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0521619823 - Edmond Malone Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography

Peter Martin

Frontmatter

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Edmond Malone (1741–1812) was the greatest early editor of Shakespeare's works, the first historian of early English drama, the biographer of Shakespeare, Dryden, and Reynolds, and a relentless exposé of literary fraud and forgery. His dedication to discovering the facts of literary history through manuscripts and early editions laid the foundations for the scholar's code and the modern study of literature. Yet he was also a gregarious man, attracting many friends – and enemies – among his contemporaries. This first modern full-length biography of Edmond Malone illuminates in a unique way both the intensely private world of the scholar and the highly public world of the late eighteenth-century artistic, intellectual, and political elite, including Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Sarah Siddons, and James Boswell.

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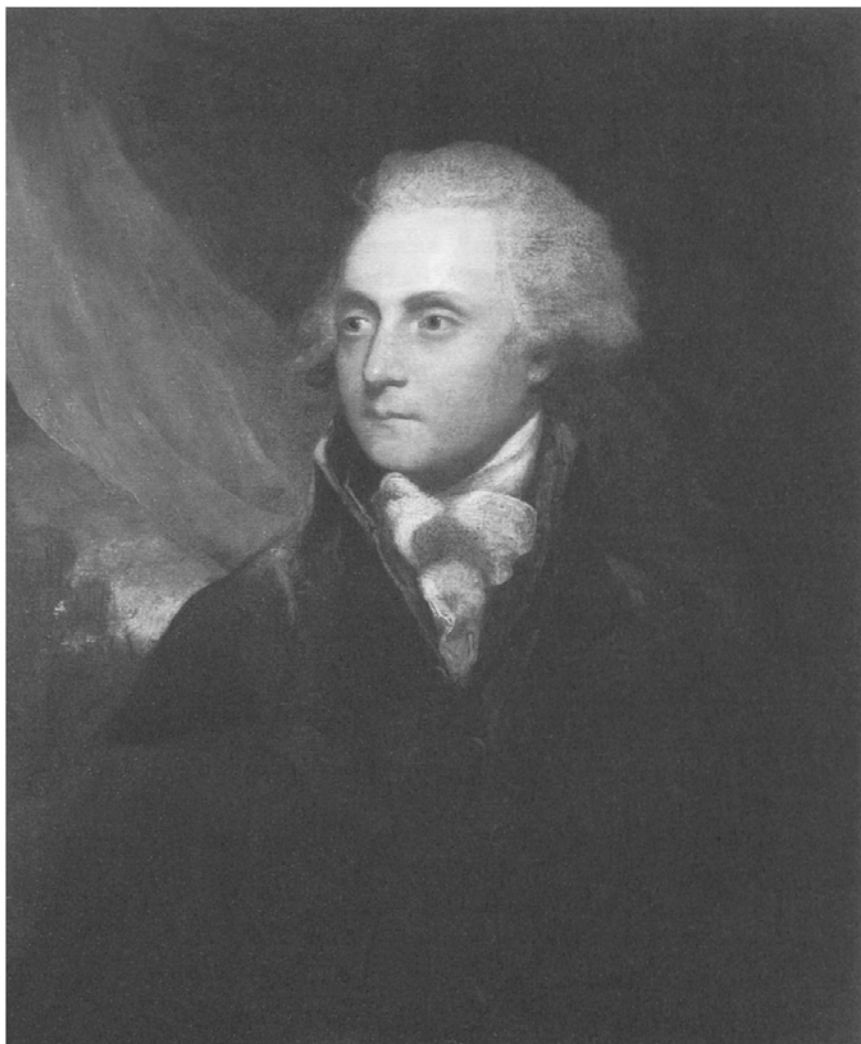
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0521619823 - Edmond Malone Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography

Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Edmond Malone. Oil by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1779

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Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Edmond Malone
Shakespearean scholar

A literary biography

PETER MARTIN



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Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

0521619823 - Edmond Malone Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography

Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*For
Maynard Mack
and in memory of
James Marshall Osborn*

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0521619823 - Edmond Malone Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography

Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Constant employment is, I believe, the true philosopher's stone, and
contributes more to the happiness of life, than all the splendid nothings
for which half the world are contending.
(Edmond Malone, 1777)

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xxi
1 Irish beginnings	1
2 ‘Shakspearomania’	21
3 Dr Johnson and The Club	52
4 Courtship, books, forgeries, and Horace Walpole	65
5 Scholarship and strife	81
6 ‘ <i>O brave we!</i> ’: helping Boswell with the <i>Tour to the Hebrides</i>	95
7 Deep in Shakespeare	112
8 Boswell’s <i>Life of Johnson</i>	144
9 Interruptions and disappointments	165
10 The Club of Hercules: exposing Shakespeare forgeries	188
11 Art and politics: homage to Reynolds and Burke	204
12 John Dryden and the closing of the century	223
13 Signs of weariness	243
14 ‘The last of the Shakspearianis’	257
Epilogue: The Malone–Boswell third variorum edition (1821)	271
<i>Appendix A</i>	277
<i>Appendix B</i>	280
<i>Bibliography</i>	281
<i>Index</i>	291

Cambridge University Press

0521619823 - Edmond Malone Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography

Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Illustrations

Edmond Malone. Oil by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1779. 30 × 25 in.

Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery (NPG 709).

frontispiece

Between pages 164 and 165

1. *Samuel Johnson*. Oil, unknown artist, c. 1784. 30 × 25 in. Courtesy of the James P. Magill Library, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania.
2. *George Steevens*. Engraving by George Cooke from an oil painting by E. Haytley, 1812. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
3. *Isaac Reed*. Engraving by C. Knight after painting by Silvester Harding for Harding's *Shakspeare Illustrata*, 1791. Stipple 5 × 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
4. *Joseph Ritson*. Engraving by James Sayer after drawing by James Sayer, 22 March 1803. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
5. *Thomas Warton*. Oil by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1784. 30 × 25 in. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
6. *Thomas Percy*. Mezzotint by William Dickinson, 1775, after oil by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1773. 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 10 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
7. *Sir Joshua Reynolds*. Self-portrait, 1780. Oil on panel. 50 × 40 in. Courtesy of the Royal Academy of Arts, London.
8. *John Courtenay*. Drawing by James Sayers, n.d. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery: *Sayers Caricatures*, p. 99.
9. *A Literary Party*. Engraving by W. Walker after oil by J. E. Doyle, n.d. The location of the original is unknown. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
10. *David Garrick*. Oil by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1776. 32 × 26 in. Owned by Lord Sackville. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
11. *William Windham*. Oil by Sir Thomas Lawrence, c. 1803. 73.7 × 61 cm. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.

Cambridge University Press

0521619823 - Edmond Malone Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography

Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

Illustrations

12. *James Boswell*. Oil by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1785. 30 × 25 in. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
13. *Edmund Burke*. Oil by Sir Joshua Reynolds, for Streatham, 1774. 30 × 25 in. Collection: National Library of Ireland. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
14. *Mrs Hester Thrale* (afterwards Piozzi). Oil by Robert Edge Pine. 1781. 27 × 23 in. Courtesy of Courage, Barclay and Simonds Ltd.
15. *Thou art a Retailer of Phrases*. English School, 1800. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
16. *Revising for the Second Edition*, 15 June 1786. From *The Beauties of Boswell*. See Boswell's *Journal*, 2nd edn., p. 527. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University. *British Museum Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires*, no. 7041.
17. *The Biographers*, 1786. Shows Hester Thrale Piozzi, Courtenay, and Boswell. The bust of Dr Johnson looks down on them, displeased. Johnson also appears as a bear in Boswell's *Journal of the Tour*, in which Boswell is writing. *British Museum Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires*, no. 7052. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.
18. *Titianus Redivivus; – or – The Seven Wise Men consulting the new Venetian Oracle, a Scene in ye Academic Grove*, 1797, no. 1. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.
19. *Joseph Farington*. Drawing by George Dance, RA, 1793. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
20. *Dr Charles Burney*. Drawing by George Dance, RA, 1794. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.
21. *Fanny Burney*. Drawing by her cousin E. F. Burney in the Brooklyn Museum Collection, n.d. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.

Cambridge University Press

0521619823 - Edmond Malone Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography

Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

If a scholar ‘who [has] passed his Life among his Books’ may be, as Samuel Johnson put it, a fit and useful subject for biography, Johnson’s contemporary Edmond Malone is an especially apt choice. For to his minute and multifarious labours during a literary career of four decades, we owe much knowledge not only about Shakespeare but also about Johnson, Boswell, Dryden, Reynolds, Pope, and Goldsmith, as well as English stage history and early English poetry, that without him would have been lost for ever or delayed until the birth of university literary study in this century.

Young ‘Neddy’, as Malone was affectionately called by his family, could not in the remote Ireland of his birth and upbringing easily have imagined his later career at the heart of London social and artistic life. Many highly educated Irish felt far removed from the artistic and intellectual energy of England, an energy centring in London, Oxford, and Cambridge. And while a young literary Irishman might think it possible to study some day at one of those centres of learning, he could see himself there only as a foreigner who must inevitably return home to feel, more than ever, his sense of separation. A recurring theme in the correspondence Malone received in London from Irish friends like Bishop Thomas Percy, one of the most eminent men of letters of the day, and the Earl of Charlemont, Irish statesman, was the consciousness that they were living on the fringe of European culture. Continually they asked Malone for literary and political news, periodicals, and publications which they feared they would receive either unbearably late or not at all. The thought of being out of the mainstream was inevitably demoralizing.

It was, however, possible to feel the penalties of remoteness without loss of national pride. During the decade before he settled in London Malone felt such emotions as keenly as anyone, and he frequently despaired afterward at what he interpreted as Irish insularity; but he never lost his love of country. He maintained an astute – though at times exasperated – interest in Irish politics, was faithful to his old friends, and returned frequently to visit them and his closely-knit family.

As a scholar–collector, editor, biographer, and critic, Malone based his writing and editing on facts, painstakingly discovered. His thoroughness

Cambridge University Press

0521619823 - Edmond Malone Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography

Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi

Preface

and rigorous insistence on accuracy remain exemplary. Today we take this for granted as part of the scholar's method, but in Malone's day it was uncommon. He took nothing on faith. His second home was the British Museum library. He wrote constantly to friends, asking them to ransack libraries, old repositories, and family collections for the elusive fact, date, or name that would lighten the quickly darkening pages of literary history. Malone felt his work was crucial, that he was racing against time; too much had been lost already. He had little use for those, like Bishop William Warburton, who he felt passed up rare and privileged opportunities to preserve literary facts.

Malone embarked on his scholarly career at a propitious time in English literary history. Cultural and political circumstances were such that what he had to offer was especially valued. These included: the growth of antiquarianism and biography; a relish for comprehensive histories of English poetry on the part of a larger and broader reading public; and the solidifying consciousness of national identity, accelerated by the French Revolution, which propelled the discovery and recovery of national authors to set against the ancients. Shakespeare was at the centre of this patriotically celebrative mode, but Chaucer, Spenser, Jonson, Dryden, and Pope, to name a few, bearing the standard of national pride, were also scrupulously edited in splendid editions, commented upon, and firmly placed in a national pantheon of poetry. And when Thomas Warton emerged in the 1770s as the defender of national pride, as Lawrence Lipking has put it, in writing the first history of English poetry, it was clear that the English search for their own literary traditions had finally come of age. It mattered less to his countrymen that Warton's *History* was an un compelling and uneven compilation of diverse material, than that it was a monument of a national heritage. All of this sketches the context within which the astonishing worship of Shakespeare as the national poet climaxed in the second half of the eighteenth century. So when Malone decided to put his research talents at the service of Shakespeare, he was eagerly welcomed into the exclusive pale of leading Shakespeareans by George Steevens – then at work on a second edition of the *Johnson–Steevens Shakespeare* – with little more to recommend him than a successful university career, some editorial and biographical work on Goldsmith, and an evident enthusiasm to roll up his sleeves and get to work in the archives.

There was something both heroic and obsessive in Malone's approach to his work. 'When our poet's entire library shall have been discovered, and the fables of all his plays traced to their original sources', he wrote in 1790, 'when every temporary allusion shall have been pointed out, and every obscurity elucidated, then, and not till then, let the accumulation of notes be complained of.'¹ Two centuries of Shakespeare scholarship have

¹ Preface, *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, ed. Edmond Malone, I, i (1790), p. lvi.

Cambridge University Press

0521619823 - Edmond Malone Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography

Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

xvii

vindicated his zeal, although several of his contemporaries mocked him for it.

Throughout his career, he rarely was free of critics who accused him, sometimes correctly, of numbering the streaks of the tulip. Even Sir Walter Scott, who relied heavily on Malone's considerable discoveries about Dryden, thought his *Life of Dryden* marred by an embarrassment of riches that made it dull. Malone also made enemies by not suffering fools gladly. He could be arrogant and was a terror to forgers. But the weight of critical and literate opinion was heavily on his side. He counted among his close and admiring friends Johnson, Boswell, Burke, Reynolds, Goldsmith, Windham, Priestly, Horace Walpole, Banks, Burney, and Burney's daughter 'Fanny'. He was at the centre of this world, epitomized by the vigorous part he played in the life and progress of the famous Literary Club. The Club, in fact, plays a large part in this biography.

In 1860 James Prior published a biography of Malone, but it is not scholarly rigorous. Samuel Schoenbaum, in *Shakespeare's Lives* (1970; revised 1991), explains the need for a new Life:

James Prior was no doubt an excellent naval surgeon, and his *Life of Malone* qualifies as an agreeable exercise in piety, but it is not an authoritative study of one of the ornaments of the Johnson circle and one of the greatest of all Shakespearean scholars. Yet a more up-to-date biography has not superseded Prior's, despite quantities of untapped manuscript material at the Bodleian Library, the British Library and elsewhere.

In my biography I have tried to offer a fuller picture of Malone, in the full range of his literary activities, than Prior did or than other shorter and more recent studies do, by concentrating on particular aspects of his impressively diverse career. Indeed, that diversity makes Malone a difficult subject. His biographer must follow him into Renaissance and Shakespeare studies, Dryden and Restoration drama, the history of the English stage, Pope, Boswell, Johnson, and the intellectual and social world of late eighteenth-century English letters – epitomized by The Club. It is a large arena.

What I hope emerges in this biography is a clear idea of Malone's enormous contribution to Shakespeare studies. I have tried to put this into perspective by examining the extent of his influence on readers and students of Shakespeare since he left his mark. How lasting was it? How has his work measured up to Shakespeare scholarship since? Much recent writing on Malone's editorial and critical work has been theoretical and deconstructionist. It argues that both Malone's work and the traditional scholarship based on documentary evidence that it heralded was restrictive and distorting. Malone is supposed to have re-created Shakespeare in the image of the archival documents that he painstakingly tracked down.

Cambridge University Press

0521619823 - Edmond Malone Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography

Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xviii

Preface

Historical facts become the potential enemies of the truth. By striking at him, the progenitor of modern scholarship, this theoretical criticism strikes at the heart of the value of historical literary research. In the course of explaining Malone's methods and successes, I hope without being polemical, I try to counter this recent critical tendency. Two other dimensions of my narrative of Malone's scholarly activities are how they helped shape the scholar's code from his day to ours and what this tells us about the direction of literary studies in this period.

Malone the biographer is also a theme, as is his intimacy with Boswell. Nothing shows Malone's personality so clearly as his collaboration with Boswell on the *Life of Samuel Johnson*. It is a very human story, replete with anxieties and frustrations, success and disappointment, and – ever at the core of Malone's work – principles and tenets of how facts should be presented and history told. His especially close relationship with Burke and Reynolds, as well as his hostility towards literary adversaries like Joseph Ritson, his fiery opposition to Jacobinism in any shape or form, and his almost neurotic pursuit of literary forgers also help reveal Malone's complex personality – his uneasy mix of mild-mannered sociability and professional aggressiveness.

Another emphasis in this biography, however, is the current of unfulfilment in Malone's life, personally and professionally. It was always a source of sadness for him that in his early thirties his scholarship took him away, more or less permanently, from his family in Ireland. Bachelorhood pained him even more. He does not fit the mould of the Aubrey-like, self-sufficient, retiring, dusty scholar blissfully sequestered among his books and happy to let the events of the world take whatever course they will. In spite of his respect and fondness for women, and in spite of several efforts to marry, his unwanted lot was a life of domestic solitude. His inability to make himself attractive enough to the women he wished to marry was (as one of his friends put it) his own personal devil.

As a scholar, sometimes he showed a similar inconclusiveness. He loved hunting for archival information more than arranging and writing it up, so that several of his projects were either delayed far too long or never completed. When he did complete a study, he found his gratification too often dimmed by the previous deaths of scholars and friends whom he respected and whose commendation he had eagerly sought. It sometimes seemed to him that the most voluble survivors waiting to greet his publications were carping critics determined to cut him down to size. Add to this his fierce political frustrations over the French Revolution, Irish affairs, and Jacobinism that at times surfaced in his writings and won him few friends; and it becomes easy to see that for him the scholarly life was no ivory tower existence; not infrequently, it was a blend of toil and trouble.

In an effort to make this book accessible to the non-specialist reader, I

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0521619823 - Edmond Malone Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography

Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

xix

have provided background to Shakespearean and other literary and historical scholarship whenever useful. Personalities are identified when they are first introduced, literary issues are explained, and political background is clarified. I have not, however, modernized eighteenth-century spelling and punctuation except for bracketed emendations.

I have accumulated debts in the course of writing this biography. First and foremost, to Maynard Mack, who suggested the idea one afternoon in Stratford-upon-Avon rather more years ago than seems possible, who read several drafts and guided me with wisdom at many turns. I dedicate the book to him as well as to the memory of James Marshall Osborn, who intended to write a biography of Malone but died before he could do so. His collections of Maloniana in the Osborn Collection at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, have been crucial to my work, and I am extremely grateful to Stephen Parks, Curator of the Collection, for permission to cite from it so extensively. My very great thanks, too, to G. Blakemore Evans, Arthur Sherbo, and Paul Korshin for reading portions of the manuscript and offering invaluable suggestions for revision, as well as to David Fleeman who advised me on the Boswell chapters.

I also wish to thank the following repositories for permission to use manuscript material: Sterling Library and the James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection at the Beinecke Library, Yale University; British Library; Folger Shakespeare Library; Bodleian Library; Cambridge University Library; the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland; John Rylands Library, Manchester University; the Victoria and Albert Museum; South Kensington Museum; Library of Congress; the [Donald and] Mary Hyde Collection (Somerville, New Jersey); the Arthur O'Neill Collection, National Library of Ireland; Durham University Library; Huntington Library; the Record Office and Library at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon; the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham; Sheffield City Libraries; the Trustees of the Boston Public Library; the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection (New York Public Library); Edinburgh University Library; Pierpont Morgan Library; University of London Library; Petworth House (Sussex); West Sussex Record Office; and Houghton Library, Harvard University. My debts to smaller and private collections are acknowledged in the notes. A Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1986 enabled me to spend an entire academic year on research for this book, as did a sabbatical leave from the British Campus of New England College. A grant from the Gertsch Fund at Principia College enabled me to include illustrations in this book that otherwise I would have had to exclude. I am also indebted to Laetitia Yeandle at the Folger, Dr Iain Brown (Assistant

Cambridge University Press

0521619823 - Edmond Malone Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography

Peter Martin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xx

Preface

Keeper of Manuscripts) at the National Library of Scotland, Eric M. Lee at the Beinecke, and Francis O. Mattson (Curator of the Berg Collection) at the New York Public Library for extensive help at those repositories. Margaret Birkinshaw, Librarian at New England College, helped me frequently to obtain books I needed; Eileen Brocklehurst supplied Latin translations; and Lionel Moon provided vital last-minute help with the preparation of the manuscript. Finally, as ever, my thanks to Cynthia, my best, my ever friend, for her encouragement and support.

Abbreviations

BL Add. Ms. <i>Attempt</i>	Additional Manuscripts, British Library Edmond Malone, <i>An Attempt to Ascertain the Order In Which the Plays Attributed to Shakespeare Were Written</i> , first published in vol. I of the <i>Johnson–Steevens</i> edition (2nd edn. 1778); revised for Malone’s Shakespeare editions in 1790, 1821.
Beinecke	Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
<i>B–M Corr.</i>	<i>The Correspondence of James Boswell with David Garrick, Edmund Burke, and Edmond Malone</i> , eds. Peter S. Baker, Thomas W. Copeland, George M. Kahrl, Rachel McClellan, and James M. Osborn. <i>The Yale editions of the private papers of James Boswell, research edition: Correspondence</i> , vol. 4, 1986.
<i>Boswell 1778–82</i>	<i>Boswell: Laird of Auchinleck 1778–82</i> , eds. J. W. Reed and F. A. Pottle, 1977.
<i>Boswell 1782–85</i>	<i>Boswell: The Applause of the Jury 1782–85</i> , eds. Irma L. Lustig and F. A. Pottle, 1982.
<i>Boswell 1785–89</i>	<i>Boswell: The English Experiment 1785–89</i> , eds. Irma L. Lustig and F. A. Pottle, 1986.
<i>Boswell 1789–95</i>	<i>Boswell: The Great Biographer 1789–95</i> , eds. Marlies K. Danziger and Frank Brady, 1989.
Bronson, <i>Joseph Ritson</i>	Bertrand H. Bronson, <i>Joseph Ritson, Scholar at Arms</i> , 2 vols. Berkeley, 1938.
<i>Burke Corr.</i>	<i>The Correspondence of Edmund Burke</i> , ed. T. W. Copeland, 9 vols. Cambridge, 1958–70.
DPW	<i>The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden ... and An Account of the Life and Writings of the Author</i> , ed. Edmond Malone, 3 vols. 1800.
DF	<i>The Diary of Joseph Farington</i> , eds. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre (vols. I–VI), ed.

	Kathryn Cave (vols. VII–XVI continuing). New Haven and London, 1978–.
Everyman <i>Life</i>	Boswell's <i>Life of Johnson</i> , ed. and intro. by Sir Sydney Roberts, 2 vols. New York and London, 1960.
<i>F&P</i>	James M. Osborn, <i>John Dryden: Some Biographical Facts and Problems</i> , 1940.
Fettercairn	Fettercairn Papers (Acc. 4796) deposited in the National Library of Scotland.
Folger	Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC.
<i>Hebrides</i>	<i>Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson</i> , LL. D., 1973, ed. F. A. Pottle (1961).
Hill-Powell	James Boswell, <i>The Life of Samuel Johnson</i> , LL. D. ed. G. B. Hill, rev. edn. L. F. Powell, 6 vols. 1934–64.
<i>HMC</i>	<i>Reports of Historical Manuscripts Commission</i> .
<i>Inquiry</i>	Edmond Malone, <i>An Inquiry Into the Authenticity of Certain Miscellaneous Papers... Attributed to Shakespeare, Queen Elizabeth and Henry, Earl of Southampton</i> , 1796.
<i>J–S</i>	<i>The Plays of William Shakespeare, with Notes by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens</i> . 2nd edn., 10 vols. 1778; 10 vols. 1785; 15 vols. 1793; 21 vols. 1803, 1813.
<i>Malahide</i>	<i>Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle, in the Collection of Lt.-Colonel Ralph Heyward Isham</i> , eds. Geoffrey Scott and F. A. Pottle, 18 vols. 1974.
<i>Malone–Jordan</i>	<i>Original Letters from Edmond Malone, the Editor of Shakespeare, to John Jordan, the Poet, now first printed from the autograph manuscripts preserved at Stratford-upon-Avon</i> , ed. J. O. Halliwell, Esq., 1864.
<i>M–D</i>	<i>The Correspondence of Edmond Malone, the Editor of Shakespeare, with the Rev. James Davenport, D.D., Vicar of Stratford-on-Avon</i> , 1864.
Ms. Malone	Malone manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.
NLS	National Library of Scotland.
OFB	Osborn Files, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
<i>P–M Letters</i>	<i>The Correspondence of Thomas Percy & Edmond</i>

	<i>Malone</i> , ed. Arthur Tillotson. Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1944.
<i>PP (1790)</i>	<i>The Plays and Poems of William Shaksepare</i> , ed. Edmond Malone, 10 vols. in 11, 1790
<i>PP (1821)</i>	<i>The Plays and Poems of William Shakspeare</i> , eds. Edmond Malone and James Boswell Junior, 21 vols. 1821.
Prior	Sir James Prior, <i>Life of Edmond Malone</i> , 1860.
Reynolds, <i>Works</i>	Sir Joshua Reynolds, <i>Works ... [with] An Account of the Life and Writings of the author</i> , ed. Edmond Malone, 2 vols. 1797; 2nd edn., 3 vols. 1798.
Schoenbaum, <i>Shakespeare's Lives</i>	Samuel Schoenbaum, <i>Shakespeare's Lives</i> . Oxford, 1970; rev. edn. 1991.
<i>Shakespeare Verbatim</i>	Margreta de Grazia, <i>Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus</i> . Oxford, 1991.
Smith, <i>Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare Supplement</i>	D. Nichol Smith, <i>Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare</i> , 1963; first published in 1903.
	<i>A Supplement to the Edition of Shakespeare, Published in 1778 by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens</i> , ed. Edmond Malone, 2 vols. 1780.
<i>Walpole Corr.</i>	<i>The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence</i> , ed. W. S. Lewis, 48 vols. New Haven, 1937–85.