dryden thus had common acquaintances, among them, John Aubrey, who possibly acted as intermediary between patron and poet. The Bloodless Revolution of 1688 that brought the Protestant William of Orange to the English throne deprived the Catholic Dryden of his official sinecures: the laureate's crown that he had worn since 1668 and the position of historiographer royal dating from 1670. Dryden would certainly have welcomed the financial benefits such a commission would realize, although Abingdon was allied to the interests of William III. For his part, the Earl could overlook political and religious differences to engage the foremost poet of the day to commemorate his deceased wife.

By 1691 John Dryden (1631-1700) had achieved lasting fame in a variety of genres. In such works as *Mac Flecknoe* (written 1678; printed 1682), *Absalom and Achitophel* (Part I, 1681), and *The Medal* (1682), he produced the finest verse satires in the language. He also composed powerful argumentative religious poetry, notably

Religio Laici (1682) and *The Hind and the Panther* (1687); pseudo-Pindaric odes, like "A Song for Saint Cecilia's Day" (1687); critical prose, especially *Of Dramatick Poesie* (1665; 1688) and *Of Heroique Plays* (1670; 1672), that earned him Dr. Johnson's acclaim as "the father of English criticism"; heroic tragedies, particularly *The Conquest of Granada* (1670; 1672) and *Aureng-Zebe* (1675; 1676); and the neoclassical tragedy *All For Love* (1678).

Dryden's ill health delayed completion of *Eleonora* but allowed him time to ascertain a number of facts about his subject's life that he might otherwise not have known. From the Countess's friends and from Robert Gould's anonymously published *Mirana, A Funeral Eclogue: Sacred to the Memory of that Excellent Lady Eleonora* (1691), he learned of her charities, of her marital fidelity, and of her maternal care.

As was his habit, Dryden turned a basic elegy into a "Panegyrick," which he defined in the Epistle Dedicatory as "a kind of Apotheosis," designed "to raise an Emulation in the living, to Copy out the Example of the dead." In his later *Parallel of Poetry and Painting* (1695) he claimed that in both arts "there is a better or worse likeness to be taken; the better is a *Panegyrick*, if it be not false, and the worse is a *Libel*." Thus he makes Eleonora the ideal of the virtuous Christian, "the Pattern of Charity, Devotion, and Humility; of the best Wife, the best Mother, and the best of Friends." In heroic couplets he stresses that in life she attended the poor, "wisely manag'd" the household, provided a model for piety, loved and educated her family and friends, and in death assumed a position in the realm of "Heav'ns Imperial Face." In the closing lines Dryden apostrophizes the Countess as "thou, great Saint."

The Frank Fletcher-Louis Samter Levy copy. Peal 7,410.

102. FRANCIS BACON. *Of the Advancement and Proficiency of Learning; or, The Partition of Sciences*. London: T. Williams, 1674.

In *An Essay on Man, Epistle IV*, Alexander Pope, "the Wasp of Twickenham" (1688-1744), blistered Sir Francis Bacon, Baron Verulam, Viscount St. Albans, as "The wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind." Instances of the final trait come readily to hand. In 1601 Bacon (1561-1626) vigorously prosecuted the Earl of Essex on a charge of high treason, winning the death sentence against his erstwhile friend and benefactor. Named Lord Chancellor by James I

are in some sort useful) as of experiments of the same kind, which may produce more subtil objects, than for the faculty of sense, are by sense comprehensible. And they ought rather to have charged the defects in this kind upon the errors, and contumacie of the mind, which refuseth to be pliant and morigerous to the Nature of things; and to crooked demonstrations and rules of arguing and concluding, ill set down and propounded from the Perception of sense. This we speak not to disable the mind of man; or that the business should be abandoned; but that apt and proper assistances may be acquired; and applied to the understanding, whereby men may subdue the difficulties of things, and the obscurity of Nature. For no man hath such a steadiness of hand by nature or practice, that he can draw a strait line or make a perfect circle with his hand at liberty, which yet is easily done by rule or compass. This is that very business which we go about and with great pains endeavour, that the mind by the help of Art might be able to equal Nature; and that there might be found out an Art of Discovery, or Direction, which might disclose, and bring to light other Arts, and their Axioms and Works. This upon good ground we report Deficient.

II This Art of Discovery (for so we will call it) hath two parts; for either the Indication is made from Experiments to Experiments; or from Experiments to Axioms; which may likewise design new Experiments; whereof the former we will term, *Experientia Literata*; the later, *Interpretatio Naturæ*, or *Novum Organum*. Indeed the former (as we have touched heretofore is not properly to be taken for an Art, or a part of Philosophy, but a kind of sagacity; wherefore we sometimes call it *Venatio Panis*, borrowing the name from the Fable. But as a man may go on his way after a three-fold manner; either when himself feels out his way in the dark; or being weak-sighted is led by the hand of another; or else when he directs his footing by a light: So when a man essays all kind of Experiments without sequence or method that is a meer palpation; but when he proceeds by direction and order in Ex-

EXPERI
ENTIA
LITERATA
NOVUM
ORGANUM

periments, it is as if he were led by the hand; & this is it which we understand by *Literate experiences* for though light itself not was; this way is to be derived from interpretation of nature or of new Organum

III *Literate experiences*, or the hunting of Pan sheweth of diverse ways of making Experiments: this (seeing we have set it down deficient, & that it is a matter not altogether so plain & perspicuous) we will according to our manner of discourse give some light touches & shadows of it. the manner of making Experiments chiefly proceeds; either by variation of the experiment; or by production of the experiment; or by translation of the experiment; or by inversion of the experiment; or by compulsion of the experiment; or by application of the experiment; or by copulation of the experiment; or else by lots & chance of the experiment. And all these are limited without the terms of any Axiome of Invention: For that other part of the New Organ takes up & containeth in it all Transition of Experiments into Axiomes; or of Axiomes into Experiments

§ Variation of Experience is first practised upon Matter; that is when the Experiment in things already known commonly doereth to such kind of Matter; & now is tried in other things of like kind; as the

A page from Alexander Pope's copy of Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, with passage restored in Pope's hand (item 102)

in 1618, he was subsequently accused of bribery and gross corruption, found guilty, and stripped of his office. Macaulay characterized him as the man whom "the wise Queen Elizabeth distrusted and the foolish King James honoured and advanced."

Bacon's mental height shows no less prominently. To his uncle Lord Burghley, Elizabeth's chief minister, he wrote that he had taken "all knowledge" as his "province." His writings testify to his intellectual range. Three collections of trenchant *Essays* on such topics as followers and friends, revenge, ambition, and truth combine aphoristic skill and worldly wisdom into prescriptions for success. Bacon also envisioned an ambitious six-part promulgation of all human knowledge, which he planned to write in Latin under the general title *Instauratio Magna* ("The Great Renewal").

The Advancement of Learning served as an introduction to the larger, unfinished enterprise. In Book I Bacon enunciated the excellence of knowledge, disposed of objections to learning, considered methods for its advancement, and criticized defects in current systems. In the second book he divided knowledge into three kingdoms—history, poetry, and philosophy—which he then analyzed.

In the treatise he encouraged the attainment of factual knowledge through accurate observation and experimentation. Ironically, while collecting snow to test its preservative qualities on chicken skin, Sir Francis Bacon caught cold and died.

The Peal Collection includes Pope's small folio edition of this work published in London in 1674. Three examples of Pope's hand distinguish the volume. On the back of a mounted portrait of Bacon appears the defective inscription, "The Lord Bacon's Advancement of Learning. Ex Libris Alex. Pope. . . ." Inlaid in another leaf is a ten-line fragment from an autograph manuscript of Pope's notes on Colley Cibber, whom Pope proclaimed King of Dunces in the final edition of *The Dunciad* (1743). At some length, Pope has restored the text of fragmentary pages 145-46. Also inserted are two engraved portraits of Pope, and an engraved scene from his *Essay on Criticism* (1711).

This volume later passed into the possession of the *fin de siècle* poet and critic Lionel Johnson (1867-1902), who inscribed the back of Bacon's portrait, "Lionel Johnson. New College. Oxford. 1888."

On the same page appears the autograph of Maud Cruttwell, the author of books on Signorelli (1899), Mantegna (1901), Venice (1909), Donatello (1911), and Mme de Maintenon (1930), among

other studies on art and history.

The Alexander Pope-Lionel Johnson-Maud Cruttwell-Adolph Lewinsohn-Saul Cohn copy. Peal 9,375.

103. JOHN EVELYN. *Diary*. Edited by William Bray. 2 vols. London: Henry Colburn, 1818.

John Evelyn (1620-1706), a man of means and a projector, evidenced a zeal for improving and beautifying the life of his day. He turned his considerable energies toward gardening, city planning (for London after the Great Fire of 1666), forestry, and experimental science. During the troubled 1640s, he travelled on the Continent, but in 1647 returned to England. He laid plans with Robert Boyle for the establishment of the Royal Society, of which he was a charter member, and in 1659, worked for the restoration of the monarchy. Where his friend Samuel Pepys was a bureaucrat, Evelyn was a courtier who modestly refused high office, including presidency of the Royal Society.

From the age of twenty-one to his death at eighty-six, Evelyn kept a diary, but unlike Pepys and his coded records, he consciously wrote for future readers, revising entries, expressing his thoughts with dignity and discretion, and saying little about himself. Its balance and sobriety make Evelyn's *Diary* a valuable history of his own times.

From 1641 to 1652, the diary treats primarily of Evelyn's Continental tours, on which he associated with the philosopher Thomas Hobbes, Edward Hyde (later Earl of Clarendon), and other royalists. The richest section of the diary deals with his life at Sayes Court, Deptford, and in London, from 1652 to 1694. Evelyn indulges in agricultural and scientific experiments, studies architecture and numismatics, and writes treatises on the improvement of life. In *Fumifugium* (1661) he criticized the smoke nuisance in London, while in *Sylva* (1664) he urged the reforestation of England. He also provides first-hand information on contemporary conditions of English public and social life. In 1694 he retired to his birthplace of Wotton, where he continued to write in his diary up to a month before his death twelve years later. Here, he delights in the calm pleasures of rural life and the leisurely perusal of London newspapers, while confidently awaiting his call to the Heavenly City, a journey for which he was "every day

trussing up."

John Evelyn's *Diary* is unique in literature for the span of its record, kept by one man at the focal point of taste and ideas in his age.

The Peal Collection contains a first edition of Evelyn's *Diary*, edited by William Bray and published in a two-volume abridged version by Henry Colburn in 1818.

Peal 7,491-7,492.

104. JOHN EVELYN and WILLIAM D'OYLY. A.L.s. to the Principal Officers and Commanders of His Majesty's Navy, 28 February 1664.

John Evelyn served for a time as one of the Commissioners for Sick and Wounded in the Dutch War, attending to his duties even when his colleagues abandoned their posts because of the plague. In this capacity he incurred expenses for which he was still seeking reimbursement nearly forty years later.

On 28 February 1664 Evelyn and his fellow commissioner Sir William D'Oyly addressed a letter of grievances and suggestions to the Principal Officers and Commanders of His Majesty's Navy. As the commissioners had noted in earlier reports, ill and injured seamen "sett on shore" might have improved on board "with farr less charge" to the King. Such confinement would have also curtailed the "daily" desertions of men "after they have recovered health."

As the commissioners have found "no redress of these great and growing evils," they "therefore most earnestly beseech" their correspondents to use their authority with the ships' captains and officers "that this mischief may be prevented especially in the Port of Portsmouth." They have sent one of their own number, Colonel Bullein Reymes, to take "speedy order thereon and to lay the complaint" before the Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's ships there.

Both D'Oyly and Evelyn sign the letter as "Yo[u]r honno[u]rs[]" most humble servants."

From the collection of F.L. Pleadwell. Peal 11,077.

105. SAMUEL PEPYS. *Diary*. 2 vols. London: Henry Colburn, 1825.

With the assistance of his cousin Sir Edward Montagu, Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) maneuvered through the bureaucracy of the British naval service until he arrived at the secretaryship of the Admiralty, a position he ably held from 1672 to 1679, and again from 1684 to 1688. He served as President of the Royal Society for two years from 1684. Deprived of all government positions with the accession of William and Mary in 1689, Pepys devoted a part of his retirement to philanthropy toward such institutions as Christ's Hospital, London, a charity school later attended by Coleridge, Lamb, and Leigh Hunt. To his alma mater, Magdalene College, Cambridge, he bequeathed his library of three thousand volumes. His remarkable six-volume manuscript diary in code remained neglected there until the nineteenth century.

John Evelyn mentioned his friend Samuel Pepys several times in his own *Diary*, published in 1818, creating interest in Pepys's work. John Smith, an undergraduate at Cambridge, was employed to decipher the text, written in the shorthand system of Thomas Shelton's *Tachygraphy*. Richard Lord Braybrooke prepared an abbreviated version of the *Diary* which Henry Colburn, publisher of Evelyn's *Diary*, brought out in 1825.

Pepys made almost daily entries in his diary from 1 January 1660 to 31 May 1669, when failing eyesight forced him to end his project. In some 1,300,000 words of cipher he vividly recorded the historical, the sensual, and the mundane. He gives eyewitness accounts of great public events—the return of Charles II from exile, his coronation, the horrors of the plague of 1665, and the holocaust of the Great Fire of 1666. Here, too, he describes the ways of court and the administration of the Navy. In time, however, pageantry and business give place to everyday concerns, but Pepys depicts private life in London with his usual richness and humanness of detail.

The *Diary* paints as intimate a picture of Pepys as it does of Restoration society, causing fainthearted editors to censor livelier sections. With utter frankness Pepys confesses the inordinate delight he takes in his possessions; the gratification he derives from fondling chance female acquaintances; the variety of pleasures he finds in all experiences—physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. Pepys's love of beauty, food, music, architecture, theatre,

people, and a cultivated home life flashes forth at every turn. Even in his earthier moments Pepys impresses the reader chiefly as a connoisseur of hedonism.

The Charles Cockerell copy. Peal 9,755-9,756.

106. PHILIP DORMER STANHOPE, Earl of Chesterfield. *Letters . . . to His Son*. 2 vols. London: J. Dodsley, 1774.

Philip Dormer Stanhope, the fourth Earl of Chesterfield (1694-1773), figures in history not only as a leading statesman during the reigns of the first two Georges, but also as a prominent and prolific letter writer. Literature always interested him, but he counseled, "Take care not to understand editions and title-pages too well." In his youth a friend of Pope, Arbuthnot, Gay, and others, he later cultivated Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu. He served as ambassador to The Hague (1728-1732, 1744), as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (1745-1746), and as Secretary of State (1746-1748). Though gifted as a wit and an orator, Chesterfield is known best as the writer of over 2600 letters, his principal fame resting on those he addressed to his illegitimate son, Philip Stanhope (1732-1768), born to Mlle du Bouchet, the Earl's French mistress during his first diplomatic tour in The Hague.

From 1737 Chesterfield corresponded almost daily with his bookish, shy, and awkward son, to educate him in bearing, charm, and manners, that he might take his place as a diplomat, gentleman, and aristocratic citizen of the world. Discounting natural behavior, Chesterfield advocated studied grace in all aspects of life. To this end he counseled broad social experience and wide, but not pedantic, learning; countenanced discreet sinning, intrigue, and compromise between ideals and conduct; and condemned vulgar concupiscence, drinking, and gambling. Certain of these attitudes horrified moralists like Dr. Johnson, William Cowper, John Wesley, and the Victorians generally. If Chesterfield's letters lack warmth and familial intimacy, they abound in suavity and aphorisms: "Whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well."

Ironically, the Earl's son died at age thirty-six without attaining the social presence or acceptance his father so earnestly desired for him. And "Chesterfield," a synonym for polished manners, has declined into a style of overcoat, a kind of couch, and a brand of cigarettes.

In 1774, a year after Chesterfield's death, his son's widow, Mrs. Eugenia Stanhope, published a two-volume edition of the letters written to her husband by his father. The first edition on display has contemporary boards and the rare errata leaf at the end of Volume II.

Peal 7,489-7,490.

107. PHILIP DORMER STANHOPE, Earl of Chesterfield. A.L.s. to unnamed correspondent, 2 December 1760.

On Tuesday morning, 2 December 1760, the Earl of Chesterfield addressed an entreaty to a correspondent whom he saluted only as "My Dear Lord." He writes on behalf of Lieutenant Horace Hayes of Colonel Howe's regiment, who has served in America "during all" the French and Indian War (1755-1763). The lieutenant's father died some ten months earlier, leaving him "but a moderate fortune, and that perplexed enough with Chicanes." Nevertheless, the younger Hayes "would not ask leave to return while there was any thing to be done in America, but now that that bottom seems to be wound up," he "earnestly sollicit" Chesterfield to obtain General Amherst's leave to depart for England "to settle his own private affairs," which Chesterfield can testify "require his presence." Chesterfield knows "no other way of obtaining General Amherst's leave" than by his Lordship's "leave," so he will "leave" the matter with him.

Peal 8,338.

108. SAMUEL RICHARDSON. A.L.s. to Miss Morris, 27 September 1758.

One of the shapers of the eighteenth-century novel, Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) used the epistolary form exclusively, in the process creating the novel of character with the first fully-rounded personages in English prose fiction.

Printer to the House of Commons, King's Printer, and inveterate letter writer, Richardson came to a literary career belatedly. At the age of fifty he undertook a commission from two London booksellers to prepare a manual of model letters which the less educated could imitate and adapt to their personal needs. He

further specified that the letters should inculcate morality. Midway through this work, which appeared in 1741, Richardson felt inspired to tell a story through a lengthy series of letters, and he interrupted his task to write *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (I, 1740; II, 1741). *Clarissa Harlowe* (1747-1748) ran to seven volumes containing 547 letters that total over a million words. He published *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* in 1753.

On 27 September 1758 he wrote a playful letter, now in the Peal Collection, to the "dear and worthy Miss Morris," whom he had met through their "ever-obliging Friend Mr. Lefevre." Richardson effuses that "To commence an *Acquaintance* with a Mind so very good, is in every Sense of the Word, to commence a *Friendship* with it." He responds to her "Regard so truly filial" with "an Affection . . . as truly paternal," addressing Miss Morris as "My Friend, my *Daughter*, then." Richardson, who claims that he is "not happy in contracting new Friendships," observes aphoristically that "As to Length of Acquaintance, . . . there are Minds with which one may be better acquainted in a few Weeks, than one can with others, in a greater Number of Years; especially in Cases, where *Self* is intirely [*sic*] out of the Question." He reports that his wife and "4 good Girls" likewise "respect" Miss Morris.

In closing, he asks her to "Think *less highly*, that is to say, *more justly*," than her "over-grateful Heart" has obliged her, of the "Merits" of the one who signs himself "Your paternally affectionate S. Richardson."

From the collection of Robert Levine. Peal 8,867.

109. EDWARD GIBBON. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. 6 vols. London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776-1788.

For converting to Roman Catholicism while at Oxford, Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) was dismissed from the university and placed by his father under the care of a Calvinist minister at Lausanne, where he soon abandoned all faith and for a time wooed the future mother of Mme de Staël.

Once more in England he devoted himself to historical studies. A visit to Rome in 1764 inspired his masterpiece, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, a project that occupied twenty years of his life in research and composition. During that period he also served as a Member of Parliament and worked on

the Board of Trade and Plantations.

Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* (Vol. I, 1776; II, III, 1781; IV, V, VI, 1788) covers almost fourteen centuries, from the accession of the emperor Trajan (A.D. 98) to the fall of Constantinople (1453), from what he perceived as the peak in human history of tolerance and moderation downward to the reign of superstition and brute force in the West. At the same time the account comprehends such vast topics as the growth of Christianity, the movement and settlement of the Teutonic tribes, the Moslem conquests, and the Crusades. In sum, the monumental work traces the connection of the ancient world with the modern.

Gibbon examined Christianity as a purely natural phenomenon that arose from contemporary social conditions. According to his thesis, the very forces that effected the triumph of Christianity caused the fall of Rome. His anti-Christian remarks provoked hostile reactions, and later, in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron expressed a widespread awareness that Gibbon was "Sapping a solemn creed with solemn sneer."

Not only did Gibbon marshal a massive amount of material into an ordered, substantially accurate narrative, but he evolved a prose diction of unvarying nobility that would carry the reader majestically through the centuries. As befits a neoclassicist, his elevated tone shuns low, everyday vocabulary. Balanced phrases, antitheses, aphorisms, Latinate expressions, and oratorical and rhetorical devices contribute to the chiselled appearance and rhythmic sonority of his "noble Roman" style. Frequently, he writes merely for the sake of sound, but even then he achieves a sure musicality. On occasion he allows excessive melodramatic heightening to mar his language. In general, despite a chill formality, he maintains a vividness of description and a fluidity of narration. Suave, almost unctuous irony underlies the idiom and gives the Gibbon tone its quality: The undulating, cadenced passages often sound like polished translations from Cicero, and sometimes impress as blank verse.

After completing the work in Lausanne, Gibbon returned to England, dying in London in 1794. In his will he asked rhetorically, "Shall I be accused of vanity, if I add that a monument is superfluous?"

Peal 7,269-7,274.

110. SAMUEL JOHNSON. *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets. With Critical Observations on Their Works.* 4 vols. London: C. Bathurst et al., 1781.

In 1765, for his work as a poet, satirist, dramatist, essayist, novelist, scholar, critic, and lexicographer, Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) received the degree of LL.D. from Trinity College, Dublin, thereby enshrining him in the annals of English letters as *Doctor Johnson*. That same year he published an edition of Shakespeare's works; then, for a decade, he did little writing, devoting his energy, wit, and intelligence to incomparable conversation.

When an Edinburgh publisher brought out a flawed collection of English poetry, a group of London booksellers-publishers determined to answer this Scottish invasion of its territory with Dr. Johnson's formidable assistance. They planned to print small, elegant volumes of all the English poets of repute, from Chaucer to their day, and they approached Johnson to write short biographical introductions to each poet. He readily agreed, telling Boswell on 3 May 1777 that he had been "engaged to write little lives, and little Prefaces, to a little edition of the English poets."

The booksellers drew up the list of worthies, to which Johnson proposed five names. When Boswell asked him if he would write a preface to "any dunce's work," Johnson replied that he would and even state that the poet was "a dunce." In the final selection, the earlier poets dropped out; the fifty-two retained dated from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Despite his age and ill health, his recurrent moods of melancholia and indolence, and his erratic writing habits, Johnson made good progress on his portion of the project. The *Lives* and works of the first twenty-two poets in the series appeared in 1779. In August 1780 he told Boswell that he had sat at home in Bolt Court "all summer, thinking to write the *Lives*, and a great part of the time only thinking." But in 1781 he could state that "some time in March" he had finished them, having written in his "usual way, dilatorily and hastily, unwilling to work and working with vigour and haste."

Johnson undertook no tedious research. He probably read extensively in biography and talked to people familiar with the poets, but he did not reread their works, instead relying for interpretations and appropriate quotations on his original readings and his prodigious memory. In discussing a work that had made no

strong first impression, he usually did not hunt for passages to cite. From Milton's *Paradise Lost* he quotes but two and a half lines.

The Works of the English Poets. With Prefaces, Biographical and Critical (1779-1781) filled sixty-eight volumes. In 1781 Johnson's introductions were printed separately in revised form as *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*. The four-volume opus stands as his masterpiece. The author himself acknowledged that he did not know that he had written "anything more generally commended" than the *Lives*, and he had "found the world willing enough to caress" him for them. As John Wain notes, Johnson chronicled in this work "the literary history of an epoch."

Johnson accords his best treatment to his favorites—John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and Joseph Addison. He observes, for example, that although more than a century has passed since Dryden's earlier pieces, "they have nothing yet uncouth or obsolete" about them. And Pope possesses, "in proportions very nicely adjusted to each other, all the qualities that constitute genius": invention, imagination, and judgment.

By scholarly consensus, Johnson's *Life of Milton* represents his least successful study. The opinionated Tory and devout Anglican had no sympathy for Milton's Puritan politics or religion; he also detested the pastoral tradition, and thus concluded that Milton "writ no language," and that in *Lycidas*, "the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing." Upon reading this passage, the young Anthony Trollope threw the book out the window. Yet other, complimentary passages on Milton show Johnson striving to overcome his prejudices. In the *Life of Cowley*, he dismisses the Metaphysical Poets because "their thoughts are often new, but seldom natural; they are not obvious, but neither are they just." Nevertheless, he recognizes their wit, learning, talent, and intellectual energy. He treats lesser poets perfunctorily.

In *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* Johnson sought to reveal the men behind the poetry by wedding biography, analysis, and criticism into a meaningful study of character and thought. Absent here is the ponderous formality of style that characterizes certain of his earlier works, replaced by a lighter, more conversational tone, rich in sly humor and common sense. Voicing the opinion of many critics, John Wain describes the *Lives* as "the greatest single body of literary biography and criticism in our language."

Peal 2,158.

111. JOHN GAY. *Fables*. 2 vols. London: John Stockdale, 1793.

On 30 October 1725 the poet John Gay (1685-1732) wrote to General James Dormer that he had spent the summer studying and working on "a Book of Fables" which he hoped "to have leave to inscribe to Prince William," the four-year-old third son of the future George II. Gay hoped that the dedication would win him a place at court, but on the accession of Prince William's father in June 1727, he was offered no more than the post of gentleman usher to Princess Louisa, then two years old. He declined the position. At the time of his letter to Dormer, when his ambition was high, Gay had already written some forty of the proposed fifty fables, "all entirely new." In November 1726 he informed Dormer that, despite delays by the "Gravers," the work was in the press. He wrote Jonathan Swift on 18 February that the fables had been printed but that the engravings remained unfinished. Publication of the fifty fables occurred between March and June 1727.

The following year Gay created the ballad opera, a genre unique to the early eighteenth century, with *The Beggar's Opera*. He returned to fables in the winter of 1731 and continued to labor over another series through the following summer. He wrote Swift in May 1732 that the fables in the second group had "a prefatory discourse before each of 'em by way of Epistle, & the Morals of most of 'em are of the political kind," making them longer than those in his original set. Although Swift and others might think the composition of fables easy, Gay confessed that he found it "the most difficult" of any writing he had ever undertaken: after he had "invented one Fable, and finish'd it," he despaired "of finding out another." By then, he had completed fifteen or sixteen, and intended to do four or five more. However, the more lucrative ballad opera *Achilles* diverted his creative energies, and he died that December without having arranged for the fables' publication. The Duke of Queensbury, possibly with assistance from Swift, saw them through the press in 1738. Sixteen fables comprise the second series.

Singly and combined, Gay's volumes of fables enjoyed immediate and lasting success. Over the next century and a half, more than 350 editions of the *Fables* appeared, surpassing even the better-known *Beggar's Opera*. Today, Gay's rivals in the genre number but two, Aesop and La Fontaine.

In his *Life of Gay* in *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*,

Dr. Johnson defines "A *Fable*, or *Apologue* . . . in its genuine state" as "a narrative in which beings irrational, and sometimes inanimate, . . . are, for the purpose of moral instruction, feigned to act and speak with human interests and passions." Johnson holds that Gay's octosyllabic poems do not conform to this definition because they include tales and allegories. But Gay did not hesitate any more than did Aesop to create stories in which some or all of the characters are human, or some are human and the rest supernatural. Johnson does, however, praise "the liveliness" of their telling, their "smooth" versification, and the "generally happy" diction, only "now and then a little constrained by the measure of the rhyme."

In 1793 John Stockdale brought out a two-volume edition of all the *Fables*. Among the seventy plates that "embellished" the work figure twelve executed by William Blake (1757-1827), who perhaps also designed some or all of the dozen illustrations that he signed "Blake sc" (for *sculpsit*, "engraved by"). For Volume I he produced a plate for the introduction, "The Shepherd and the Philosopher," as well as for Fable VI, "The Miser and Plutus"; XIII, "The Tame Stag"; XVI, "The Pin and the Needle"; XXII, "The Goat without a Beard"; XXIV, "The Butterfly and the Snail"; XXVIII, "The Persian, the Sun and the Cloud"; XXX, "The Setting-dog and the Partridge"; XLI, "The Owl and the Farmer." For Volume II he prepared engravings for Fable I, "The Dog and the Fox"; XII, "Pan and Fortune"; XVI, "The Ravens, the Sexton, and the Earth-worm."

By the end of 1793 Blake had engraved such of his own works as *Songs of Innocence*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, and *The Gates of Paradise*. His engravings for Gay's *Fables* constitute the most important pieces he produced at this time for other writers and publishers.

The Samuel Clinton Van Dusen copy. Peal 7,322-7,323.