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978-1-107-66641-2 - Matthew Prior: Dialogues of the Dead and other Works in Prose and Verse

A. R. Waller

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CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH CLASSICS

The Writings
of
Matthew Prior

* *

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MATTHEW PRIOR

Born 1664

Died 1721

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Frontmatter

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MATTHEW PRIOR

DIALOGUES OF THE DEAD
AND OTHER WORKS IN
PROSE AND VERSE

THE TEXT EDITED BY
A. R. WALLER, M.A.



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at the University Press
1907

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[More information](#)

NOTE.

THE present volume contains the whole of Prior's English literary works in prose and verse, other than those published in the folio of 1718, which were contained in the volume edited by me two years ago. It thus completes the publication of the text of Prior's writings as designed, and it is pleasant to remember that this publication has been undertaken by the Press for which Prior negotiated a purchase of Greek type when in Paris in 1700¹.

More than half the pages now published contain additions to the known writings of Prior, and, in respect of this, the thanks of all who are interested in the literature of the 17th and 18th centuries are due to the Marquess of Bath, who kindly permitted me to make an examination of the whole of Prior's literary papers preserved at Longleat, and who readily granted leave to the Syndics of the University Press to publish them. It is but rarely, now, that an addition of this bulk can be made to the works of a writer who exercised an abiding influence on the form of English verse, besides being a person of importance in his day.

The additions thus made are of varying importance. The prose *Dialogues of the Dead* seem to me to be among the best of their kind. They were read by Pope and thought 'very good,' and they were seen and praised by a few other and lesser people in the 18th century. The *Dialogue between Mr John Lock and*

¹ See J. E. B. Mayor, in *Notes and Queries*, S. ii, v. 5, p. 356.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTE

Seigneur de Montaigne, especially the encounter between John and Margaret, will be enjoyed by all lovers of Montaigne, and the lines on *Conscience*, a few of which have previously been printed in collected editions of Prior, can now be read, in their original and unabridged form, in the delightful *Dialogue between The Vicar of Bray and Sir Thomas Moor*.

The poems now first printed consist of juvenile lines and mature verses, further addresses to the Lady Margaret, foundress of St John's—his Cambridge college, to which he was ever attached and to which he left his library—Hudibrastic lines, political verse, songs, an imperfect attempt at a theme frequently undertaken in his days (*A Session of the Poets*), light *vers de société*, personal addresses, ballads, translations, fragments intended for *Alma*, an *Answer to the Female Phaeton*, prologues, essays in blank verse, portions of an ambitious work on *Predestination*, epigrams and, perhaps finest and most characteristic of all, the three-line stanzas which, adapting a phrase in the poem, I have ventured to call *Funny the Just*.

All these, together with a few fragments which I have kept only in my notes, are printed as found in the Longleat papers, where they are preserved in the form of rough originals or fair transcripts, the latter showing evidence here and there of correction. They have been printed from photographs or from transcripts, and any alterations I have made (which have been as few as possible) will be found indicated in the notes.

The appearance of the present volume has been considerably delayed in order to examine the anonymous poetry contained in miscellanies, collections of *State Poems* and other anthologies of the 18th century. It was natural to suppose that some of the Longleat

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A. R. Waller

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTE

poems would be found in these collections, for we know that much of Prior's work was published anonymously and much, it may be added, attributed to him upon the most flimsy evidence. Two or three of the Longleat poems and part of one song, as indicated in the notes, have been found by me in these anthologies or elsewhere, but nothing else has been discovered, or pointed out in answer to the list of titles and first lines which, by the courtesy of the editor, was printed in *The Athenæum* some few months ago. I need hardly add that if any of the poems now printed are recognised as occurring elsewhere, I shall be extremely obliged if the fact be communicated to me.

In addition to this fresh material, perhaps the most interesting result of the examination of the Longleat papers has been the discovery of fresh evidence as to the authorship of poems repudiated by Prior. In the preface to the edition of the poems contained in the folio, before I had had an opportunity of going through the Longleat papers, the opinion was expressed, based upon knowledge gained in collating Prior's earlier and later versions, that his disclaimer of the *Satyrs* might be regarded in a diplomatic sense. Both *Satyrs*, in their printed form, are preserved among the Prior papers at Longleat, and the *Satire upon the Poets, in Imitation of the Seventh Satire of Juvenal* has a hitherto unprinted and signed postscript in verse, which will be found in my notes (p. 389). These facts, and the very significant verse on p. 336 (ll. 25–8), seem to place the authorship of the poems beyond reasonable doubt.

Lastly, so far as the Longleat papers are concerned, the discovery that there are a great many more Latin poems by Prior than have hitherto been printed as his has caused me to leave out of the present edition

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTE

the few Latin verses hitherto published with his poems. Limits of space seemed to urge that the present edition should be confined, as in the case of Cowley, to English writings. I had collected a few published items and done a certain amount of collation when I came to this decision, and it may be of interest to mention one slight matter. The Latin poem *On the Marriage of George Prince of Denmark, and the Lady Anne*, 'Conjunctum Veneri Martem, Danosque Britannis,' signed A. Prior, Coll. Div. Joh. Alumn., in certain editions, has, usually, a note attached to it signed K (= Kynaston) to the effect that 'This copy, notwithstanding the signature, is beyond a doubt the property of the facetious Matthew Prior.' Had editor or annotator referred to *Hymenæus Cantabrigiensis*, 1683, in which the poem first appeared, while 'the facetious Matthew Prior' was an undergraduate at St John's, it would have been seen 'beyond a doubt' that the printed signature to that poem is 'M. Prior.'

A few words seem necessary respecting the arrangement of the miscellaneous contents of this volume.

After *The Hind and the Panther*, in the notes to which will be found an interesting document, hitherto unprinted, abstracted from the Longleat papers, I have followed the text of Curll's *Supplement*. After the *Supplement*, I have followed the text of the *New Collection of Poems on Several Occasions. By Mr. Prior, and Others.*, a rare volume, published in 1725. A few trifling variations between the last printed and earlier appearances will be found in the notes. From p. 83 to p. 152 I have followed the two-volume edition of Prior's *Miscellaneous Works* 'Now first published from His | ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS. | Revised by Himself, and Copied fair for the | Press |
viii

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-66641-2 - Matthew Prior: Dialogues of the Dead and other Works in Prose and Verse

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTE

By Mr. *ADRIAN DRIFT*, His Executor. | The SECOND EDITION. | LONDON: | Printed for the EDITOR, MDCCXL.' I have not reprinted the second volume of that compilation, containing THE | HISTORY | OF | *His Own Time*, because there appears to be doubt as to how much might fairly be regarded as Prior's; also, because the thorough examination of Prior's historical papers is, I understand, in the hands of the capable editors of the Historical MSS Commission. From p. 153 to p. 175 I have followed the text of the excellent edition that usually goes by the name of T. Evans, 1779. I have not been able to obtain much corroborative evidence that all the additional poems in Evans are by Prior, but, in the case of the *Songs*, I have been fortunate enough to find in the library of St John's College, Cambridge, a copy of the very rare music-book in which the songs were first published, and one verse is reprinted from it for the first time. On p. 364, are printed a few fugitive items collected by previous editors: others, which seemed unsupported by sufficient testimony or which rested on recollection only, have been omitted.

The Appendix of poems attributed to Prior has caused some trouble. Through the kindness of Mr T. J. Wise, who is always willing to place his unrivalled library of first editions at the service of students, I have had an opportunity of reading many rare 18th century poems, published separately in folio, quarto and octavo and attributed to Prior. There is practically nothing but internal evidence on which to rely, and I have not been able to persuade myself that more than a few of these can safely be attributed to Prior. Two are printed from rare copies in the possession of Mr Wise, and I wish to thank him for

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTE

his leave to do this. Others, not printed, are mentioned by name in the notes. One, pointed out to me by Mr Wise, I have printed from Dodsley ; five, though not with any great feeling of certainty, from Lintott's undated *Oxford and Cambridge Miscellany Poems* ; one, the paraphrase, may be Dorset's.

It remains to thank other helpers for much kind assistance. Mr G. A. Brown helped me in the collation of some of the early issues, when I was not able to undertake it myself ; the Librarian and staff of the University Library, Cambridge, facilitated in every possible way the examination of the Longleat papers when they were kindly deposited in the Library by the Marquess of Bath for that purpose ; Mr J. Bass Mullinger, Mr J. H. A. Hart and Dr J. E. Sandys helped me in matters relating to St John's College ; Mr G. A. Aitken, Mr Austin Dobson and Dr G. F. Warner, of the British Museum, aided me in various ways ; and Mr R. A. Roberts, of the Public Record Office, helped me to obtain the first transcript of the *Dialogues*, when permission had been granted, and has, I am afraid, been frequently bothered by me since.

There are many questions raised by these poems, published or hitherto unpublished, which I should like to discuss, but this must be left until it is possible to publish a commentary upon them as a whole.

A. R. WALLER.

CAMBRIDGE,
10 May, 1907.

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A. R. Waller

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE HIND AND THE PANTHER TRANSVERS'D	I
A SUPPLEMENT TO Mr. PRIOR'S POEMS	29
To...the Countess Dowager of Devonshire	31
The Female Phaeton	33
The Judgment of Venus	34
Song to his Mistress	36
An Ode in Imitation of the Second Ode of the Third Book of Horace	36
An Epistle to Sir Fleetwood Sheppard	45
A Satire on the Modern Translators	47
A Satire upon the Poets	52
POEMS FROM THE <i>New Collection</i> , 1725	
Epitaph Extempore	57
The Turtle and the Sparrow	58
Application of the Turtle and the Sparrow	69
Down-Hall	70
Verses Spoke to the Lady Henrietta-Cavendish Holles Harley .	75
Prologue to the Orphan	76
The Conversation	77
Colin's Mistakes	80
MISCELLANEOUS POEMS, ETC., FROM THE COLLECTION OF DRIFT	83
THE EXAMINER. 7 SEPTEMBER 1710	147
MISCELLANEOUS POEMS, FROM THE COLLECTION OF EVANS, INCLUDING TWENTY-FOUR SONGS	153
ESSAYS AND DIALOGUES OF THE DEAD	177
POEMS FROM THE LONGLEAT MSS.	271
FRAGMENTS FROM PRIOR'S LETTERS, ETC.	364
APPENDIX	
Poems Attributed to Prior	365
NOTES	385
INDEX OF TITLES	409
INDEX OF FIRST LINES	412

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-66641-2 - Matthew Prior: Dialogues of the Dead and other Works in
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Frontmatter

[More information](#)
