THE CORRESPONDENCE OF ROBERT DODSLEY 1733–1764

EDITED BY
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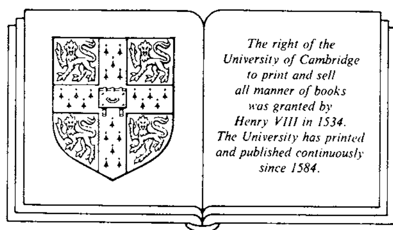

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CONTENTS

Preface *page* xiii

Acknowledgements xvii

Notes on the text xxi

Cue-titles xxiii

Chronological list of Robert Dodsley's correspondence xxvi

Alphabetical list of correspondents xxxvi

Introduction 1

LETTERS

A Letters, 1733–1764 65

B Public letters 494

Appendixes

A Robert Dodsley's Will 503

B 1 Abstracts of Robert Dodsley's publishing agreements, receipts, and bills 506

2 Copyrights registered at the Stationers' Company 530

3 Dodsley's purchases of copyrights and stock at booksellers' sales 531

C Provenance of autograph letters and citations to major printed versions 534

D Untraced correspondence of Robert Dodsley 546

E Correspondence and documents of James Dodsley 555

Index 568

A. ROBERT DODSLEY'S LIFE AND CAREER

1. Life, writings and associates

Writing to Thomas Percy in 1761, William Shenstone took obvious delight in recounting an anecdote arising from Lady Gough's recent visit. Apparently the Lady had taken the liberty of peeking into a letter from Dodsley that lay open on the table. Confusing the bookseller with the deistical pamphleteer Henry Dodwell (d. 1784), she soon thereafter sent Shenstone the advice that he should "break off all correspondence with that Dodwell; for that she had heard he was an infidel." Since then, Shenstone hastens to tell Percy, she has "accused our Friend Dodsley of no Less than Blasphemy; by reason that he in his verses makes so free with silvan Gods & rural deities."[1]

One smiles at the Lady's ingenuousness, but not with complete confidence, for even those familiar with eighteenth-century London society have difficulty distinguishing among those notables whose surnames approximated Dodsley's. Lurking in the shadows of the century's annals are several who occasionally make a show on the stage to complete the historian's cast of characters. The clergyman and author William Dodd (1729–77), for instance, by forging a four thousand pound bond in the name of the 5th Earl of Chesterfield, earned considerable notice on the way to a public execution in 1777. Two other controversial clerical authors swell the chorus of notable "Dods": the active dissenting lecturer and hymn-writer from Northampton, Philip Doddridge (1702–51), and the forementioned Henry Dodwell's more traditional brother, William Dodwell (1709–85), Archdeacon of Berkshire. Perhaps the best known of the "Dods" at the time was George Bubb Doddington, Baron Melcombe, a popular wit, political pamphleteer, and patron of literature. But more obviously blurring the picture within Dodsley's own trade were Anne and Benjamin Dodd. Not only did the careers of these two London booksellers overlap Dodsley's, but their names were occasionally joined with his in imprints.

It is not entirely surprising, then, that even modern scholars occasionally blunder when referring to Dodsley, especially confusing him with his younger brother and successor, James Dodsley. A. S. Collins, in his standard *Authorship in the Days of Johnson* (1928), claims that "where Dodsley gave 220 guineas for Young's *Night Thoughts* in 1742, he gave Percy in 1765 300 Guineas for his *Reliques*."[2] R. W. Chapman prints among Samuel Johnson's *Letters* (1952) one piece to Dodsley whose date he estimates to be sometime in September or October 1765.[3] Neither

[1] *The Letters of William Shenstone*, ed. Marjorie Williams (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939), p. 601. Lady Gough was sister to Sir Henry Gough of nearby Edgbaston.

[2] London: George Routledge & Sons, p. 34. [3] Oxford: Clarendon Press, I, 182.

Collins nor Chapman seems to realize that he is confounding the two brothers: Robert had died in 1764. The same error abounds in library catalogues, sometimes marring even those of our most sophisticated research libraries.

Robert Dodsley, bookseller, poet, and playwright, was born the eldest son of a Mansfield schoolmaster on 13 February 1703. He was descended from an old Midland family whose origins can be traced to the thirteenth century.[4] Of his four brothers and two sisters, only the youngest, James, would approach Robert's stature in eighteenth-century society. Joining Robert as a partner, he later succeeded to the business, which he carried on until 1797. John, who took up the family tradition as a farmer and maltster, remained in the Mansfield area, as it seems did Lucy.[5] Isaac travelled to Bath to become Ralph Allen's gardener, and Alvory to London where, Straus suggests, he might have run a Westminster pamphlet shop.[6] Alice, having married Francis Dyer and moved to London, tended the ailing Robert during his retirement at her home in Bruton Street.

Like the early history of many notables, Dodsley's is difficult to chart; he seems not to have saved much (if there was anything to save) from the period of his migration from Mansfield to London. From various sources, we know that he had been apprenticed to a Mansfield stocking weaver, but doubtless the education Robert, Sr., had expended on his first-born chafed under the restrictions of the menial trade, and he soon departed the city – under what conditions it is not known.

The road to London was not direct, nor without distress. His anxieties were exacerbated by an ambition and an awareness much beyond his humble origins. He records in an early essay, *Miseries of Poverty*: "The miseries of a thinking man are intolerably aggravated by the quick sense he has of them . . . every uncomfortable circumstance depresses his spirits; the contempt with which the world looks upon him in a mean and despicable habit, the rude illiterate company he is forced to associate with, and the many insults, inconveniences, and restraints which he undergoes . . . are themes which afford him a great many melancholy reflections." These frustrated psychological energies initially drove him to seek relief as a footman, first at the house of the epicure and humorist Charles Dartiquenave, then probably for Sir Richard Howe of Gloucester and Notts., and finally at the Whitehall residence of the Hon. Jane Lowther, where he seems to have remained at least until 1732. Here, no doubt, he met many titled persons and literary celebrities of the Lady's acquaintance; and here he had access to a library. Most importantly for his career, he parlayed his experience in these services, with the assistance of the Muse, into verses that captured the fancy of some influential visitors. (He was obviously aware that the Wiltshire farmer, Stephen Duck, was currently being lionized in London as the "Thresher Poet.")

[4] Because Ralph Straus's biography seems to have exhausted available evidence on Dodsley's pre-London days, the following account relies on Straus for that period.

[5] Perhaps some estrangement or favoritism was at work when John inherited his father's Mansfield property in 1750, property that would have been rightfully Robert's.

[6] Straus (p. 9) does not reveal the source of his suggestion. Perhaps his notion of Alvory's pamphlet shop stems from the imprint to *Memoirs of Field Marshal Leopold Count Daun* (1757): "London printed for R. Withy and J. Ryall; and sold by A. Dodsley."

By some unknown means, the young footman gained access to Daniel Defoe. Defoe read, revised, and added some front and back material to Dodsley's poem *Servitude* (1729), and then saw to this first publication of the footman's works. His acceptance among influential circles by 1732 is confirmed by the appearance of his *A Muse in Livery, or the Footman's Miscellany*. This anonymous collection of one hundred and fifty pages of verse was prefaced by a subscription list of over two hundred names, many of them from among the peerage. Within a few months, a second edition appeared, this time printed as "By R. Dodsley, now a Footman to a Person of Quality at Whitehall." It is difficult to imagine that his bookseller's shop at the sign of Tully's Head was less than three years away. But now he was ready to meet the revered Alexander Pope, and here begins the present collection of letters.

Pope's pleasure with Dodsley's little satiric play, *The Toy-shop*, is recorded in a letter of 5 February 1733, where Pope promises to recommend it to John Rich, the manager of Lincoln's Inn Fields. Two years would intervene before the production, during which Dodsley turned out three poems after the manner of his benefactor: *Epistle to Mr. Pope, Occasion'd by his Essay on Man* (1734), *The Modern Reasoners* (1734), and *Beauty, or the Art of Charming* (1735). Again, his patron was obviously pleased, for all were issued by Pope's current publisher, Lawton Gilliver.

On 3 February 1735, Rich produced *The Toy-shop* at his new theater in Covent Garden. It scored an immediate success both on and off the stage. Eleven editions were called for within the first two years, and it passed through a number of translations. Despite its lack of plot, its gentle satire of contemporary extravagances so pleased audiences that it enjoyed a considerable run as an afterpiece and was frequently revived at both major theatres over the next two decades. Most importantly, however, it provided Dodsley with the financial resources (together with a hundred pound contribution from Pope) to open his bookseller's shop within months of the play's debut.

As might be expected, Pope's patronage was crucial to the new business from the outset. Switching some of his trade from Gilliver to Dodsley, Pope would publish at least seven works from Tully's Head by 1739, including his *Letters* and the second volume of his *Works*, though in the former "RD" was joined by Knapton, Gilliver, and Brindley.[7] Likewise, the appearance of Pope's works from Dodsley's shop doubtless brought the new bookseller's name to the attention of other authors, as well as inevitably inserting him into the mainstream of the trade. In 1737, he published Richard Glover's *Leonidas*, a poem of epic proportions that, to some critics, rivaled Milton's *Paradise Lost*. More significantly at this time, it was to Dodsley that the then little-known Samuel Johnson brought his poem *London* (1738), which became a milestone in the careers of both author and publisher.

One misfortune during these years, Dodsley would not forget in the future management of his business. His publishing of Paul Whitehead's satiric poem *Manners* in early February 1739, enraged certain members of the House of Lords, particularly Thomas Sherlock, Bishop of Salisbury, who caused the bookseller to be summoned before that body. When the poem was judged a scurrilous reflection on

[7] The problem of copyright ownership is taken up in the notes to Pope's first letter and in Appendix B, section 2.

certain members, Dodsley was committed to prison in Butcher Row. There he stayed for a week until his friend and neighbor Benjamin Victor used his influence with one of the offended parties, Lord Essex, to secure his release on 20 February.[8] By absconding, Whitehead had escaped prosecution.

The ease and success of Dodsley's transition from footman poet to London businessman, quite extraordinary in itself, says something about his versatile talents. But, amidst it all, he did not forget his first love, writing. *The Toy-shop* was followed by *The King and Miller of Mansfield*, a melodrama first acted at Drury Lane on 29 January 1737. With Colley Cibber playing the King, the play captured the fancy of London audiences, ran for many nights (including a command performance at the order of the Prince of Wales), and was acted every season thereafter until 1775. Although its sequel, *Sir John Cockle at Court* (1738), lasted but two performances, the young playwright must have been elated to realize that his first three plays (*The Toy-shop* being revived) were being acted on London stages within a single month, during February and March 1738. Still a fourth play, *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green*, with Kitty Clive in the lead, was performed at Drury Lane in 1741, but this sentimental afterpiece proved equally ineffective.[9]

Other works continued to flow from his pen through the early 1740s, including *Rex et Pontifex* (1745), a "new Species of pantomime," for which Dodsley failed to find a producer. Most likely a realization of his waning ability to entertain the town prompted him, by the middle of the decade, to turn his attention to the publication of other men's plays.

His love of the theater, together with an ever-present patriotism, at some point had set him to collecting old English plays. The first fruit of this new endeavor appeared in 1745 as *A Select Collection of Old Plays* (10 vols.), followed by two more volumes in 1746 (though all were dated 1744). Dodsley's purpose in gathering these sixty-one plays, ranging back to the year 1547, is expressed in the preface to the volumes: "My first End was to snatch some of the best pieces of our old Dramatic Writers from total Neglect and Oblivion."[10] And, for some, Dodsley is best remembered for this service. Apparently he had collected well over six hundred plays in these days, many of which would pass into the famed collection that David Garrick formed over the next three decades.[11]

[8] *Journal of the House of Lords*, 12, 19, 20 February 1739.

[9] None the less, Richard Bevis, tracing the development of the sentimental comedy, thinks this "earliest of the sentimental afterpieces was also the best" – *The Laughing Tradition. Stage Comedy in Garrick's Day.* (Athens, Geo.: University of Georgia Press, 1980), p. 105.

[10] I, xxxv–xxxvii.

[11] Dodsley mentions (Vol. I, p. 2) that the "Harleian Collection of old Plays, consisting of between 6 and 700 . . . are now in my Possession." In *The Garrick Collection of Old English Plays* (London: The British Library, 1982), George M. Kahrl and Dorothy Anderson trace some of the origins of Dodsley's collection and identify volumes that passed into Garrick's. Reportedly, Garrick had written in his copy of Gerard Langbaine's *The Lives and Characters of the English Dramatic Poets* (1699) the following: "All the Plays marked thus X in this Catalogue I bought of Dodsley." Garrick's note was recorded by Saunders in his sale catalogue of Garrick's library in 1823 (lot 1269). Garrick's copy of Laingbaine was offered again the same year by Thomas Thorpe (item 14360), but it has since disappeared.

Dodsley's bookselling business hit full stride by the mid-1740s. Through the first half of the decade, he had been issuing, either by himself or in collaboration, well over a dozen titles a year, a figure that reached nineteen in 1744 and twenty-nine in 1745. In an age when authors were at the mercy of crass, "dealing" booksellers, Dodsley had leavened his negotiations with a literary sensitivity, apparently fulfilling Pope's prediction: "Dodsley . . . as he has more Sense, so will have more Honesty, than most of that Profession."[12] Besides issuing some of Pope's works, he had inserted himself in the ongoing Bathurst edition of Swift through a purchase of original Swift manuscripts from Thomas Sheridan, the younger. To these, he joined a number of first works from the decade's rising stars: William Shenstone's *The Judgment of Hercules* (1741), William Whitehead's *The Danger of Writing Verse* (1741), John Brown's *Honour* (1743), Mark Akenside's *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744), Joseph Warton's *The Enthusiast* (1744), Thomas Warton's *Five Pastoral Eclogues* (1745), Thomas Gray's *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College* (1747), and William Mason's *Musaeus* (1747). At the same time, a number of established authors turned to Dodsley's services, including John Dalton, DD, Stephen Duck, George, Lord Lyttelton, Joseph Spence, Gilbert West, and, probably the best remembered, Edward Young, who would issue the first six of his *Night Thoughts* from Tully's Head. This predominantly literary cast reflects Dodsley's own interests, as well as illustrating that, in the first decade of business, Dodsley's shop had become synonymous with *belles lettres*.

Surrounded with such figures, and no doubt inundated with the petitions of so many more, it is not surprising that Dodsley should conceive of a project with which his name has been linked ever since. With something of the foresight that gave birth to the *Select Collection of Old Plays*, Dodsley decided "to preserve to the public those poetical performances, which seemed to merit a longer remembrance than what would probably be secured to them by the Manner wherein they were originally published." So read the Advertisement to *A Collection of Poems by Several Hands*, whose first three volumes appeared on 14 January 1748. There Dodsley re-printed many of his earlier successes but also included a number of original pieces, as well as many older favorites. Together with the three concluding volumes issued in the 1750s, the *Collection* has sometimes been regarded as an index to mid-eighteenth century taste.[13] And to some degree, this is true. Of course, some notables are missing – Swift and Young, for instance – but such were probably excluded either because their works were readily available in numerous editions or because copyright ownership prevented their inclusion. Indeed the volumes contain a good deal of trivial material (probably imposed upon the bookseller by friends and acquaintances). On the other hand, it is difficult to find half a dozen notable, practising poets who are not represented.

In the same year that he published the *Collection*, the enterprising Dodsley

[12] Letter to William Duncombe on 6 May 1735. *Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), III, 454.

[13] R.W. Chapman, "Dodsley's *Collection of Poems by Several Hands*," *Oxford Bibliographical Society: Proceedings and Papers*, III, iii (1933), 269. Donald Eddy qualifies the view in "Dodsley's *Collection of Poems by Several Hands* (Six Volumes), 1958. Index of Authors." *PBSA*, 60 (1966), 11–12.

launched another work of broad significance, in terms of public utility. As one who struggled to gain a rudimentary education, Dodsley never forgot the needs of schoolboys, especially the less privileged who were forced to earn their education at home. Accordingly, on 7 April 1748, he issued the two-volume *Preceptor: Containing a General Course of Education.* The introduction was written by Samuel Johnson, whose other contribution to the work, "The Vision of Theodore, the Hermit of Teneriffe," Johnson later thought was entitled to the "Palm over all he ever wrote."[14] Boswell himself regarded the *Preceptor* as "one of the most valuable books for the improvement of young minds that has appeared in any language."[15] The volumes covered a broad range of topics, offering lessons on mathematics, architecture, geography (125 pages), rhetoric, drawing, logic (195 pages), ethics (140 pages), trade and commerce (82 pages), law and government, to mention only a handful. The products of several authors, the pieces were selected and edited by Dodsley, who even secured a special license from George II to protect his copyright. The whole work was conducted in an atmosphere of deism, pragmatism, and common sense. Something particularly "Dodsley" surfaces in the estimate of trade and commerce: "the only effectual means of banishing idleness, indigence, and ill humours." The work passed through at least four editions during the bookseller's lifetime, spawned a number of imitators, and was used even by young scholars at Rutgers University during the century.[16]

Besides Pope, undoubtedly the most popular authors that Dodsley saw through the press in the 1740s – in terms of numbers of works and editions – were Mark Akenside and Edward Young. Three editions of Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination* (1744) were called for in the first year, the same year the author published *An Epistle to Curio.* Two editions of *Odes on Several Subjects* were printed in 1745, as were two editions of *An Ode to the Right Honourable the Earl of Huntingdon* in 1748. Akenside served his bookseller in another capacity during 1746–7, when he took on the compiling and editing of Dodsley's fortnightly *Museum: or, Literary and Historical Register*, to be considered below.

But among Dodsley's poets in this decade, no one matched Edward Young for productivity and popularity. Within three years, Dodsley had paid Young more than 230 pounds (see Appendix B) for the copyright to the first six "Nights" of the poet's *The Complaint; or Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality.* The "Nights" were issued individually but on no regular schedule from 1742 to 1743. "Night the First" passed through two editions in the first two months, followed by the next three "Nights," all of which were then published under one cover through two editions. The next two "Nights" followed in order, and then appeared a collected edition of all six, which, by 1749, had enjoyed eight editions. It is not clear why Dodsley refused to purchase "Nights" VII–IX when offered by Young in a letter of October 1747 (q.v.). Perhaps the bookseller thought he had expended enough on

[14] Thomas Percy letter to William Shenstone on 12 March 1760. *Correspondence of Thomas Percy and William Shenstone*, ed. Cleanth Brooks (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 57.

[15] Boswell, *Life*, I, 192.

[16] Dale Randall, "Dodsley's *Preceptor* – A Window into the 18th Century." *Rutgers University Library Journal*, XXII (1958), 10–22.

the work or that the public had begun to have enough of Young's weighty *Complaint*. Whatever the reason for it, the refusal did not dampen their relationship. In 1751, Dodsley joined with Andrew Millar, who had bought the remaining "Nights," to issue a complete edition of all nine "Nights," a work they continued to issue through the 1750s. Finally, in 1753, Dodsley would be publishing Young's tragedy *The Brothers*, and, two years later, his *Centaur Not Fabulous*.

In 1741, Dodsley struck out in a new direction. He attempted to capitalize on the phenomenal growth in the periodical market, particularly on the popularity of the relatively new form, the magazine. Since Edward Cave had begun the *Gentleman's Magazine* ten years earlier, his imitators had proliferated. The more elaborate monthly had already taken its toll on such specialized periodicals as essay sheets, journals, and reviews, leaving itself and the newspaper as the most prosperous undertakings in the field. Apparently Dodsley attempted to beat Cave at his own game by publishing a weekly three-penny pamphlet that combined high-quality essays with fresher news than Cave was able to offer in his monthly. The *Public Register: or the Weekly Magazine* got off to an encouraging start on 3 January 1741, but apparently by the fourteenth number it had begun to make inroads on the territory closely guarded by Cave and his chief rivals. When it was reported to the authorities that the *Register* carried news, Dodsley was forced to pay the stamp tax or discontinue the news. He chose the latter, and the circulation began to drop. Three numbers later, he paid the tax, restored the news, but cut the size of the magazine. However, even then, the forces working against him proved too strong, and he concluded the periodical with the twenty-fourth number, adding the complaint: "the additional expense I was obliged to in stamping it, and the ungenerous usage I have met with from one of the proprietors of a certain monthly pamphlet, who has prevail'd with most of the common newspapers not to advertise it, compel me for the present to discontinue it."[17]

Five years later, however, having firmly secured himself in the trade and now with Tully's Head bustling with fashionable literary talent, Dodsley made another run at the periodical market. On 20 January 1746, he signed an agreement with Mark Akenside to conduct the fortnightly *Museum: or, Literary and Historical Register* (see Appendix B), whose first issue appeared on the following 29 March. The periodical's regular forty pages were divided into four well-defined sections: essays, poetry, literary memoirs, and historical memoirs. Besides the work of Akenside, through the course of its thirty-nine numbers, the *Museum* included contributions from such as William Collins, the late Lord Hervey, Soame Jenyns, Samuel Johnson, Robert Lowth, George, Lord Lyttelton, Joseph Spence, Horace Walpole, Joseph and Thomas Warton, and the future poet laureate William Whitehead. Although its predominantly literary character hardly posed a marketing threat to the more general pitch of the *Gentleman's*, once again Cave smugly congratulated himself when the *Museum* was discontinued in September 1747. The Preface to the

[17] At the time, newspapers were largely controlled by share-holding booksellers, who could effectively squelch competition from new publications simply by refusing to advertise them. For a thorough consideration of the subject, see Michael Harris, "The Management of the London Newspaper Press during the Eighteenth Century," *Publishing History*, 4 (1978), pp. 95–112.

collected edition of the *Gentleman's* for that year delighted in the fact that this "super-excellent Magazine [*Museum*], which was entirely to extirpate all others . . . a work of genius and learning" had expired. Accompanying verses roundly chastised the pretentions of the *Museum*'s projectors. Why Dodsley discontinued the *Museum* at this time is not known. Perhaps it had been designed for only a stated number of issues, as would be his next periodical, *The World*. But it is true that, by 1747, Dodsley had already engaged himself in another large, time-consuming project, his three-volume *Collection of Poems by Several Hands*, which would appear the following March.[18]

A major addition at Tully's Head during the 1740s should be mentioned before leaving the decade. One piece of evidence suggests that, sometime before 3 June 1742, Dodsley's brother James had come to work for him. On that day James witnessed an agreement Dodsley signed with Henry Baker for the purchase of *The Microscope Made Easy* (see Appendix B). Unfortunately this single document is all that we have to link the younger Dodsley with Tully's Head during the 1740s, for his name does not appear with Robert's in an imprint until 1753. But since he was admitted as a member of the Stationers' Company in 1754 (albeit by redemption), it is likely that he served some time with Robert during the previous decade. The extremely low profile James kept at Tully's Head – even after 1754 – is perplexing, however. Although numerous letters he exchanged with authors after Robert's death are extant, only one brief piece predating 1764 has turned up.[19] Likewise, despite James's intimate involvement with the business during the 1750s, Robert does not mention his brother in the letters printed here until 20 July 1757, when writing to Nicholas Herbert; that is, less than two years before he surrendered the business to James. But no evidence survives to explain this curious omission.

Dodsley opened the 1750s with a work of his own pen that proved immensely popular. *The Oeconomy of Human Life. Translated from an Indian Manuscript, written by an Ancient Bramin* earned some of its success because it was commonly thought to have been the work of Lord Chesterfield, an opinion that endured as late as Tedder's entry on Dodsley in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.[20] Some of this confusion arose because the book was published anonymously from the shop of Mary Cooper (who, curiously, issued a sequel not by Dodsley) and because the volume was purportedly written as a "Letter from an English Gentleman, now residing in China, to the Earl of ****." Essentially, the book consisted of more than a hundred pages of moral aphorisms, conveyed in something of a biblical air but with an ease and neutrality that made it accessible and agreeable to all. The

[18] Recognizing the book value of bound editions of periodicals, many shrewd publishers set a predetermined number of issues as their goal, after which they would discontinue publication and re-issue the periodical in collected editions, thereby realizing a second profit on their intial outlay. If the original periodical had enjoyed popular authors, book publication was almost assured of success. For more on the *Museum* and its contributors, see my article "The *Museum*, the Super-Excellent Magazine." *SEL*, 13 (1973), pp. 503–15.

[19] See James's letter to Shenstone on 22 October 1754.

[20] Considering all available evidence, as well as opposing opinions, Straus (pp. 169–80) argues convincingly for Dodsley's authorship. *The British Library Catalogue of Printed Books* credits Dodsley with the work.

Oeconomy passed through at least ten editions during Dodsley's lifetime and was translated into French, German, Italian, Latin, and Spanish within the first five years of its publication. It was truly, as Straus calls it, a "minor literary success of the century" (p. 180).

Another of Dodsley's own compositions, issued in 1753, did not enjoy the same reception; in fact, it turned out to be quite a disappointment to him. *Agriculture* had been planned as the first book of a three-part work to be entitled *Public Virtue*. But the eighty-eight pages of tedious blank verse, despite its concern with the increasingly popular subject of landscape gardening, did not sell, and Dodsley abandoned the entire project.

Towards the end of 1754, the bookseller became involved with a work, which, because of its delicate nature, found him vacillating on the decision to put the Tully's Head imprint to it. From the very start, he had been anxious about Joseph Warton's treatment of Pope in Warton's proposed *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Mr. Pope*. In the forefront of the new trend in poetry, Warton had some negative things to say about Dodsley's old benefactor. But besides worrying about the inevitable charge of ingratitude, Dodsley had been fidgeting lest the door be closed on a lucrative business opportunity. William Warburton, Pope's executor, had inherited the poet's manuscripts and had issued the "authoritive" edition of Pope's *Works* in 1751. For some time, Dodsley had hoped to buy into the edition, but as late as 1754 Warburton had refused him. While still continuing to hope, he knew that Warton's *Essay* would not assist his case with Warburton. The full story is told in the Dodsley–Warburton exchange in late December 1755, and consequently it is not rehearsed here. It will be adequate to say that, despite the apparent finality of that exchange, Dodsley engaged Mary Cooper to put her name to the *Essay* when it appeared in March of 1756. Only the "Second Edition, corrected" (1762) carried the names "R. and J. Dodsley."[21]

In his letter to Warton on 18 January 1755, Dodsley revealed another distraction he had endured over the past month, an event that hurt him deeply. His wife of twenty-three years, Catherine Iserloo, had died on 12 December. Little is known of "Kitty," except the passing references to her in Dodsley's correspondence, more frequent during her last years when she was seeking relief at Bath. She had certainly claimed a major place in Dodsley's early verses, however, inspiring the young footman's muse on many an occasion. His *Wish* offers but one example:

> A wife, young, virtuous, fair and kind,
>   If such a one there be;
> Yes, one there is 'mongst Womankind
>   O Kitty! thou art she.
> With her, ye gods, with her but make me blest,
> Of all your blessings – that would be the best.

Shortly after, another "lady" of Dodsley's acquaintance would cause him additional sorrow, although she would ultimately prove a source of great joy and triumph. Sometime in the mid-1750s, he had been at work on a tragedy, whose

[21] It is interesting that the title was revised to read: *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Mr. Pope*. James Dodsley published the much-delayed second volume in 1782.

subject, Cleone, he had borrowed from the legend of St Genevieve. Rounded into shape by 1756, *Cleone* was submitted to Garrick for Drury Lane, but the theater manager refused it. Again and again, Dodsley revised the play with the help and encouragement of his friends, but Garrick would not have it. Finally, with the patronage of Lord Chesterfield, Dodsley ventured the play at John Rich's then unfashionable Covent Garden theater. Dodsley's friends, including Samuel Johnson, rallied round him, and soon the Town was split into factions over the anticipated performance. Garrick had privately condemned the play to Dodsley's leading actress, George Anne Bellamy, and, to insure his judgment, had scheduled Susannah Centlivre's *Busy Body* (with himself playing the lead for the first time) to run against *Cleone*'s opening night. Tension mounted when the performance of *Cleone* was delayed for a few nights, and Garrick likewise delayed his production of *The Busy Body.* Finally both opened on 2 December 1758, and the rivalry spawned a host of partisan newspaper accounts. The story of Dodsley's enormous success and Garrick's chagrin is reflected in Dodsley's letters to Shenstone immediately following the play's debut and in his bitter exchange with Garrick at the same time, a feud from which the two former friends never seemed to recover.

Some defense of Garrick is in order, however. Although *Cleone* enjoyed a long run, was graced with the presence of the Prince and Princess of Wales, passed through two editions and four thousand copies within two weeks, and generally turned the tide of fashion at Covent Garden, the tragedy has perhaps appropriately not outlived its time. The echoes of Shakespeare are too evident, some of its happenings extremely improbable, and the sentimental tug irksome. In his letter to Shenstone on 20 January, Dodsley reports that both men and women wept aloud at Cleone's woes. And Samuel Johnson says the same of its author: "Doddy . . . went every night to the stage-side, and cryed at the distress of poor Cleone."[22] But although faithful to his patron, Johnson had serious reservations about the tragedy, as Boswell later records. When Bennet Langton had finished reading aloud a particular act to him, Johnson urged: "Come let's have some more, let's go into the slaughter-house again, Lanky. But I am afraid there is more blood than brains."[23]

On the other hand, whatever might be said of *Cleone*, few plays have been written with a more studied attempt to achieve a particular effect. Dodsley's tireless revising in the face of Garrick's repeated rejections might suggest the wearisome author who has written his "masterpiece" and will not let the world rest until his prodigy is recognized. And thus it may be. But there is more to it than that, as is revealed in a little-known commonplace book of Dodsley's now in the Bancroft Library.[24] This loosely constructed essay on tragedy, running fifty folios and studded with quotations from seventeenth and eighteenth-century critics, demonstrates how extensively the playwright had read and reflected on the subject when preparing *Cleone.* The culmination of his effort is expressed in a letter to James Cawthorne twenty months before *Cleone* was produced. Writing in response to Cawthorne's criticism of the play (now missing), Dodsley offers his own perceptions on the proper nature of domestic tragedy, the form he was championing. There, among other things, he says he has been "so great an enemy to that tumidity of style

[22] Boswell, *Life*, I, 326. [23] Ibid., IV, 20.

[24] Originally Phillipps MS 20112, but now in the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

so often made use of in tragedy." He claims "a domestic distress like this, should be as far remov'd from all pomp of expression as elegance will permit." Similarly his versification has purposely avoided "a smooth & flowing harmony of numbers (which I have always look'd upon in Rowe as a fault)," and instead has striven for "a natural ease and simplicity of language, as might flow . . . from the lips of the Speaker." And indeed that is how the play reads; one might even call it forward-looking, for its simplicity of expression is well wedded to the domestic scene. Regrettably, however, Dodsley could not resist the melodrama that his age demanded.

The same preoccupation with dramatic theory was no doubt responsible for Dodsley's *Melpomene: or The Regions of Terror and Pity*, a 25-stanza ode he published in September 1757 while still pining over the unproduced *Cleone*. Issued anonymously from Mary Cooper's shop, the ode was well received, even the chary Thomas Gray confessing a liking for it.[25] Sometime in November, responding to Robert Lowth's kind words, Dodsley explained his motivation: "To confess the truth, I have long been an admirer of the fair Melpomene [muse of tragedy], of late had made my addresses to her with some assiduity, and . . . I thought my self in a fair way of gaining her good graces. But the King of her Country [Garrick], being inform'd by the said Cleone of my design on his favorite Melpomene forbad my entrance into his Dominions on pain of Damnation, deem'd my humble spirit audacious and presuming, and dismiss'd poor Cleone from his presence with visible marks of unkindness and disgrace. Piqued at this repulse, I publish'd my Ode on Terror and Pity, to show y[e] World my pretensions, and to let the Tyrant see, tho' he scorn'd my offers, that the Lady had not disdain'd to admit me into some of her secret Misteries." So were Dodsley's spirits born up for the ensuing year until the opening of *Cleone*.

But Dodsley's reputation and influence had been expanding by still another work that was going forward at the same time as was *Cleone*. The reception of his *Collection of Poems by Several Hands* (1748; three editions by 1752), together with his ever increasing stores of poetry, prompted him to consider a fourth volume sometime in 1753. Although initially planned for the winter of 1754, its progress suffered several delays, not the least cause being the death of his wife in December 1754. Finally it appeared on 18 March 1755, together with a fourth edition of the first three volumes.

As the author of *Tristram Shandy* would at one point happily complain – "the more I write, the more I shall have to write"[26] – so Dodsley, the more he published, the more he was obliged to publish. Within little more than a year after the appearance of the fourth volume of the *Collection*, he wrote to Shenstone that he now intended to add two more volumes to the work.[27] But again numerous delays,

[25] Letter to William Mason on 28 September 1757. *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), II, 530.

[26] Vol. IV, Chap. XIII.

[27] Perhaps a caution should be urged here. If one were to rely strictly on Dodsley's extant correspondence, it would seem that the production of Volumes V and VI of the *Collection* pivotted on Shenstone's participation, but this impression results merely from the disproportion of their correspondence in relation to the total number of extant letters from the period.