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LIVES OF THE ENGLISH POETS



诗人传

第一卷

塞缪尔·约翰逊 著



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LIVES
OF THE
ENGLISH POETS

诗人传

贵州师范学院内部使用



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序

王佐良在《英国散文的流变》一书中认为塞缪尔·约翰逊（Samuel Johnson）之死为十八世纪英国散文发展画上了句号。约翰逊编撰的《英语词典》（1755）被认为是英国“学界最了不起的成就之一”，^①直到1928年《牛津英语词典》最后一卷出版，约翰逊的《英语词典》一直是最权威的英语词典。^②上世纪九十年代，学界因约翰逊的政治立场展开了一场激烈的论战，^③论战的焦点并不在于其个人政治信仰，而在于十八世纪下半叶君主立宪的政治思想是否已经完全取代君权神授成为当时英国社会对政治制度的共识，可见约翰逊成为了当时英国社会文化和政治思潮的风向标。牛津大学教授、十八世纪英国文学专家罗杰·朗斯代尔（Roger Lonsdale）的新版编注本《英国诗人传》（*The Lives of the Poets*, 2006）获得美国现代语文协会2005-2006年度编注类大奖。颁奖词中特别指出此书“对所收诗人生平以及约翰逊评论的丰富注释，既展示了近百年来英国学界的学术成就，又重建了约翰逊之著述在当下的重要性”。^④那么塞缪尔·约翰逊究竟是什么呢？

1709年约翰逊出生在斯塔福德郡（Staffordshire）利奇菲尔德教区（Lichfield）的一个书商家庭。虽然少年时代的约翰逊聪慧过人，但家庭经济状况每况愈下，这令他求学之路布满坎坷。在文法学校学习期间，约翰逊掌握了拉丁语，之后在表兄科尼利厄斯·福特（Cornelius Ford）家逗留的数月不仅让约翰逊从这位古典主义学者身上收益颇多，并有机会在家庭

① Bate, Walter Jackson, *Samuel Johnson*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977. p. 240.

② Lynch, Jack. "Introduction to this Edition", in Jack Lynch's *Samuel Johnson's Dictionary*. New York: Walker & Co. pp. 1-21.

③ 龚龔《约翰逊和他的“托利主义”》，《国外文学》2011年第2期。

④ 严蓓雯，《简评约翰逊博士的〈英国诗人传〉新版编注本》，《外国文学评论》2008年第2期。

聚会中接触到当时的社会名流和文坛风云人物。之后约翰逊在牛津大学上了一年多学，终因无力支付学费被迫中断学业。约翰逊与年长其二十岁的寡妇伊丽莎白·波特（Elizabeth Porter）的婚姻遭到许多非议，富有的伊丽莎白虽然资助约翰逊开设了一所学校，但因学校经营困难，1737年3月约翰逊不得不前往伦敦另谋出路。

从1737年至1755年《英语词典》的出版，约翰逊在伦敦的生活十分困难，为爱德华·凯夫（Edward Cave）主编的《绅士杂志》（*Gentleman's Magazine*）撰稿可能是他这段时间的主要收入来源，而这些文章却渐渐为其赢得了几许关注。十八世纪上半叶见证了英国报刊文学和英语小说的兴起，经过约瑟夫·艾迪生（Joseph Addison）、理查德·斯蒂尔（Richard Steele）、丹尼尔·笛福（Daniel Defoe）、乔纳森·斯威夫特（Jonathan Swift）等人之手，英语散文“不再追求强烈的句式和奇思怪想”，逐渐成为以“委婉的文字”写作日常事物的载体。^①十八世纪下半叶的英国人似乎“学会了坐下来讲理”，散文成为以理性精神为基础讨论政治、经济、宗教和哲学等各种意见的主要媒介。^②同时，受过教育且经济宽裕的中产阶级因渴求最新资讯和热衷讨论日常生活以树立新的行为规范，这些人成为散文的主要读者。^③约翰逊的《漫游者》（*Rambler*）和《闲散者》（*Idler*）系列散文拥有一群忠实的读者。在这些散文中，约翰逊以其广泛阅读而形成的洞察力，又凭借其对生活的极大热情，向读者展示了他对人生各种境遇的诠释。每周二和周四以两便士出售的《漫游者》非常受欢迎，后来集结成册出版，仅在约翰逊有生之年就再版了九次。虽然约翰逊的写作随处可见对仗句、圆周句，具有拉丁语散文之文风，但他的散文并不显得古板或书卷气太重，而是用人之常理讲生活琐事和文学创作，以一种平和的心境娓娓道来，可谓新古典主义文风发展的极致。^④最具代表性的是约翰逊于1755年2月写给第四任切斯特菲尔德公爵（Lord Chesterfield）的信。词典编撰开始之时公爵曾宣称资助他完成此项工作，但之后从未露

① 王佐良，《英国散文的流变》，北京，商务印书馆，1993年。第82页。

② 同上。

③ 同上。

④ 同上，第94-95页。

面。公爵却在词典将要完工之时，在报刊上撰文批评当时英语语言使用中的乱象，并力荐这本词典试图窃取赞助人的美名。约翰逊写信批评从未履行赞助人义务的公爵，信中写道：

Is not a patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help?^①

约翰逊以极为克制的文字对沽名钓誉者提出质问。礼貌的语言与尖刻的讽刺糅合在一起却又形成一种张力，不仅揭露了公爵的企图，又很好地维护了约翰逊本人的道德立场。

1747年约翰逊出版了词典编写计划，1755年《英语词典》正式出版，成为第一本现代意义上的英语词典。约翰逊原计划三年编写完的词典，最终耗费了七年才完成。虽然在编写工作才启动时，就有人提醒约翰逊法兰西学院四十位学者耗费四十年才编写完成《法语词典》，约翰逊当时的不以为然似乎显得有些不自量力；虽然学界一直有人认为约翰逊企图通过编写词典将英语规范为一种恒定而高尚的语言是种徒劳，但《英语词典》的诸多特点和约翰逊当时编写词典的理念已足以让当时的英国人和后世的词典编写者惊叹。《英语词典》收入了四万多个词条。并为大部分词条提供了例句，且例句都出自约翰逊时代之前的名家名篇。在《英语词典》序言中，约翰逊强调释义精确的重要性，提出“解释用词与被解释的词应该是经常可以互换”，他认为释义要“简明、完整、清晰”，这些都是沿用至今的词条释义原则。^②另外，他还解释了例证的作用和如何选取例证。他认为例证具有补充释义、阐明用法、显示词的文体色彩和证实词的存在等四

① Bate, Walter Jackson, *Samuel Johnson*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, p. 257.

② 徐海《塞缪尔·约翰逊词典编纂思想探析》《学术研究》2007年第11期，第138-139页。另见 Johnson, S, *The Preface to Johnson's Dictionary*, London, 1755; Johnson, S, *The Plan of an English Dictionary*, London, 1747。

项功能。^① 约翰逊挑选例句眼光敏锐, 兼具“超凡脱俗和常规之感”,^② 以至于第一版《牛津英语词典》中有 2976 条例证和 723 条释义直接摘自约翰逊的词典。^③ 约翰逊还第一次将英语动词短语作为词条编入词典,^④ 他认为这种词组数量巨大, 又因为与各个单词本意相去甚远、变化极不规则, 往往给外国人带来很大困惑。^⑤ 这些特点使《英语词典》成为一本面向普通人且极具参考意义的工具书。1762 年国王乔治三世因约翰逊编写词典的杰出贡献颁给他每年三百英镑的退休金。

1765 年约翰逊编辑的八卷本《莎士比亚戏剧集》(*The Plays of William Shakespeare*) 出版。在序言中约翰逊强调了艺术应当摹仿自然的新古典主义美学观、但却批判了三一律、讨论了文学批评的标准和方法。约翰逊的文学成就还有很多, 包括诗歌《人类欲望之虚幻》(“*The Vanity of Human Wishes*”) 和《伦敦》(“*London*”)、小说《阿比西尼王子拉赛拉斯》(*The History of Rasselas*) 等。当然, 最令人难忘的就是《诗人传》(*The Lives of the Poets*)。

《诗人传》一共写了五十二个英国诗人的传记, 每篇都由诗人生平、诗人品性和诗人作品评述三部分构成。最出名的有《考利传》、《蒲柏传》和《弥尔顿传》。在约翰逊之前, 传记要么是用来为逝者歌功颂德的, 要么是充满丑闻的回忆录。^⑥ 约翰逊的《诗人传》却用日常的笔触让诗人走下文学圣坛, 犹如读者生活中遇见的朋友或熟人, 以平易近人的语调讲述他们生命历程和文学创作生涯。

其实早在在《漫游者》第 60 期中, 约翰逊就详细阐述了传记写作的社会意义。关于“王朝灭亡或帝国革命”的历史记录对那些“日常生活波

① 徐海《塞缪尔·约翰逊词典编纂思想探析》《学术研究》2007 年第 11 期, 第 138 - 139 页。另见 Johnson, S, *The Preface to Johnson's Dictionary*, London, 1755; Johnson, S, *The Plan of an English Dictionary*, London, 1747。

② 陆谷孙,《眼不见、尽失落?》,《辞书研究》2008 年第 5 期, 第 53 - 54 页。

③ 徐海《塞缪尔·约翰逊词典编纂思想探析》,《学术研究》2007 年第 11 期。另见 Silva, P, *Johnson and the OED*, *International Journal of Lexicography*, 2005, 18 (2), p. 235。

④ 李翔《国外约翰生〈英语词典〉研究的新进展》,《外语教学理论与实践》2009 年第 2 期。

⑤ 徐海《塞缪尔·约翰逊词典编纂思想探析》,《学术研究》2007 年第 11 期, 第 138 - 139 页。

⑥ Abram, M. H, *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Sixth Edition, Vol. I, New York: Norton, 1993. p. 2297.

澜不惊的普通人而言读来并无太大受益”，与历史记录相比，“描写一个人生活细节”的传记却可以在我们脑海中“立即勾勒出可亲的形象”，因为“没有什么比就日常生活中琐碎小事的经验教训更叫人受用、愉悦和感兴趣了”。^①在传记写作对象方面，约翰逊主张不必限于“名人”，因为“只要是对一段生命忠实而公正的叙述多少都会给读者带去一些裨益”。^②他补充道那是因为我们都有着“相同的境遇、犯过同样的错误或错失过相同的机会、逃避着类似的责任、采用过相似的权宜之计”，“若不考虑各种偶然和令人迷惑的外在因素，我们每个人的生活是何其相似，这些境遇并无善恶，却有着一种人类的共性”。^③在传记内容挑选方面约翰逊主张少写一些重大事件，而要更多关注日常生活中的细节。因为这些小处才最能展现人物的真实品性。

此外，在对诗人作品评述中，约翰逊展示了文学批评的基本方法。《考利传》中对玄学派诗人特点的评介就是一例。其实玄学派诗人这个称号就是约翰逊在《考利传》中为这些诗人取下的名字。约翰逊先从这些诗人的共同特点“巧智”（wit）之定义入手，在探讨了“巧智”各种定义之后，认为“巧智”有两个特点：“第一，要自然，乍一出现就让人觉得它贴切之极；第二，要新奇，不是那么容易被人所发现”^④。约翰逊总结了这类诗人创作方法，即他们试图从书本中搜寻这种体现“巧智”的意象，而绝少从生活中寻找获得启发。之后约翰逊对通过考利的诗歌分析，进一步证明“巧智”虽可以一时让人惊异，却不能激起读者的同感，终究有些不足。虽然此评价包含了对玄学派诗人的偏见，却也说到他们诗作风格的实质。约翰逊的新古典主义美学观令他对个别诗人诗作的评价有些偏颇。但整个传记却以极其平易的笔调向当时的普通读者解释了诸多文学概念和文学批评方法，让此书成为一本极好的教材。诚如这一1854年版本^⑤的编辑

① Abram, M. H, *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Sixth Edition, Vol. I, New York: Norton, 1993. p. 2384.

② *ibid.*

③ *ibid.*

④ 叶丽贤《玄学巧智：塞缪尔·约翰逊与玄学派经典话历史》，《国外文学》2016年第2期，第24页。

⑤ 全书第三卷没有目录，我们按一二卷体例新编了一个。

彼得·坎宁安（Peter Cunningham）在其前言中讲述《诗人传》如何陪伴其成长，他父亲能买到一套《诗人传》无疑是幸运的，而今我们能够在约翰逊的亲切文字中再次走近这些诗人，犹如新交了朋友，何尝又不是一种幸运呢？

刘思远

2017年3月15日

L I V E S
OF THE
E N G L I S H P O E T S .

L I V E S

OF THE

MOST EMINENT

E N G L I S H P O E T S,

WITH

CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THEIR WORKS.

BY SAMUEL JOHNSON.

~~~~~  
WITH NOTES CORRECTIVE AND EXPLANATORY,

By PETER CUNNINGHAM, F.S.A.  
~~~~~

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1854.

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

IN the year 1777 the booksellers of London, fearing an invasion of their literary preserves by the publication at Edinburgh of an edition of the British Poets from Chaucer to Churchill, resolved on publishing a rival edition, more correct in text than that of Bell, and at the same time superior in print and paper. To give a greater attraction to their undertaking, they agreed that to the works of each author a concise account of his life should be prefixed, and Dr. Johnson, as the most distinguished of his contemporaries, was solicited to undertake the task. Johnson was pleased with the offer, and undertook to write what he describes in a letter to Boswell as "little Lives and little Prefaces to a little edition of the English Poets."

The Edinburgh collection thus dreaded by the London trade was the first attempt to form a complete body of British poetry, and in its design the publication set on foot by an unassisted individual in Edinburgh is preferable to the collection made by the trade in London. Neither, however, is good, whether for general accuracy of text, or the selection of authors. Many who have hardly a claim to be considered poets were admitted by the courtesy of criticism into both editions, the right of selection resting, in both instances oddly enough, with the booksellers, in whose judgment, as men of trade, the Poet whose works were not in demand was doubly dead. The Drama was excluded. Four insignificant poets, Blackmore, Pomfret, Yalden, and Watts, were recommended by Johnson for insertion in the London collection; and beyond the Prefaces (afterwards reprinted as Lives) this recommendation of

four small poets made all he had to do with an edition which he wrote to Nichols to say was "impudently" called his.

When persuaded to promise little Lives and little Prefaces to a London edition of our Poets, the undertaking, as then presented to his mind, Johnson tells us, seemed not very extensive, or, as he had first written it, not very *tedious* or difficult. "My purpose," he says, "was only to have allotted to every Poet an advertisement, like those which we find in the French Miscellanies, containing a few dates and a general character; but I have been led beyond my intention, I hope by the honest desire of giving useful pleasure." A slight sketch slowly expanded into a detailed life, a short character into a general criticism, and what was undertaken as a light employment became not only the last but the greatest work of its author.

It was at one time the intention of the London booksellers to have commenced with Chaucer. King George the Third wished that Johnson had commenced with Spenser, and Beattie expressed his regret that he had not given Spenser instead of Cowley. Yet a criticism on 'The Faerie Queene' would hardly have supplied Johnson with points of equal value to those which in Cowley led to his admirable observations on the so-called Metaphysical Poets; nor is it possible to avoid feeling the partial truth of an observation by Southey, that the poets before the Restoration were to Johnson what the world before the flood is to historians. It is much to be regretted, however, that the petty interest of a bookseller named Carnan should have excluded Goldsmith from the number of his Lives.

Of all works of eminence it is curious to trace the gradual growth, and the history of the 'Lives of the Poets' from commencement to completion is not devoid of interest. Johnson's first object was to discover what materials were readily available, to gather round him books necessary for the undertaking, and to obtain what further information public libraries or private individuals might supply to printed narratives. Seeing the scantiness of Murdoch's 'Memoir of Thomson,' he requested Boswell to procure what information he could in Scotland con-

cerning him ; and from the following letter it will be seen that he at least entered into his task with ardour.

“ TO DR. FARMER.

“ SIR,

“ Bolt Court, July 22, 1777.

“ The booksellers of London have undertaken a kind of body of English Poetry, excluding generally the dramas ; and I have undertaken to put before each author's works a sketch of his life, and a character of his writings. Of some, however, I know but very little, and I am afraid I shall not easily supply my deficiencies. Be pleased to inform me whether among Mr. Baker's MSS., or anywhere else at Cambridge, any materials are to be found. If any such collection can be gleaned, I doubt not your willingness to direct *our* search, and will tell the booksellers to employ a transcriber. If you think my inspection necessary, I will come down ; for who that has once experienced the civilities of Cambridge would not snatch the opportunity of another visit ?

“ I am, Sir, your most humble servant,

“ SAM. JOHNSON.”

Nor was he without friends able and willing to assist him. Lord Hailes sent communications for the memoirs of Dryden and Thomson ; Cradock lent him a copy of Euripides with Milton's MS. notes ; and through Dr. Percy he obtained the use of Clifford's remarks on Dryden, which he had long been looking for in vain. Joseph Warton contributed some useful information to the Lives of Fenton, Collins, and Pitt. Malone and Isaac Reed assisted him when he sought assistance at their hands, while Steevens, his old associate in editing Shakespeare, supplied him with many particulars, enlivening, as he says, and diversifying his work. As he advanced, other and more valuable assistance was obtained, and Mrs. Boscawen procured him the use of Spence's MS. anecdotes, a favour which he thought worthy “ of public acknowledgment.”

The first Life written was that of Cowley, sent to press in December, 1777. Waller, Denham, and Butler immediately followed. “ I have written a little of the Lives of the Poets,” he says in his annual review of his life made Easter, 1778, “ I think with all my usual vigour.” Dryden was completed in August, 1778, and Milton, begun in January, 1779, was finished in six weeks. The other lives included in the first