

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-48738-3 - The History & Sources of Percy's Memoir of Goldsmith

Katharine C. Balderston

Excerpt

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## THE HISTORY AND SOURCES OF PERCY'S MEMOIR OF GOLDSMITH

BISHOP PERCY'S Memoir of Goldsmith, prefixed to the edition of Goldsmith's *Works*, issued by the principal members of the London book-trade in 1801, was the first considerable authentic biography of the poet, and has remained to this day the basis for a large part of the more ambitious biographies which have superseded it. It has proved a puzzle to all later investigators of Goldsmith's life, both because of the inexplicable delays attending its preparation, and the involved question of its authorship, and also because of the uncertainty as to the exact character and provenance of the original documents on which it was largely based. Most of these original documents disappeared completely after the publication of the Memoir, and it thus became the sole source of information concerning such important biographical evidence as Mrs Hodson's narrative of her brother Oliver's early life, Goldsmith's memorandum of his own life dictated to Percy in 1773, and the large number of original letters it contained. These documents only recently came to light again, in the possession of Miss Constance Meade, a descendant of Bishop Percy's, living in London, by whose courtesy the present writer has been permitted to examine them. These documents, and the discovery of a number of hitherto unpublished, or only partially published,

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letters of Percy, make it possible to trace consecutively for the first time the history of the Memoir's genesis and publication, and to determine the sources of Percy's information.

## THE HISTORY OF THE MEMOIR

Short accounts of the Percy Memoir have been given by Prior<sup>1</sup> and Forster<sup>2</sup>. Prior's account, though invaluable because of the extracts it affords from Percy's and Malone's correspondence from ms. collections then in the possession of Dr H. U. Thomson and Mr William R. Mason, is too fragmentary to be satisfactory, and Forster's, beside being incomplete, errs in its too partisan effort to exonerate Bishop Percy from all the blame of the misunderstanding with the booksellers. Both leave in obscurity the time at which the office of biographer was transferred from Percy to Johnson, and back again to Percy; the reasons for the delay which permitted twenty-eight years to elapse before the publication of the Memoir, by which time all Goldsmith's relatives who were originally intended to benefit by the edition were dead; the reason for the change from Campbell to Boyd as ostensible editor; and the share of the three collaborators and of Rose, the "interpolator," in the final Memoir. These points will be duly considered here. No attempt, however, will be made to include the complications of Percy's con-

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Goldsmith*, London, 1837, I, pp. x-xiv.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*, 5th ed., London, 1871, II, 442-451.

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nection with Goldsmith's surviving relatives, except when necessary to elucidate the progress of the Memoir. It will suffice to remind the reader that the original purpose of the friends of Goldsmith, in planning the edition, was to benefit Maurice Goldsmith, his younger brother, with whom they became acquainted on his visit to London to settle his brother's affairs, after Goldsmith's death. Charles, his other surviving brother, was out of touch with his family, and Catherine Hodson, his sister, was not in need. Presumably his other sister, Jane Johnson, who was indigent, did not survive him. Maurice died in the winter of 1792-3, and Henry Goldsmith's daughter, Catherine, and Maurice's widow, Esther, then presented themselves as rival claimants on the *Works in futuro*. Percy settled the claim in favour of Catherine, on her own information that Esther had remarried, and that her husband had left her handsomely provided for. She lived only until July, 1803, when as yet no settlement had been made by the Dublin bookseller entrusted with the sale of the copies designed for her benefit<sup>1</sup>. From an unpublished letter in the possession of Mr W. M. Elkins of Philadelphia, written by Percy to Malone on October 5, 1803, it appears that not until after Catherine's death did Percy divert any of the funds to the assistance of Charles, the youngest brother, who had returned to England from Jamaica in 1791, and who in 1795 had applied to Percy for a share in his

<sup>1</sup> The facts about Percy's negotiations with Catherine and Charles Goldsmith are taken from Clarke, *Trans. Bib. Soc.* xv, 51-58.

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Goldsmith charity. Percy had at first paid no heed to his request because, upon inquiring of Catherine, he had been informed that her uncle had a "great deal of money in the funds." The pertinent passage of the letter to Malone, referred to above, reads:

I have a further favour to request of you. I had above a year ago<sup>1</sup> a letter from Charles Goldsmith, a Brother of the Poet, dated from No. 1 Dorset Place, St. Pancras, informing me that having formerly lived in Jamaica, he was come to reside in London, where he had purchased some property and that he had a little son named Oliver to whom he meant to give a liberal education and requesting for him some of the profit arising from the sale of his brother's works. At that time I had devoted this for the benefit of the author's niece in great indigence. But she is now dead, and I should be glad to give what copies remain unsold in London to this Mr. Chas. Goldsmith. But I have no answer to a letter I wrote to him on the subject (directed to him at about several months past.) And I requested a friend to inquire for him, who I believe had left town. Will you have the goodness to let your servant inquire if this Charles Goldsmith be dead or removed from the foregoing residence where I understood he lived in a house of his own, having built several houses there with some fortune he realized in Jamaica.

Charles, it is known, was finally located by Malone's friend, Bindley, who discovered that he had spent the time since the Peace of Amiens in France, and had returned to England to escape Napoleon's edict against British subjects.<sup>2</sup> For Charles' subsequent benefit from the *Works*, and his death on or near March 24, 1805, the reader is referred to Clarke's

<sup>1</sup> This refers to a second begging letter from Charles.

<sup>2</sup> Nichols, *Illust.* VIII, 239.

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account,<sup>1</sup> and to Forster. Of other details of Percy's aid to the Goldsmith family Clarke gives the best account.

To return to the history of the Memoir itself. There can be no doubt that in Goldsmith's lifetime both he and Percy intended that the latter should be his biographer. The idea originated probably with Percy rather than with Goldsmith, for, as far as we know, Goldsmith, in spite of his life-long hunger for fame, had singularly little concern for biographical immortality. He wrote few letters, he made no effort to preserve records of his intimacy with the greatest men of his day, he left with his best friends only the haziest ideas of his youth, and of his early life in London before he gained prominence. None of them knew his birth-day or birth-place, or even his age, when he died. I surmise, then, that Percy was responsible for the suggestion which led Goldsmith, on April 28, 1773, in the flush of the success of *She Stoops to Conquer*, to visit Percy at Northumberland House, and there dictate to him a memorandum of his own life. This ms., still surviving in the Meade collection, is in Bishop Percy's own hand, and is endorsed by him with the exact date. It consists of six folio sheets of writing paper, folded, and roughly stitched by hand into a quarto pamphlet of twenty-four pages. Only twelve pages are used for the original memorandum, the remainder consisting of additional sheets on which Percy has written corrections. The first page of these is labelled, "Corrections from Dr. Goldsmith's Brother Maurice,"

<sup>1</sup> "Family Letters of Oliver Goldsmith," *Trans. Bib. Soc.* xv, 11-58.

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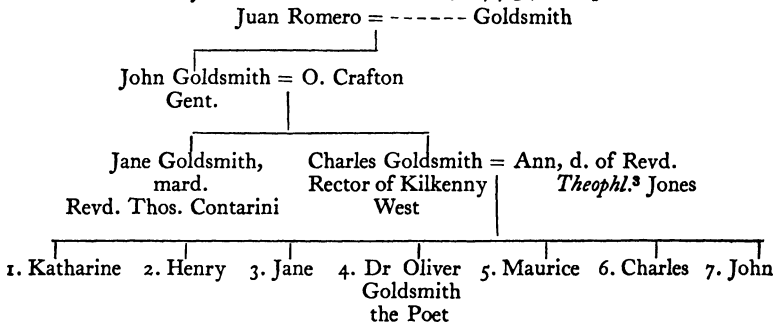
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and presumably this describes the later corrections as well. Sometimes, when no blank sheet offered, corrections were made between the lines of the text itself. All statements which seemed questionable to Percy were underlined, including a number for which no actual correction was offered. The text of this singular document, only part of which has been previously published,<sup>1</sup> is here reproduced, in order that Percy's use of it, and his deviations from it, in the published Memoir, may be clearly seen. The original state of the text is adhered to, including Percy's underlinings<sup>2</sup>, and the corrections are given in the foot-notes. The family tree which comes first, on the cover of the pamphlet, is not a part of the original memorandum, but is on one of the correction sheets, and was evidently worked out by Percy at his leisure, from information given in the memorandum.

## MEMOIRS OF DR. OLIVER GOLDSMITH

(Chiefly from his own Mouth, 1773.) April 28.

<sup>1</sup> Clarke, *Nineteenth Cent.* LXXV, 821-831.<sup>2</sup> Printed in italics.<sup>3</sup> "Oliver" is added.

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From his own Mouth, Apr. 28, 1773.

Dr. Oliver Goldsmith is Descended from a Spanish Family of the name of Romeiro or Romero, wch. came over to England<sup>1</sup> *in the time of Philip and Mary.*<sup>2</sup> From a marriage with a Miss Goldsmith the Descendents took the latter name.

His, the Doctor's, Father, the Revd. Charles Goldsmith, was a native of the *County of Durham,*<sup>3</sup> but educated at Dublin College: he got a small Living in England, & afterwds. a good Benefice in Ireland: being rector of Kilkenny West. He died while his son Oliver was at College (about 25 years ago, 1773). *General Wolfe was allied to the Goldsmith Family.*

His mother was Ann, Daughter of the Revd. Mr. Jones, Rector of Elphin. Her maternal Uncle & Grandfather & other of her Family has been successively Rectors of Kilkenny West aforesd. *She was allied to Oliver Cromwell, in compliment to whom our Author was named Oliver.*

They had 7 children, sc.

1. Catharine, wife of Daniel Hudson Esq. of St. Johns in the County of Roscommon.

2. Henry, who was curate of Kilkenny West, & left a son & Daughter at his Death, which happened 4 or 5 years ago. To this Brother the Traveller was inscribed.

3. Jane, wife of Mr. Johnson a farmer in Ireland.

4. Oliver, born at a Place called Pallas in the County of Longford in the Parish of Forney (a house belonging to his Wife's Uncle the Revd. Mr. Green Rector of Kilkenny West with whom his Father & Mother then resided.) He was born 29th Novr. 1731 (or 1730, h<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "To England" is crossed out.

<sup>2</sup> On the opposite page, marked "Corrections from Dr. Goldsmith's Brother Maurice," is the following: "The Doctor's great grandfather Juan Romero came over to Ireland as private tutor to a Spanish Nobleman in the last Century, who was then on his travels."

<sup>3</sup> The correction reads, "A native of the County of Roscommon in the Diocese of Elphin at a place called Ballyoughter."

<sup>4</sup> "1731 (or 1730, h" is crossed out and "1728" added in the margin. This correction must have been Maurice's, since in the Memoir Percy

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6. Charles, who went to Jamaica as a Cabinet Maker, where he now lives possessed of a good fortune.

5. Maurice, who lives now in Dublin a cabinet-maker.

7. John, who died young, circ. Aet. 12.

Th. Doctor's Mother died at Athlone, about 2 years & half ago.

The Doctor was educated chiefly under the Direction of his great Uncle Green, who placed him first at the Grammar School of Elphin<sup>1</sup> whence he removed him to Revd. Mr. Campbel's at Athlone, thence to Revd. Mr. Patrick Hughes's at Edgworthstown where he profitted more than any where, as the Master conversed with him on a footing very difft. from that of a young Scholar which the Doctor mentions with great gratitude & Respect. This Revd. Gentleman is still alive.

At 13<sup>2</sup> years of age he was entered at Dublin University under the Tuition of Theaker Wilder, who used him very harshly *and was a debauched licentious Man.*<sup>3</sup>

After taking the Degree of A.B. he proceeded upon the Line of Physic and took the Degree of M.B. when he was about 20, he however ceased to reside after his degree of A.B.<sup>4</sup>

While he was an undergraduate his Father died & left his family in distressed Circumstances, upon wch. the Revd.

offers "a member of Goldsmith's family" as authority for giving 1728 as the birth year.

<sup>1</sup> Here is added on the correction sheet, "under the Revd. Michl. Griffin."

<sup>2</sup> "Or 15 or 16" is added above.

<sup>3</sup> On the correction sheet opposite this statement is written, "He was rusticated from college for being concerned in a riot to set at large a Prisoner confined for Debt, who had been arrested within the Precincts of the College." The statement is made evidently on the authority of Thomas Wilson's letter to Malone, a copy of which is in the Meade collection.

<sup>4</sup> Percy has written here in the margin, "He most probably took no degree." The entire paragraph is bracketed, as if to express doubt.



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Mr. Contarine,<sup>1</sup> who had mar'd. his Father's sister, took him under his care & finished his Education.

After his Degree of M.B.<sup>2</sup> (about 1751) he removed to Edinburgh<sup>3</sup> where he persued his Medical Studies under Monro for about 2 years and half, and then removed to Leiden where he staid about a year studying Chimistry under Gaubius & Anatomy under Albinus.

He then went (about 1753) to *Padua in Italy*,<sup>4</sup> where he staid 6 months & saw *Venice, Florence, Virona, & all the North Part of Italy*. His Uncle dying while he was at Padua,<sup>5</sup> he was obliged to return back thro France &c. on Foot, lodging at Convents chiefly of the Irish Nation. After spending in this pergrination near a year he came to settle in London this was about the breaking out of the War in 1756:—Here he first tried to practice Physic, living in the Bank Side, & then removed to the *Temple*:<sup>6</sup> where he had plenty of Patients, but got no Fees.

The Revd. Dr. Milner, a dissenting Minister of note, who kept a Classical School, at Peckham in Surrey, having a long fit of illness of which he soon after died, becoming acquainted with him thro' his son, who was also a young Physician, invited him to take the Care of his School During his illness, upon promise of securing him the Place of Chief Surgeon aboard an India-man: which promise he effectually fulfilled thro the Interest of Mr. Jones then a Director, the Doctor had accordingly made preparations for going abroad (in the

<sup>1</sup> Opposite is written, "Contryon or) Contarini."

<sup>2</sup> Above "his Degree of M.B." is written, "he left Dublin College," evidently as a substitute statement.

<sup>3</sup> Here is added on the opposite sheet, "at the expense of his Uncle Contarine who was like a Father to him."

<sup>4</sup> On the correction sheet opposite is written, "To Switzerland."

<sup>5</sup> "At Padua" is crossed out, and "thus abroad" substituted.

<sup>6</sup> The underlining of this shows that Percy doubted it, although he retained it in the Memoir. Proof of its veracity is found in an excised passage in Goldsmith's letter to his brother Henry, written in January 1758, in which he says, "I have taken chambers in the temple."

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spring of 1757)<sup>1</sup> when happening to dine with Mr. Griffith the Bookseller, who was acquainted in Dr. Milner's Family, he was drawn into an agreemt. to write in his Review, in consideration of his board, Lodging, & 100 Pd. per annum.<sup>2</sup> In this Thraldom<sup>3</sup> he lived 7 or 8 Months<sup>4</sup> Griffith and his wife continually objecting to everything he wrote & insisting on his implicitly submitting to their corrections [ ] & since Dr. Goldsmith lived with Griffith & his wife during this intercourse the Dr. and he<sup>5</sup> thought it incumbt. to drudge for his Pay constantly from 9 o'clock till 2. The above agreemt. (which was in writing) was to hold for a twelve-month, but by mutual consent was dissolved at the end of 7 or 8 months; when the Dr. removed into Green Arbour Court in the Old Bailey where he wrote his *Review of the Present State of Polite Literature in Europe printed for Dodsley &* published in 1759.<sup>6</sup> Here I first became acquainted with Dr. Goldsmith from supping along with him at the lodgings of our common Friend Dr. Grainger.

He afterwards removed to Lodgings at Mrs. Carnan's in Wine License Court Fleet Street: where he wrote his *Vicar of Wakefield*.

He then had Lodgings at Canonbury House Islington.

He afterwards Lodged up the Library Staircase in the Temple with Mr. Jeffs, the Butler of the Temple.

He then removed to Chambers of his own at No. 2 Brick Court in the Temple.

His *Traveller* was published about 1764.

His *Deserted Village* in 1770.

<sup>1</sup> Percy has written "9" under the last figure of the date.

<sup>2</sup> Over "100 Pd. per annum" is written, "some pecuniary stipend."

<sup>3</sup> "Thraldom" is excised, and "situation" substituted.

<sup>4</sup> From this point to "and he thought it incumbt," the writing is scratched over. The bracketed portion is illegible.

<sup>5</sup> "And he" is inserted to make the passage read smoothly, after the excision.

<sup>6</sup> Here two parallel lines are drawn, and seem to indicate where Goldsmith's dictation ends, and Percy's personal recollections begin.