

ROGER LONSDALE

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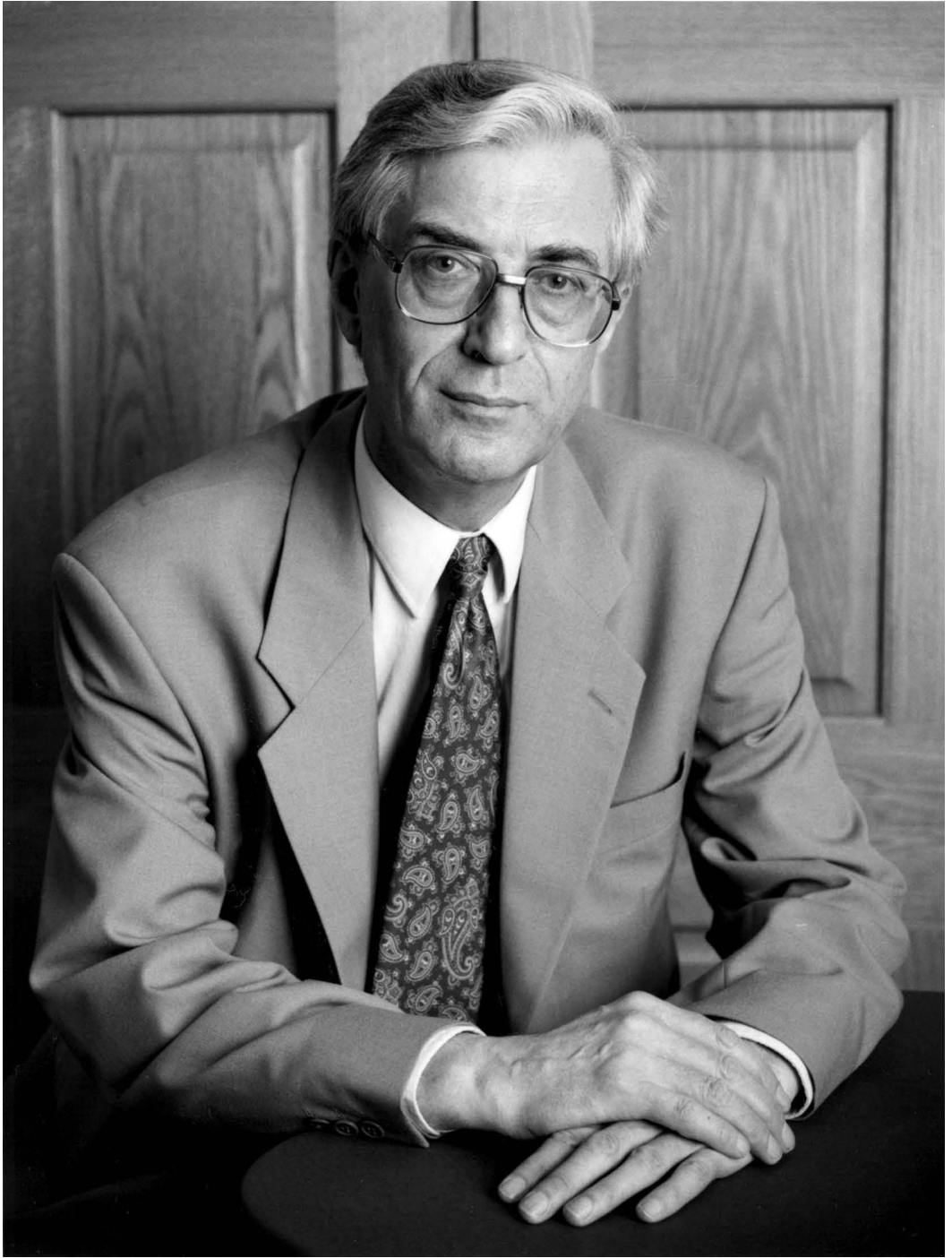
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elected Fellow of the British Academy 1991

by

JAMES McLAVERTY

Roger Lonsdale was pre-eminent as an editor of 18th-century English literature, the scholar who for many of us changed the 18th century. In his two anthologies, *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse* (1984) and *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (1989), for which he read and evaluated all 18th-century verse, he rescued forgotten voices and introduced us to a culture more diverse, practical, and wayward. Earlier distinguished editions of Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith (1969), Beckford's *Vathek* (1970), and John Bampfylde (1988) were followed by a final, prize-winning, four-volume edition of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (2006).



Roger Lundale

I

Roger Lonsdale was born on 6 August 1934, and brought up in Hornsea, a Yorkshire seaside town, fifteen miles from Kingston upon Hull. His father, Arthur John (1894–1977), worked as a manufacturer’s agent (1910–59), at first for the Hull Oil Manufacturing Company and then independently. His mother, Phebe (1904–2004), née Harrison, looked after the children and the home. Roger had an elder brother, Martin, and a younger sister, Elspeth. The family were Methodists: regular chapel-going was part of Roger’s early life and his early poetry was influenced by Nonconformist theology and hymns.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Roger, his mother, and his sister were evacuated to Scotland, an event that generated in him a new awareness and his first preserved writing.¹ On 26 June 1940, they set off for Ormsary, part of the estate of Sir James Lithgow (1883–1952),² a hamlet on the shore of Loch Caolisport on the south-west coast of Scotland, looking across the sea to Islay and Jura. Roger went to the local school, where he was remembered by his teacher Etta Cameron as a brilliant but sensitive little boy, a child whose eyes filled with tears when they sang a folksong about a baby lost while gathering blackberries.³ In a move that was to become characteristic, Roger started to record his new surroundings: ‘Roger H. Lonsdale’s History of Ormsary In the handwriting of R.H. Lonsdale. Stories, which happened in his time. Also pictures of Ormsary.’ The future scholar is already present in the careful list of residents, which includes ‘Mrs Lonsdale Dairymaid’.⁴ In his second year at Oxford Roger wrote a poem, ‘This Boy Saw Islands’, that was at least partly about his Ormsary experience, capturing a sense of alienation and of engagement with the rawness of nature.⁵

The Lonsdale family was reunited in Hornsea on 17 April 1943. Roger then went to Hornsea Council School, but he passed the new eleven-plus examination and moved to Hymers College, an independent, Head Masters’ Conference, school in Hull. His career at Hymers (1945–52) was distinguished: editor of *The Hymerian* (1950–2), secretary of both the Music and Debating Societies, Under Officer of the Combined Cadet Force, Head of Brandesburton House, Woodhouse Essay Prize 1951, Prefect 1951–52.⁶ At his final sports day he won the 880 yards and the shot, and finished second in the mile and

¹For information on this and other episodes in Roger’s life, I am grateful to Nicoletta Momigliano for access to his typed versions of his diaries and letters. As they are private, I refer to them, rarely, as ‘Diaries and Letters’, with the date.

²His son, Sir William (1934–2022), Roger’s exact contemporary, was at Lincoln College with him as an undergraduate, but they were never close friends.

³Probably ‘A Fairy Lullaby (I Left My Darling Lying Here)’. ‘Diaries and Letters’, 20/4/43 [letter of 20/1/75].

⁴‘Diaries and Letters’, preceding account which begins with 26/6/40.

⁵‘Diaries and Letters’, 20/4/43, Appendix.

⁶See the notice by Edward Wilson, <https://www.oldhymerians.com/news/fondly-remembered/265/265-Roger-Lonsdale-OH-1945->. Wilson was a Fellow of Worcester College Oxford and a member of the English Faculty.

the long jump. He did not continue his athletics career—when he volunteered for the 880 yards in Lincoln’s ‘Cuppers’ team, he was told they had already recruited the Commonwealth champion⁷—but in his final term at school he played cricket for the first eleven, and cricket remained an enduring enthusiasm, though as a spectator. He always remembered with regret going to see the Australians at Scarborough in 1948, and, having promised his father he would be home early, feeling bound to leave the ground, just as Bradman began his innings. He was academically successful at A-level in 1951 (the exams were introduced that year) and secured a place at Lincoln College Oxford in April 1952.⁸ The only disruption to his academic success seems to have come from his devotion to Sibelius. Hearing Sibelius in his early teens, he was enraptured, taken from himself into another world. Sibelius became such an important focus for his life that it led to neglect of his school work and the school had to intervene to reset his priorities. His achievements as a sixth-former show the problem was resolved, but he remained devoted to Sibelius (with Mahler a major addition) all his life. Until his final years, he would go to orchestral concerts in London, was a Friend of the Philharmonia, and even went on tour with them. Music in general, including 18th-century music and modern music, remained, like sport, an enduring commitment.

Before going up to Oxford, Roger did his national service in the RAF. His initial training was at Padgate, where he found neither the haircuts nor the meals as bad as he had feared. Russian courses were full, but he was sent to Hornchurch for Air Crew Selection. There his great strength in aptitude tests was his Maths, and, though he did less well in coordination tests, he was quickly selected as suitable for air crew as navigator or engineer, declining the latter. After being successful in interviews and tests at Cranwell, Roger was sent on to Jurby, Isle of Man, for Officer Training. He found flying a new and very enjoyable experience, though he worried about leadership training. He became an officer on 4 February 1953, missing the Sword of Honour by two marks, and was sent to RAF Bishop’s Court, near Belfast, for navigation school, before being posted as a navigator on No. 1 Squadron at RAF Flying College, Manby in Lincolnshire. He took well to life in the RAF, combining a full programme of academic reading (including *The Lives of the Poets*, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Shakespeare, Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney, the metaphysicals) with his duties, which included serving as first navigator on an important trip back from Keflavik to Manby. He left the RAF with more sorrow, he said, than he had felt on leaving school.⁹

⁷Derek Johnson, who also won the silver medal at the Melbourne Olympics in 1956. This incident came to represent for Roger something of the glamour of Oxford.

⁸He had been disappointed not to get into Christ Church in December.

⁹‘Diaries and Letters’, 1/9/54.

II

Roger Lonsdale went up to Lincoln College, Oxford on 6 October 1954. The English tutor at Lincoln was Wallace Robson (1923–93). Robson had been a supporter of F.W. Bateson (1901–78) in the founding of *Essays in Criticism*, and later held chairs at Sussex (1970) and Edinburgh (1972). Roger's tutor for Old English was Joan Turville-Petre (1911–2006), with whom he came to have an uncomfortable relationship. Roger was a keen cinema-goer and wrote for her an essay comparing *Beowulf* with the film *Shane* (1953). Both works follow the pattern where a hero enters a society, cleanses it of a threat, and then leaves. Such a comparison would raise no eyebrows today, but Turville-Petre was shocked ('I don't know what you're trying to do here', she is reported to have said, 'but please don't do it again'). The matter was raised with his other tutors at Lincoln, but with no consequences. Outside his scholarly writing, Roger liked to flavour his learning with contrarian spices: he would wonder whether Aphra Behn was an actual person (had she ever been seen in the same room with Dryden, for instance?), insisted that Pope's *Dunciad* was on a topic of major importance, enjoyed blaming Wordsworth for Coleridge's failed career as a poet, applauded Mrs Norris as the only sensible character in *Mansfield Park*, and acclaimed Mr Casaubon the real hero of *Middlemarch*. This spirit played a part in his undergraduate career, as it continued to do in later life in private conversation

A development with more long-term significance than the disagreement with Mrs Turville-Petre was Roger's being sent to Bateson's tutorials in Corpus Christi College in Hilary term 1956, while Robson was on leave. Bateson was something of a renegade in the English Faculty. The editor of the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*¹⁰ and the founding editor of *Essays in Criticism*, he was an advocate for removing compulsory Old English from the Oxford syllabus, and, though deeply committed to historically informed criticism, sceptical of the claims of the new bibliography and opposed to old-spelling editions (particularly sparsely annotated ones). The 'Critical Forum' section of *Essays in Criticism* enabled Bateson to work out his positions in argument with some of the finest critics of the time and his role in these debates was probably more influential than the example of his criticism.¹¹ Roger found him an immensely stimulating tutor because he was such a challenging one. I have the sense that in later life he was often

¹⁰ *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940–57).

¹¹ See Valentine Cunningham, 'F.W. Bateson: Scholar, Critic, and Scholar-Critic', *Essays in Criticism*, 29 (1979), 139–55. Although Bateson regarded himself as an inferior critic to Leavis (see e.g. his 'Editorial Postscript: F. R. L. and *E in C*: A Retrospect', *Essays in Criticism*, 28 (1978), 353–61), it is questionable whether his influence on English studies has not been greater. A monograph on Bateson and the Batesonians is much to be desired.

responding to an internal Bateson. At an early meeting, Bateson told him his essay was very well written and suggested he might get a job on the *TLS*—in the context, Roger was sure, an insult. Later a comment that an essay was mainly hot air ‘really stung me but made me work even harder’.¹² However, he took to Bateson’s historically informed criticism and, when he was scheduled to return to Robson, asked to stay with Bateson. He graduated with First Class Honours in 1957, in a distinguished year that included Gillian Beer, John Carey, and Peter Dronke; Roger’s friends Christopher Ricks and Martin Dodsworth had graduated the previous year.

During his time at Oxford, Roger felt a vocation to be a poet.¹³ He had written poetry from the age of thirteen, at first comic but moving on to nature and religious themes. During his period in the RAF there had been little time for poetry, but Oxford led to membership of poetry societies and a circle of friends with a commitment to writing: Bernard Donoughue, Dennis Keene, Peter Ferguson, John McGrath, Bernard Bergonzi, Judith Spink, and Marilyn Butler.¹⁴ Perhaps Roger’s most popular poem (he describes it in his notes as his mini-‘hit’) was ‘The Other Lords’:

The other lords all fell in lust
 With ladies waiting round the court,
 Committed love, a sin that must
 Remain for me a haunting thought.
 I knew no words for love to trust
 Affection that declines to sport.

I served the King, stood at his side;
 And when his murderers came, disguised
 With hood and mask, I might have cried
 Alarms of treason. Yet, surprised,
 I knew no words; the good man died.
 Stuck through with knives, I fell despised.

Risen to heaven, I came on throngs
 Praising with harp and blended voice.
 Yet how could I feel good among
 Such unrehearsed yet perfect noise?
 I knew no words of those rare songs
 That angels sing as they rejoice.

¹² ‘Diary and Letters’, 23/1/1956.

¹³ I am grateful to Nicoletta Momigliano for access to Roger’s typescript account of his poems, ‘RHL Poems’, and for giving me access to his collection of contemporary poetry magazines. Unpublished poetry is printed by kind permission of Professor Momigliano.

¹⁴ There is a reflection of the group of poets in Judith Grossman (née Spink), *In Her Own Terms* (New York: Soho, 1988). Roger is the model for Jeremy, a relatively nice character in a world in which niceness is in short supply. Roger and Judy Spink edited *Oxford Poetry* (Eynsham: Fantasy Press, 1959) together.

Lonely in paradise is each
 Who must have silence as his state.
 Better than any lord should teach
 These souls some method to relate
 Occasions to a style of speech:
 The power to seem articulate.¹⁵

The poem is in Roger's later, ironical style: words about having no words. It is metrically accomplished, and although some of its word play ('fell in lust'/'committed love') might seem bald, its concern with failure of speech engages persuasively with issues of love and commitment. Like many of his poems of this period, 'The Other Lords' remains within its chosen metaphor, while inviting the reader to interpretation. An earlier poem, 'Image of Water', in which a man of 'great compassion' rescues fish from the sea, where he thinks they must have been bored, only for them to die in their new element (*Lincoln Imp*, Hilary 1955) offers easier interpretation, as it was written only a few months after Roger had arrived in Oxford.

Roger was elected president of the Critical Society in Trinity term 1957 and was chosen, with John McGrath, to be editor of *departure*, a magazine for which he persuaded Philip Larkin, whom he had met while he was using the library at Hull, to contribute a poem, 'Pigeons'. But the Oxford poetry scene was changing and, although Judith Spink had been appointed the next editor of *departure*, it was discontinued. In 1958 Roger moved to America as James Osborn's research assistant, and, preoccupied with scholarship, stopped writing poetry. But one of the unpublished poems he wrote there, dated 24 August 1959, is one of his most successful:

Song

Learn, lover, to withstand
 The violent imprecision
 Of lover turning friend:
 Better that love should end
 With sharp derision,
 Than haunt old rooms to find –
 To pack and unpack more –
 What must be left behind.
 Avoid her eyes, and stand
 Impatient at the door.¹⁶

¹⁵Text from Roger's typescript. Printed in *Lincoln Imp* (Hilary, 1956); *Isis* (24 October 1956); *Oxford Poetry 1956* (Oxford: Fantasy Press, 1957).

¹⁶Text from Roger's typescript (New Haven, 24/8/59). Roger's published poems are 'The Aviator Observes the Gulls' (*The Mitre* (1953)); 'Image of Water' (*Lincoln Imp*, 16:1 (Hilary, 1955)); 'Aubade' (*Lincoln Imp*, 15:6 (Hilary, 1956), *Oxford Poetry* (1956)); 'The Others', later 'The Other Lords' (*Lincoln Imp*, 16:1 (Hilary, 1956),

There is a new, stripped-down maturity, and directness of statement. Roger himself attributed his drying up as a poet not only to his new academic career but to the problematic influence of Larkin. He was fond of saying that he had been put off by Bateson's describing him to his face as 'the poor man's Larkin', which Roger thought 'a bit cruel'. But Bateson was possibly led to this comment by Roger's own concern about his relation to Larkin. Certainly, Roger's Oxford poems are not in any obvious way like Larkin's. There is no observation of the natural or social world, to be transformed by later understanding, nor is there an attempt to create a consistent, reflective poet's voice. Roger says in his notes that he admired 'Larkin's more wistful mode in short meditative lyrics' – exactly how he would have liked to write, if he could—but his problem seems to have arisen from admiration, rather than imitation, of Larkin.

Roger's review of Robert Conquest's important anthology, *New Lines, in departure*, 4:10 (1956), 18–20, reveals much about his developing taste in poetry at this time, a taste that was in some measure to sustain him in his role as anthologist. The poems were those of 'The Movement': Conquest himself, Kingsley Amis, Donald Davie, D.J. Enright, Thom Gunn, John Holloway, Philip Larkin and John Wain. Roger congratulates the poets on their 'vitaly necessary reliance on basic intellectual structure'. The best of the poetry in the anthology, he finds, is not retreating from extreme emotions but defining them more clearly. Thom Gunn is praised for his technical accomplishment, but 'Larkin's poetry, more than that of any other in this book, has the capacity for gaining our confidence, for successfully integrating the colloquial, for centring a poem on an everyday situation and letting it work out its own implications, simply and unpretentiously, without being either naive or vague'. These are some of the qualities Roger was later to look for in assessing 18th-century verse.

After graduating, Roger began work in October 1957 on a BLitt at Oxford, taking on some Workers' Educational Association lecturing in Banbury from February 1958. Herbert Davis (1893–1967) was his supervisor, and Roger retained a vivid memory of one of his early supervisions. Davis had a room in the New Bodleian (he taught bibliography there), and, visiting him, Roger found himself grabbed and bundled out of the building by his supervisor. He had wandered in while smoking a cigarette, something strictly forbidden in the Bodleian, and Davis was appropriately horrified. Roger was making progress with his thesis,¹⁷ but on 24 April 1958, he received a message from

later *Isis* 1280 (24 October 1956) and *Oxford Poetry* (1956)); 'The Witnesses' (*Isis* 1288, 30 January 1957); 'Actaeon' (*Lincoln Imp*, 17 (Trinity, 1957), and *Isis* 1304 (23 October 1957)); 'The Gates' (*Isis* 1301 (13 June 1957)), 'Loss' (*Isis* 1310 (4 December 1957), *Oxford Poetry* (1957), *Universities Poetry* 1 (1958)), 'Poem' or 'Considerations' (*Oxford Magazine*, 76:13 (20 February 1958), *Oxford Poetry* (1959)); 'Sympathy' (*Oxford Poetry*, (1959)). The *Lincoln Imp* is misnumbered.

¹⁷Roger's initial topic is unclear, possibly the relation of Coleridge to 18th-century poetry. Roger had, as he thought, made new discoveries, though Davis was sceptical.

Bateson that was to reshape his academic career: ‘An American scholar-millionaire – J.M. Osborn of Yale – is looking for a research assistant to help him finish off an edition of the Spence Anecdotes (of Pope etc). \$3600 p.a. for 2 years and post in Yale English Dept. I think this might suit you. Come and see me Monday 11 a.m. Job to start Sept. F.W.B.’¹⁸ After an interview with Osborn at the Mitre a few days later, Roger was given the job at Yale, which, he noted to his parents, was ‘the most high-powered English dept. in the world’.¹⁹

III

Roger left for Yale on 15 August 1958. At New Haven, his role went beyond Spence’s *Anecdotes* to assisting with a range of Osborn’s projects.²⁰ James Marshall Osborn was a literary historian and collector of manuscripts, as well as a Holstein cattle breeder. After an early career in investments in New York, he moved with his wife, Marie-Louise (née Montgomery) to Oxford, where he took a BLitt. In 1938 he went to Yale as a Research Associate and remained there for the rest of his life. He became an Adviser to the library on 17th-century manuscripts in 1954 and started transferring his own manuscripts (over 47,000 items) to Yale in 1963, becoming their first curator. By 1958 he had already acquired an impressive range of manuscripts, including that of Spence’s *Anecdotes*, which he had bought from the Duke of Newcastle in 1938, the composer Thomas Whythorne’s autobiography (which, because it could not be taken from the country, he donated to the Bodleian), and a large collection of papers on Charles Burney and his family. Roger would work on all these, but his own research was to be devoted to the Burney papers and to constructing an account of the career of Charles Burney.

Roger made a good early impression on Osborn, not least through his impressive recall of his reading. On his plane journey to the States he had read *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colly Cibber* (1740), and as a result he was able to supply Osborn immediately with a reference he needed concerning Lord Halifax and subscription. A more significant instance came later, when Osborn was reading to Roger from a book of lute songs, and Roger recognised one of the lyrics, by William Elderton, as supplying the

¹⁸ ‘Diaries and Letters’, 26/4/58. For an account of Osborn, see René Wellek’s introduction to *Evidence in Literary Scholarship: Essays in Memory of James Marshall Osborn*, ed. René Wellek and Alvaro Ribeiro (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. v–xv. Osborn (1906–76) had a long association with Bateson. He had contributed a section on ‘Literary Historians and Antiquaries’ to Bateson’s *CBEL* (ii. 892–932). Before the opportunity to work at Yale arose, Bateson had hoped to find Roger a job at Reading.

¹⁹ ‘Diaries and Letters’, 1/5/58.

²⁰ Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men*, ed. James M. Osborn, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966). Osborn acknowledges initial help from Mrs Theodore G. Rochow, A.J.V. Chapple, and Roger Lonsdale, but says his greatest debt is to Slava Klima and John Barnard.

four lines of Benedick's unidentified song towards the close of *Much Ado About Nothing* (V. ii). In considerable excitement Osborn published his finding in *The Times* of 17 November 1958, p. 11, acknowledging that Roger had recognised the lines when they had been read to him. The discovery caused excitement in Yale and Oxford, and Roger was widely congratulated on it.²¹

Roger's work for Osborn began with the first English autobiography, that of Thomas Whythorne, the Elizabethan composer (1528-95), which had been transcribed by the previous assistant, A.J.V. Chapple. Roger collated the transcript with the 'new orthographic' of the manuscript and compiled the index.²² In collating the two texts letter by letter, Roger had to teach himself a difficult Elizabethan hand, but it was the sort of detailed work he enjoyed.²³ Later, when Osborn published his modern spelling edition, he thanked Roger for helping with the modernisation and reading the volume in proof.²⁴ He also worked on Spence's anecdotes, as in a general way on Osborn's other manuscripts, but his personal interest was in the Burney manuscripts, which he had a major role in cataloguing.

In the evenings and at the weekends, Roger made progress with his own thesis on the literary career of Charles Burney, and early in 1959, he spent ten days in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, working on their Burney manuscripts. It was as a result of this visit that his name is found attached to an unlikely publication, *Famed for the Dance ...*, to which he contributed a short essay on Burney's reminiscences of John Weaver, the dancing master.²⁵ At the Berg he met Professor Joyce Hemlow, the author of the biography of Fanny Burney, and at her invitation he visited McGill University in Montreal, the centre of a major Burney project, in 1959. Professor Hemlow would have liked him to join them at McGill, but there were also suggestions that he should stay on at Yale to teach. Roger very much enjoyed his time at Yale and spoke warmly of the kindness he had experienced there. He was particularly pleased to meet, through Bateson's introduction, W.K. Wimsatt, whose *Verbal Icon* (1954) Roger much

²¹ By Helen Gardner among others. Christopher Ricks sent Roger a parody of the *Times* article instead. Osborn also tells the story in 'Neo-Philobiblon', *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas*, 5 (1972), 15-29.

²² *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, ed. James M. Osborn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. vii.

²³ Roger's training for the Oxford BLitt is something of a mystery. As he amusingly recalled in his retirement speech to the English Faculty in 2000, he failed the bibliography exam, even though his supervisor, Herbert Davis, taught bibliography, but whether he should have taken Reggie Alton's palaeography classes and learned secretary hand is unclear.

²⁴ *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne: The Modern Spelling Edition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. vi.

²⁵ 'Dr Burney, John Weaver, and the *Spectator*', in Ifan Kyrle Fletcher, Selma Jeanne Cohen, and Roger Lonsdale, *Famed for the Dance: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Theatrical Dancing in England, 1660-1740* (New York: New York Public Library, 1960), 59-61. Roger's first publication was 'Dr. Burney and the Integrity of Boswell's Quotations', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 53 (1959), 327-31.

admired and who turned out to be an amiable companion.²⁶ Nevertheless, Roger was set on returning home at the end of his two years with Osborn, and in early 1960 an opportunity fell in his way.

The A.C. Bradley Fellowship at Balliol was the only research fellowship at Oxford devoted to English. It had been both fortunate and unfortunate in its most recent holders: brilliant literary scholars, they had not stayed long. Christopher Ricks, appointed in 1957, had moved to the tutorial fellowship at Worcester College in 1958; John Carey had succeeded him in 1959 but moved to Keble in 1960. Both Ricks and Carey were in contact with Roger about the Bradley Fellowship, which he decided to apply for, returning to Oxford in May 1960 to be interviewed and appointed to the post. Osborn allowed him to leave early and stay in Oxford, working in the Bodleian. The fellowship freed up more time for Roger's own research, and he was encouraged by a new supervisor, L.F. Powell (1881–1975), the editor of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, who was to become a good friend. He submitted his DPhil thesis, 'The Literary Career of Dr. Charles Burney (1726–1814)' successfully in May 1962.

As a research fellow at Balliol, Roger took on significant teaching and examining responsibilities, working with John Bryson (1896–1976), the tutorial English Fellow, and in December 1960 he was made Junior Dean. Bryson was due to retire in the autumn of 1963, and when in early 1962 Roger applied for the English Fellowship at Wadham, there was consternation in Balliol that someone who had already attracted the attention of Yale and McGill would go the way of Ricks and Carey. Roger had already got as far in the application process as having dinner with Sir Maurice Bowra and the Wadham Fellows, when at a meeting of the Balliol governing body on Wednesday, 24 January, he was pre-elected to the Balliol English Fellowship that would become vacant when Bryson retired in eighteen months' time.²⁷ Roger withdrew his application to Wadham. He was to remain in post at Balliol until 2000.²⁸

IV

A revision of Roger's thesis, *Dr. Charles Burney: A Literary Biography*, was published by the Clarendon Press in 1965.²⁹ Percy Scholes, the musicologist, had published a

²⁶ Bateson sent Wimsatt one of Wimsatt's own books to sign and give to Roger ('Diaries and Letters', 31/1/59).

²⁷ 'Diaries and Letters', 25/1/62.

²⁸ There was a proposal in 1971, initiated by Philip Larkin, that he should apply for a chair at Hull. But I doubt Roger took the idea seriously.

²⁹ It was published without quotation from the Berg manuscripts Roger had worked on during his vacation from Osborn. Professor Hemlow persuaded him to exclude them, a matter for regret.

biography in 1948, and that in part explains Roger's emphasis on the literary.³⁰ For Roger, as for Burney's daughter Fanny, the great achievement of Burney's life was the move from being a 'mere' musician to being a man of letters, patronised by the Court and a member of Samuel Johnson's circle. Much new manuscript material had become available since Scholes's biography: approximately 1,500 letters, plus scholarly notebooks, and 150 fragments of Burney's 'Memoirs'. Roger's biography digests this new material and constructs a lucid narrative without rivalling Scholes's attempts to recreate the 18th-century music scene. He faced throughout, however, the problem that Burney, though a very pleasant companion, was always likely to strike the reader as a dull man leading a dull life (making his living through private music tuition until he was seventy-eight). Fanny Burney's life of her father, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 3 vols (London, 1832), had resolved the problem by making her father a secular saint, but Roger's view was that Burney, a charming man and anxious to please, was ambitious for literary fame and prepared to be a touch ruthless in his attempts to attain it. Although all Burney's life is dealt with thoroughly, particularly his unhappy childhood, Roger takes the peaks to be the major publications, and much of his research was directed at tracing how these successes were achieved. The achievements are taken to be *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (1771), *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Provinces* (1773), and *A General History of Music ... Volume the First* (1776), *Volume the Second* (1782), *Volume the Third and Fourth* (1789). Two works representing Burney's other major interest, astronomy, are also given appropriate attention: *An Essay towards a History of the Principal Comets* (1769), and 'Astronomy, an Historical and Didactic Poem', written between 1796 and 1801 but never published. Roger's respectful treatment of Burney is never more impressive than in his handling of this twelve-book poem, which Burney was fond of reading aloud to his friends and acquaintances at every opportunity. After a frank verdict from his friend Lady Crewe (which included a reference to 'crabbed chapters abt' *parallaxes*'), Burney abandoned it and destroyed it. Roger comments, 'The realization that for years he had been boring his friends in the belief that he was entertaining them must have been humiliating to one whose ambition in life was always to please.'³¹

For the major works, Roger was able to create elements of narrative tension through an account of the difficulties with which the research was conducted, and of the pains and frustrations in getting the books through the Press and favourably reviewed. When

³⁰ *The Great Doctor Burney: His Life, His Travels, His Works, His Family and His Friends*, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1948).

³¹ *Dr. Charles Burney*, pp. 403–4. Roger quotes two surviving passages from the poem, the first from the Osborn collection. Although he concludes we need not regret its loss (Burney did not find a place in Roger's Oxford anthology), he agrees with Fanny Burney that it provided her father with purpose and entertainment, possibly distracting him from depression (p. 405).

The Present State of Music and France and Italy came out in 1771, Burney persuaded his friend William Bewley to take it on for the *Monthly Review*, and looked over Samuel Crisp's notice of it in the *Critical Review*. Some very determined detective work on a letter to Crisp, reading through Fanny Burney's black-ink deletions, revealed that Burney had not only contrived the review but also read it in manuscript and suggested softening some rare elements of criticism.³² As Roger shows, Burney took a similar interest in reviews throughout his career. Burke's favourable notice of *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Provinces* (1773) in the *Annual Register* was an independent exception and helped draw Burney into contact with Johnson's circle, with Johnson praising Burney as 'one of the first writers of the age for travels'. Roger, tracing conversations unrecorded in Boswell's *Life*, notes the change from Johnson's response to Burney's first tour, when he said he could not be bothered with 'fiddles and fiddlestrings' (*Dr. Charles Burney*, p. 129). Roger's biography is innovative in its treatment of Burney's relation with Johnson, printing for the first time two touching accounts of Johnson's death (*Dr. Charles Burney*, pp. 286–7).

When it came to Burney's *History of Music*, Roger had to cope with problems even more serious than Fanny Burney's deletions. Burney had received significant help, especially with this first volume and its preliminary Dissertation, from his friend Rev. Thomas Twining (1735–1804). Their letters, or extracts from them, were in the British Museum Library and the Osborn collection, unpublished and often difficult to reconstruct. Roger seamlessly presents a record of this vital partnership, even though it has to be reconstructed from five different groups of documents.³³ Bringing the extracts together reveals a substantial collaboration, remarkable for its academic intimacy: 'Let us slap down our Thoughts as they come, without the Trouble of seeking or arranging them. ... I seem *inside-out* with you & inclined to tell you every secret of my Life' (*Dr. Charles Burney*, p. 135). Tracing the detail of their exchanges, Roger is able to convey much of Burney's conception of his *History* and explain its success.

Roger's sympathetic tolerance of the Burney family breaks down only when he comes to reflect on Fanny Burney's dealing with her father's 'Memoirs' by substituting her own. Charles Burney had started writing his 'Memoirs' in 1782; he had covered his life to 1766, with some material going up to 1806. When Burney died, Fanny took on the duty of editing the 'Memoirs', which were contained in twelve notebooks, but she ended up burning them, all but a few fragments. She had no desire to be reminded of her family's humble origins and thought her father's 'frankness about many celebrated personalities would be dangerous' (*Dr. Charles Burney*, p. 439). She decided instead to

³² *Dr. Charles Burney*, p. 109. Roger claimed to be able to read the deletions at the rate of around three lines an hour, using a magnifying glass.

³³ Roger lays out the details and shelf marks in *Dr. Charles Burney*, p. 134, n. 1.

publish her own *Memoirs of Dr. Burney*. Her book had been subjected to a severe review by John Wilson Croker in the *Quarterly Review* in 1833, but she had been defended by Joyce Hemlow in her biography.³⁴ Roger's forensic examination of Fanny Burney's practice reveals dishonesty and vanity. She pretended that only the opening of the *Memoirs* was written before Burney's 1807 stroke, when most of it had been, and she exaggerated the effects of the stroke. She misrepresented a passage on recent invitations as Burney's verdict on his 'Memoirs' as a whole (*Dr. Charles Burney*, p. 442–3). Detailed comparisons of Fanny's *Memoirs* with the scant remains of her father's manuscript showed Fanny moving herself to the centre of the narrative and excluding references to other members of the family (*Dr. Charles Burney*, pp. 449–51). Roger's careful analysis reveals an altogether discreditable performance.

John Wagstaff in *ODNB* describes Roger's biography of Burney as painstaking, which it is, but the careful and detailed attention to manuscript evidence gives a much fuller picture of its subject in a style that combines graceful simplicity with maturity of judgement. It is, as the *TLS* judged, 'a book of exceptional learning and sympathy'.³⁵

V

In 1961, before the Burney biography was finished, Roger signed a contract to edit Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith in the Longman Poets series that F.W. Bateson was initiating.³⁶ The edition was due for completion in two years, but, given the Longman requirements for extensive annotation, that was an unreasonable deadline, and the edition was published in 1969.³⁷ It provided the complete poems of the three poets (including Gray's Latin and Greek verse, and Collins's drafts, fragments, and doubtful poems). In a lecture delivered in Australia in 1976, Roger had some fun with his work as editor:

I once believed that any editor who succeeded in producing a whole page of annotation to a single line of verse should be automatically obliged to justify himself before a court of his peers. It was therefore with some despondency that I realised some years ago, when I received the page proofs of my edition of *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith* (1969), that I had myself committed precisely that crime and that it was

³⁴ *History of Fanny Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. 462.

³⁵ R. W. Ketton-Cremer, 'Dr. Burney Sets Out to Please', *TLS*, 22 April 1965, p. 310.

³⁶ I am grateful to Professor Barnard for information about the date and the arrangements for the edition.

³⁷ *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London: Longman, 1969); a paperback was issued in 1976. Roger read proof while he was teaching at the University of Virginia. He had exchanged houses and jobs with Irwin Ehrenpreis and was at Charlottesville from January to May 1968. He taught postgraduate classes for Ehrenpreis and for Martin Battestin and found the experience interesting but exhausting.

only after delicate negotiations with the printers that we managed finally to squeeze a second line of Gray's *Elegy* onto the offending page.³⁸

The problem for the annotator is the space taken by listing parallel passages, though there is a further problem in understanding what they are. Roger has various words for them: borrowings, echoes, reminiscences, imitations, allusions (this last suggesting intended recognition by the reader). In this paper he identifies attitudes evolving through three historical periods. In the first, human experience was regarded as varying little and, therefore, imitation was inevitable and desirable. There had to be what Roger calls 'creative assimilation' with, as Christopher Ricks had put it in the previous set of Canberra studies, 'The Poet as Heir'.³⁹ The second was a period where originality, individuality, and sincerity became valued; plagiarism, always a problem, became more of a worry for the aspiring author. The third stage, represented for Roger by Eliot's *The Waste Land*, was where failed allusion could indicate the disintegrating culture the poem criticises and where tracing what is lost takes on the burden of a cultural responsibility.

Roger argues that the editor's best response to the problem of parallels is to provide the maximum of information without directing interpretation. His example of a path not to be taken is from a reading of the 'Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes', by Geoffrey Tillotson, which takes an allusion (perhaps not an allusion) to Helen of Troy as a crucial guide to an interpretation in terms of mock epic.⁴⁰ Roger points to complicating echoes, quite as strong, of Gay's *The Toilette*, of Eve's viewing herself in the lake in *Paradise Lost*, of Daphne's appeal to the water deities in Ovid, and of Camilla's pursuit of Chloereus in *Aeneid*, XI. Finally he points out that, although Gray's poem is coloured by mock epic, it is an animal fable with a moral for its reader, something both Tillotson and Samuel Johnson had missed.⁴¹

Roger's Canberra essay shows us how his edition of Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith works. The echoes he identifies enrich the poem, but they are not all necessary, and they do not dictate a single interpretation. Roger's treatment of Gray's 'Elegy' typifies his approach. The headnote is substantial, fourteen pages long. The evidence for dating,

³⁸ 'Gray and "Allusion": The Poet as Debtor', in R.F. Brissenden and J.C. Eade (eds), *Studies in the Eighteenth Century, IV: Papers Presented at the Fourth David Nichol Smith Seminar, Canberra* (Canberra Australian National University Press, 1979), pp. 31–55 (31). Roger probably has p. 118 in mind, but there are only two lines on p. 134 also. There is only one line of 'The Progress of Poesy' on p. 168.

³⁹ R.F. Brissenden and J.C. Eade (eds), *Studies in the Eighteenth Century, III: Papers Presented at the Third David Nichol Smith Seminar, Canberra* (Canberra Australian National University Press, 1976), pp. 209–39. Inevitably I simplify in representing these two Canberra essays, which remain central to the topic of literary echoes.

⁴⁰ *Augustan Studies* (London: Athlone Press, 1961), pp. 216–23.

⁴¹ Johnson's criticism, to which Tillotson was responding, is in *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on Their Works*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), iv. 181.

1742 or 1746, is represented as inconclusive. The printing of the poem for Robert Dodsley in order to get ahead of the unauthorised printing in the *Magazine of Magazines* is dealt with crisply (the choice of copy-text is good) as is the poem's reception. Roger concludes with an original and sensitive discussion of the two versions of the poem, perceptively arguing that the Eton manuscript version, 'Stanzas Wrote in a Country Church-Yard', presented for Gray too simple an association between the poet and the villagers, and that the final poem is searching to define his own role.⁴² Some of these ideas were developed in Roger's 1973 Chatterton Lecture, 'Versions of the Self', an exceptionally clear-eyed and learned approach to this perplexing poet.⁴³

The annotation of the *Elegy*, as might be expected from Roger's lecture, is very full. Where possible, as in the opening discussion of the debt to Dante's *Purgatorio*, Gray's own statements or contemporary evidence support the passages cited. Roger is particularly alert to echoes of Petrarch in this poem as he is in the introduction to the 'Sonnet on the Death of Richard West', but he is also aware of the influence of English poetry: Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Cowley, Pope, but also near contemporaries such as Warton, Broome, Mallet, and West. One of the changes Gray made to the poem, turning famous classical figures into English ones, is reflected in Roger's identifying fully for the first time the poem's debt to English poetry.

Collins and Goldsmith are not so allusive as Gray, but Roger's approach to his editing was much the same, with appropriate flexibility. That included providing a general account of the conception and publication of Collins's *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects* (1746), adding to the collation emendations from John Langhorne's enthusiastic edition of the *Odes* (because of the evidence it gave of contemporary reading), and providing notes of Warton's manuscript readings of *Ode to a Lady*. Particular headnotes, for example, that to the 'Ode to Evening', refer back to the general note, leaving themselves free to concentrate on particular problems, such as the poem's relation to the work of the Warton brothers. In annotating the 'Ode to Evening', Roger is again particularly aware of its relation to English poems, drawing attention to lines of the Wartons, but also of Spenser, Milton, Pope, Thomson, and Akenside. There is an exceptionally clear and informative headnote to 'An Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland', where the manuscript had recently been rediscovered by Claire

⁴² Roger quotes the final lines of the early poem in the right place, at line 72, but it is quite difficult for the reader to get a sense of it. Modern editions, for all their distinction, can be too conservative. The problem was solved by Moses Gompertz in his little edition (London: Philip Holland, 1901) by printing a few pages of facsimile.

⁴³ *Versions of the Self: The Poetry of Thomas Gray*, Chatterton Lecture on an English Poet (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); also published in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 59 (1973), 105–23.

Lamont.⁴⁴ The poem is then printed from the manuscript with carefully weighed decisions about patterns of indentation.⁴⁵

Goldsmith offered fewer opportunities for the tracing of parallel passages, and what is notable about Roger's treatment of his verse is the neatness with which he deals with matters that might have been contested. The question about the character of the first, 1755, version of *The Traveller*, published in 1764, is dealt with briskly: 'Speculation ... is no doubt pointless', and 'there is virtually no definite information about the progress of the poem' (pp. 622–3). But in this case, compensating for the absence of critical commentary, Roger provides a subtle evaluation of the poem based on T.S. Eliot's insight that Goldsmith has the old and new in 'just proportion'. Roger identifies the poem as belonging to the genre of the Horatian verse-epistle, emphasises the important influence of Addison's *Letter from Italy* (1703), and praises the careful balance and design of the poem (pp. 626–8). In his treatment of Goldsmith's most famous poem, *The Deserted Village*, he is similarly brisk about an old bone of contention: 'It is clear from G.'s own remarks that he considered the problem of rural depopulation to be common to England and his own native country ... The positive identification of the village in question would not have seemed desirable and perhaps not even possible by G. himself' (p. 670). This poem had already been subject to subtle critical investigation, and Roger is content to endorse the view that the poems combined 'elements of purely personal idealised fantasy' with a 'coherent political (Tory) philosophy' (p. 674). Although the textual achievement of this edition is limited, in my view, by Bateson's policy of modernisation, it makes good use of manuscripts, and is unquestionably a critical triumph, enhancing and guiding the reading of three important mid-century poets.

In 1970 Roger followed the edition of Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith, with an edition of William Beckford's *Vathek* in the Oxford English Novels series.⁴⁶ In the early 1960s Roger had written two important *TLS* reviews of books on Beckford. In the first, of André Parreaux's, *William Beckford: auteur de Vathek, 1760–1844* (Paris: Nizet, 1960), Roger was sympathetic to Parreaux's textual analyses (and was to follow him in his edition), but not to his attempt to unify the novel into the projection of a myth of the power of bourgeois society: 'Beckford was basically too irresponsible to write a convincing myth of the doomed future of irresponsibility'. The review shows exceptional

⁴⁴ 'William Collins's "Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland" —A Newly Recovered Manuscript', *Review of English Studies*, 19 (1968), 137–47.

⁴⁵ Roger later edited the Oxford Standard Authors *Thomas Gray and William Collins: Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), an old-spelling edition with good textual notes and a transcription of the Eton manuscript of Gray's *Elegy*.

⁴⁶ William Beckford, *Vathek* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). This edition was the basis for the Oxford Worlds Classics issue in 1980, which dropped the textual apparatus. Thomas Keymer's new edition in that series keeps the Lonsdale text, with three emendations.

confidence in reading Beckford with responsiveness to his shifting relations to his material, arguing that Parreaux neglects ‘the element of parody and burlesque, wild force and brutal comedy, and a barely suppressed giggling by the author at his own naughtiness.’⁴⁷ The originality of these readings is somewhat lost in the edition, which has an elegant introduction and an excellent textual apparatus, but distances itself from the naughtiness and giggling which the younger Roger was able to identify, however disapprovingly.

Vathek was followed by a different editing task, volume 4 of the Sphere History of Literature in the English Language.⁴⁸ This collection of essays on major writers proved very popular, with a revised edition from Sphere in 1986 and a Penguin reissue in 1993. The contributors were distinguished, with Howard Erskine-Hill contributing a fine opening essay on Dryden. Roger’s own essay was on Pope and it offers an impressive and comprehensive account of the 18th century’s foremost poet. For many years Roger lectured on Pope in the Oxford English Faculty, and he delighted in telling a story against himself, taken from Leo Bellingham’s *Oxford, the Novel*. This version is from his speech at his Faculty farewell dinner:

A chap gets obsessed with a girl he sees in the Radcliffe Camera, fantasises about getting to know her, etc. etc. Coming out of the Examination Schools one morning he spots her walking just ahead of him up the High and racks his brains for some devastatingly impressive opening gambit. With time running out, he finally blurts out what I hope you will agree is a highly creditable effort: ‘Didn’t I see you at Lonsdale’s lectures on Pope?’ Inexplicably, she replies haughtily: ‘No. I heard they weren’t very interesting.’⁴⁹

The Sphere essay, however, is interesting and original. It begins tellingly, and originally, with Pope’s imitation of Spenser, ‘The Alley’, a poem that combines love of literary tradition with detailed description of slums by the Thames. Roger’s eye for such awkward fusions continues in his account of the *Dunciad*, with grandeur glimpsed in the pissing contest and beauty found in Fleet Ditch. An appreciation of the role of earthiness in good poetry is a persistent vein in this essay and remained a constant element in Roger’s taste in poetry.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ ‘The mask of Beckford’, *TLS*, 10 February 1971, pp. 81–2. In the second review, of Alexander Boyd’s *England’s Wealthiest Son* (London: Centaur Press, 1962), Roger demolished an attempt to deny Beckford’s pederasty, by providing an alert interpretation of a Beckford letter in French (‘Baffling Beckford’, *TLS*, 2 March 1962, p. 6).

⁴⁸ *Dryden to Johnson*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London: Sphere Books, 1971).

⁴⁹ Referring to *Oxford, the Novel* (London: Nold Jonson, 1981), pp. 91–2. The author was Arnold D. Harvey, whose name appears on the second edition (Studley: Brewin, 2012). On his career, see Eric Norman, ‘Their Mutual Friend’, *TLS*, 12 April 2013, 16–21. The second edition omits the reference to Roger.

⁵⁰ A significant essay Roger published at the end of the decade was ‘New Attributions to John Cleland’, *Review of English Studies*, 30 (1979), 268–90, attributing seven new works to the author of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* or *Fanny Hill*. This is a good example of Roger’s archival work; there are also, for example,

VI

In 1984 Roger startled the literary world with his *New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*.⁵¹ No one would have expected an anthology of this period's poems to have had such an impact. The contemporary reception is captured by the extracts printed with the paperback of 1987: 'a major event ... Enthralling: it enforces a reappraisal of what eighteenth-century poetry is' (John Carey, *Sunday Times*); 'a most readable, most valuable, indeed indispensable collection' (Kingsley Amis, *The Listener*); 'the voices he has rescued from oblivion are individual, forthright, unpredictable; they speak out of their own experience, and taken together they bring their age back to life with astonishing immediacy' (John Gross, *The Observer*). This anthology even reached politicians, being claimed by Gordon Brown as one of his favourite books (*The Times*, 17 April 2010). But Roger's conception when he began work on the anthology was not of creating a popular book but of undertaking extensive research.⁵² Commissioned to prepare the anthology, he decided that he would simply read and evaluate all 18th-century verse. He began by using David Foxon's catalogue, *English Verse, 1701–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), and for the second half of the century he made his own catalogue. Most of his reading was in the Upper Reading Room of the Bodleian Library, but in his acknowledgements he thanks the British Library and eight other libraries. As each poem was read, it was graded. Work on the anthology was completed with the award of a British Academy Readership.

David Nichol Smith's original anthology of 1926 is a charming and learned book. With a nod of appreciation, and an acknowledgement of the editor's duty, Roger began his collection with the same poem, Pomfret's 'The Choice'. But Nichol Smith, for all the sophistication of his introduction, approached his task from the perspective of romantic poetry. What is remarkable for him is that Akenside and Russell foreshadow the lake poets, and that Sir J.H. Moore has the spirit and note of Byron.⁵³ Roger's taste in poetry, of course, is also that of his era: it reflects the values in his essay on The Movement, particularly his praise of Larkin.⁵⁴ He says in his introduction that he 'tried to resist the temptation to include material merely because its style or content might seem to confound familiar generalizations about the period, or because it has purely documentary

discoveries of a letter to Pope and a letter from Burke, *Notes and Queries*, 215 (1970), 288, and 227 (1982), 202 respectively.

⁵¹ *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); a paperback, with a different poem no. 304, was issued in 1987.

⁵² I am grateful to Jacqueline Norton at the Press, for pointing out that these anthologies are aimed at a general readership, even though they may have academic significance.

⁵³ *The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse*, ed. David Nichol Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), pp. x–xi.

⁵⁴ *departure*, 4:10 (1956), 18–20.

interest' (p. xxxviii). Nevertheless, his anthology offers a response to a common challenge to the century's poems: 'Where do we find them responding to the agricultural and industrial revolutions, the effects of economic growth, increased social mobility, rapid urban development, changing sexual mores, the impact of British imperialism at home or abroad, or all the social tensions which would erupt in the last decade of the century?' (p. xxxv). Roger's answer is clear: within these pages. He has looked for 'individuality and freshness' and argues that 'when the poet has seen or felt something of his own, naivety or even clumsiness can impart to his verse a kind of immediacy about which conventional criticism and history have found little or nothing to say' (p. xxxviii). The aim is not to subvert traditional accounts of the century's poems but to supplement them (p. xxxvii). This anthology has 552 poems in comparison with Nichol Smith's 450.

There will always be room for dispute about the poems an anthologist chooses from major authors. The arrangement of the poems is chronological, so the decision to divide Pope into two sections was a wise one, though I am baffled by the decision to include the short 'A Hymn Written in Windsor Forest', not at all a bad poem but one Pope never decided to publish in his lifetime. And I regret the omission of Swift's 'A Soldier and a Scholar', one of the most brilliant social poems of the period. What reviewers remarked on, however, and rightly, was the variety of new voices Roger brought forward. Prominent among these were women. Early in the anthology came Lady Mary Chudleigh's 'To the Ladies':

Wife and servant are the same,
But only differ in the name ... (p. 36)

And she was followed immediately by Sarah Fyge Egerton:

From the first dawn of life unto the grave,
Poor womankind's in every state a slave ... (p. 37)

In spite of Roger's use of masculine pronouns for the poet in his introduction, women, and women protesting against patriarchy, have a voice his selection, with twenty-five women poets represented, almost doubling the number in Nichol Smith.

The collection is striking in escaping the boundaries of politeness. There are poems about labour, most strikingly the extract from Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour* that he called 'The Washerwoman' (no. 218), which gives details of the work, as well as a protest against it, and Robert Tatersal's 'The Bricklayer's Labours' (no. 189) which similarly traces the work of a day. But the range of material that 18th-century poetry might be expected to have avoided is wide: Jonathan Richardson dreaming of his dead wife (no. 128); John Wright's visit to the province of poverty (no. 138); Edward Chicken's *The Collier's Wedding* (no. 151); Andrew Brice on fear of the bailiffs (no. 155); 'Epitaph on a Child Killed by Procured Abortion' (no. 223); 'Strip Me Naked, or Royal Gin for Ever'

(no. 299); a sea-chaplain's petition to be allowed to use the officers' lavatory (no. 315); and poems on boxing (no. 246) and cricket (no. 247). These writers all have something individual to say and find in poetry a way of saying it. Roger concludes on a characteristically humane note, by saying that while Pope would survive his omissions, 'I am more haunted by the lingering memory of some of the totally forgotten men and women whose literary bones I disturbed after they had slumbered peacefully for some two hundred years, who had something graphic or individual to say, however modestly, and for whom I had envisaged some kind of minor literary resurrection, but who necessarily fell back into the darkness of the centuries, perhaps irretrievably, at the last stage of my selection' (pp. xxxix–xl).

Some of these writers, however, were given a second chance in the anthology of *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* that was published by Oxford University Press in 1989.⁵⁵ Here were 110 poets and 323 poems, combined with a more extensive editorial apparatus than Roger had allowed himself in the original anthology. A substantial introduction traces the publication of women's poems throughout the century and each poet is introduced with a biographical essay (often the product of original research) that provides a context for the following poems. The introduction offers an innovative account of its subject, with a perceptive account of the role of the new magazines. As in the first anthology, Roger is conscious of the role of the century's self-anthologising in the collections of Robert Anderson (1792–5) and Alexander Chalmers (1810) which included no poems by women. Roger is perhaps too severe on Wordsworth's negative influence on women's poetry, especially as his revision of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in 1815 included his characteristic praise of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea. Finch does well in this anthology, as does her aristocratic companion Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, but Roger's emphasis in this collection is once again on 'homely writers' who 'had clearly never heard about the requirements of polite taste'. Joanna Baillie (nos. 278–85) is a particular favourite, even though 'the earthiness and vigour' of her first volume (1790) 'were unfashionable and predictably ignored' (p. xxxvi). But poets more expressive of the later century's prevailing sensibility also do well. Charlotte Smith, confined in the earlier volume to 'Sonnet Written in the Church Yard at Middleton in Sussex', is allowed not only a 'Fragment Descriptive of the Miseries of War' but also a cheerful poem on reaching the age of thirty-eight (nos. 237–43), while Mary Robinson, previously excluded, is allotted six poems, including 'The Haunted Beach' (nos. 302–7).

In her valuable review of this 'almost entirely unfamiliar collection of poems' in *The Times* (21 October 1989), p. 36, Julia Briggs recognised 'an extraordinary challenge' to

⁵⁵ *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); a paperback, with corrections and additions, was issued in 1990.

current ways of interpreting 18th-century literature, even though she thought Roger might have been unconscious of it: ‘Lonsdale sometimes seems uneasy at the anger, unhappiness, or painful clear-sightedness of his contributors, an embarrassed parent watching his children misbehave. Such hesitations are unnecessary. This is a brilliant and original anthology and, despite its editor’s occasional demurs, makes a major contribution to feminist literary studies.’ Julia Briggs correctly identified the anthology’s potential for supporting a host of courses on women’s writing, but she also captured Roger’s rejection of a revolutionary stance. I am also conscious of complaints that his anthologies are under-theorised. The claim that he is uneasy about the unhappiness his poems express strikes me as unjust: one of his aims, it is clear from his introductions, and even more so from a review of the poems themselves, was to give voice to that unhappiness. And he expected his material to be taken up by those occupying a radically feminist position. But he also set himself to outline the conditions that gave women the opportunities for self-expression during the century, and saw his anthologies as corrections to the existing accounts of the period’s verse and not as a comprehensive rejection of them. He would have seen the request for theorisation as coming from belief in a superior discourse that, like his friend Christopher Ricks, he would reject, sharing with Ricks an admiration for Johnsonian criticism.⁵⁶

Another book, though this time a small one, came out of work on the first anthology.⁵⁷ Without knowing the story of John Bampfylde (1754–97), Roger found in his *Sixteen Sonnets* (1778) ‘a distinctive and original voice’ and included four of them (412–15) in his first anthology. He then started investigating Bampfylde’s life, finding he could develop existing accounts through reference to the *Public Advertiser* of 10 March 1779. Bampfylde, perhaps best known as the handsome young man pictured with his friend George Huddesford in Joshua Reynolds’s portrait in the Tate Gallery, fell passionately in love with Joshua Reynolds’s niece, Mary Palmer, and when she rejected him lost his reason, behaved violently and was incarcerated at the age of twenty-four, only regaining his freedom just before his death. As Roger admits, it is difficult to separate a response to the poems, which were mostly written from retired village life before the relationship with Mary Palmer (though they are dedicated to her), from the sad story of his life. Roger’s elegant edition, sharing its admiration of the poetry with Robert Southey, is both celebratory and compassionate. A thirty-five-page introduction precedes the poems, which are followed by textual and explanatory notes. In creating his edition, Roger provided the memorial that Bampfylde’s friend William Jackson (1730–1803), the musician, wanted to publish but could not.

⁵⁶ See especially Christopher Ricks, ‘Literary Principles as against Theory’ in *Essays in Appreciation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 311–32.

⁵⁷ *The Poems of John Bampfylde*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: The Perpetua Press, 1988).

VII

In 1987 Roger started work on an edition that brought together his interest in 18th-century poetry with his work on Johnson's circle.⁵⁸ Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* had not received scholarly editing since the three-volume edition by George Birkbeck Hill in 1905.⁵⁹ Roger began with the intention of producing a lightly annotated text, signing a contract with Penguin, but soon, with his characteristic thoroughness clicking into operation, the project started to develop into a major scholarly edition that needed four large volumes.⁶⁰ The new *Lives* provided for the first time a thoroughly analysed and faithful version of Johnson's text, detailed their composition, explaining and illustrating Johnson's approaches to biography and criticism, and provided an unrivalled level of information about Johnson and about the eminent poets themselves. There is a touching parallel between Lonsdale and Johnson himself, for whom the *Lives* were also a late project that slowly grew in importance.

Roger's introduction, at 185 pages, might stand independently as the best critical account of the *Lives*. It traces how what started as a simple task grew into a major exercise in literary history. As Roger fully recognises, the *Lives* started as a booksellers' project, renewing copyright in a major collection, and with this context, he is not embarrassed, as Birkbeck Hill had been, to acknowledge and thoroughly investigate Johnson's sources (notably the *General Dictionary*, *Historical and Critical* and the *Biographia Britannica*) and his assistants (John Nichols, George Steevens, and Isaac Read). He provides a pioneering analysis of Johnson's reluctance to engage in primary research, and points to Johnson's belief that the major essays should be written out of the copiousness of his own information and the vigour of his intellect. As in the life of Burney, Roger creates narrative tension through Johnson's struggles to realise his conception. Early in the enterprise Johnson accepted 'judicious celebration of the national heritage' (i. 104) as part of his assignment. English poetry, he would argue, had moved from barbarism and roughness to elegance and refinement in the work of Dryden and Pope, who had combined comprehensiveness with vigour. Roger sets out Johnson's opposition to the conflicting view of the Warton brothers (i. 150–3; iv. 238–40), and, more provocatively, reveals that Johnson struggled with doubts about the validity of his own account. Time and again Johnson has to qualify the praise that he wants to bestow. In the criticism of Dryden and Pope, for example, he finds it difficult

⁵⁸ Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on Their Works*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

⁵⁹ *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905).

⁶⁰ Discussion with Penguin began in March 1987, with the contract signed later that year. After Roger signed a contract with Oxford for a major scholarly edition in 2004, discussion with Penguin about use of the material continued. The contract was finally cancelled in 2008.

to identify a major poem to praise, and the success of English poetry comes to lie in translation.

The annotation of the *Lives* is copious and notable for its alertness to matters of doubt or debate. Each section begins with information about composition, the writing of the life and its progress through the press. In 1997, under the guidance of Michael Suarez SJ, ‘once my student and, finally, my best critic and mentor’ (i. vi), Roger had gone to New York to work on manuscripts and proofs in the Berg Collection and the Pierpont Morgan Library. They are the subject of valuable discussion (i. 175–9) and inform the commentary at many points. The accounts of people and events are, as one might expect, exceptionally thorough, and the commentary also provides detailed reflection on Johnson’s critical positions and explanations of his vocabulary. In annotating the negative discussion of the metaphysical poets in the life of Cowley, for example, there are notes on imitation (Aristotle, Dryden, Dennis, Jones), nature (Boyle), wit (Welsted, Trapp, Pope, Pythagoras), affection (the ‘pathetick’ in Shakespeare), sentiment, the sublime (Milton, Longinus), and generality (Reynolds) (i. 323–31), all generously illustrated by references to other lives and to Johnson’s essays in the *Rambler* and elsewhere. For the scholarly reader the volumes have three appealing appendices: ‘Sequences of Johnson’s Poets’; ‘Some Early Periodical Reactions’; and ‘Spelling and Capitalization in the *Prefaces* and *Lives*’, a witty survey of the many failures to impose consistency on the Johnson’s text.

Roger’s edition of Johnson’s *Lives* was received with exceptional enthusiasm. In a learned and critical review, Robert Folkenflik, himself the author of a major study of Johnson as biographer, judged it ‘not just the best edition of *The Lives of the Poets*’ but ‘the best edition of any text of Johnson’s, ever’ and ‘an education in eighteenth-century literature and culture’.⁶¹ It was awarded the MLA Prize for a Scholarly Edition, 2005–6. Subsequently, the long-anticipated Yale edition was published in three volumes (2010), with more detailed treatment of the text but significantly less offered by way of introduction and commentary; it sits alongside rather than displaces Roger’s edition in the admiration of Johnsonians.⁶²

⁶¹ “‘Little Lives, and Little Prefaces’?” Lonsdale’s Edition of Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets*, *Age of Johnson*, 19 (2009), 273–82 (273 and 282). Folkenflik’s study is *Samuel Johnson, Biographer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

⁶² *Lives of the Poets*, ed. John H. Middendorf, 3 vols. Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, vols 21–3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). A subsidiary title page credits the editors of individual lives: Stephen Fox (Milton), J.A.V. Chapple (Dryden), James L. Battersby (Addison), James Gray (Savage), James E. May (Young). Robert DeMaria Jr. revised the whole edition. Roger was required to resign from the board of the Yale Johnson when it was found he was editing the *Lives* for Penguin. F.P. Lock offered a perceptive and sensitive comparison of the two editions in the *Johnsonian News Letter*, 62 (2011), 41–5, with which I would largely agree, though modernization is always a problem for the textual value of an edition.

By this point, the distinction of Roger's work had received many acknowledgements. He had served as Delegate to Oxford University Press from 1977 to 1987. In 1989 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Oxford promoted him to Reader in 1990 and then to Professor in 1992. He was elected to the British Academy in 1991. To celebrate his sixtieth birthday (though the volume appeared two years later), Alvaro Ribeiro SJ and James G. Basker published a festschrift ('To Roger Lonsdale, Scholar, Mentor, and Friend'), *Tradition and Transition: Women Writers, Marginal Texts, and the Eighteenth-Century Canon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), with eighteen essays by distinguished pupils, and in 2007 his work was celebrated at a session at the British Society for Eighteenth Century Studies in Oxford.

Roger retired in 2000. He had been a Fellow of Balliol (first as a Research Fellow) continuously for forty years, and had served as Vice-Master 1978–80. He remained in Oxford, where he lived with his second wife, Nicoletta Momigliano, who had been a Research Fellow at Balliol and was to become Professor of Aegean Studies at Bristol University. Roger had first married Anne Mary Griffin (née Menzies), Senior Scholar and Lecturer in Chinese at St Anne's College, who, after their divorce (1994), became President of New Hall, Cambridge. They had two children: Charles, currently Deputy Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Vienna; and Kate, Senior Research Fellow, School of Earth and Environment, University of Leeds. In retirement, Roger continued to spend time with his books. He had started collecting antiquarian books on his return from Yale in 1960 and began to keep a catalogue of them in the summer of 1963. At first he concentrated on Burney, then Johnson's circle, and then Gray and his associates, before branching out into the 18th century in general. He bought from catalogues and from the bookshops then available in Oxford: Blackwell's, the Turl, Thornton's (just across the road from Balliol), and Sanders. He was generous in lending books to friends, but cautious about selling to other collectors. The collection is now being sold by his friend Christopher Edwards. Roger also continued his love of watching sport, in which he was often joined by Nicoletta, who showed a capacity for enjoying cricket, happily facing the challenge of translating 'silly mid-off' and 'deep mid-wicket' into Italian. He persevered in the fondness for smoking cigarettes that alone had regularly interrupted his dedicated reading in the Bodleian's Upper Reading Room, but was willing to spare the time necessary for attending the Oxford Restoration to Reform and Bodleian Literary Manuscripts seminars. He enjoyed meeting young people who knew his work (for example, the Burney scholar, Lorna Clark, and the Cleland scholar, Hal Gladfelder), but most of all he liked learning something new and different. He fell ill at the Johnson Conference at Pembroke College in 2016, and from that point his health, including his memory, began to fail. He was cared for with selfless energy by Nicoletta and continued nearly to the end to be an amused and amusing companion. He died peacefully at home on 28 February 2022.

Roger Lonsdale engaged in literary scholarship of rare quality. For predecessors, he would have pointed to Sir Harold Williams, with his edition of Swift's poems in the 1930s, or to the editors of individual volumes of the Twickenham Pope, but even some Twickenham volumes came to be the work of teams. His own edition of Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith falls in with a pattern established by the magnificent Longman volumes of Milton and Tennyson by his contemporaries Alistair Fowler, John Carey, and Christopher Ricks, but what is extraordinary is the intellectual power, dedication, and stamina that led him to go on to do so much more editorial work, including his two anthologies and the *Lives of the Poets*. In an age when teams worked to tight deadlines (or were supposed to), he worked alone, setting his own standards (those of us who tried to help by venturing suggestions often falling short), and took the time the task required. Kindly, compassionate, humorous (colleagues speak often of his self-deprecating humour), he nevertheless judged independently and severely. It was that combination of personal generosity and academic severity that made him, as Robert Folkenflik put it, 'a scholar's scholar'.⁶³

Acknowledgements

Unlike the object of desire in *Oxford, the Novel*, I attended, and enjoyed, Roger Lonsdale's Pope lectures in the English Faculty, in the late 1960s, but I first met him in 1984 at a Johnson conference at Pembroke College, Oxford. After a similar conference in 2010, we started to meet once or twice a week, and I had many opportunities to discuss his research with him. In compiling this memoir, I have received the most generous help from Roger's widow, Nicoletta Momigliano, who has made his unpublished diaries and other materials available to me. I am grateful to her for corrections and for advice. I am also grateful to John Barnard for helping me to understand what it was like to be one of James Osborn's research assistants, and to Martin Dodsworth, one of Roger's closest Oxford friends, who kindly shared information about Roger's early career, and passed on further information from Christopher Ricks. There is a dazzling account of Roger by Seamus Perry in the *Balliol College Record* (2022), followed by a witty Tribute by Professor Ricks, pp. 140–7. Edward Wilson, who had been Roger's colleague in the Oxford English Faculty provided an admirable memoir for Hymers College,⁶⁴ and I am grateful to Mrs Jenny Richardson at Hymers for further information. Among Roger's other friends, Claude Rawson, Michael Rossington, Adam Rounce, Michael Suarez SJ (who kindly read through this memoir for me), and Abigail Williams have at various times generously shared with me their insights into his personality and career.

⁶³ In the review of the *Lives of the Poets* cited above, p. 273.

⁶⁴ <https://www.oldhymerians.com/news/fondly-remembered/265/265-Roger-Lonsdale-OH-1945->

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