

DODSLEY ROBERT

THE TOY SHOP (1735)

THE KING AND THE
MILLER OF MANSFIELD
(1737)

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INTRODUCTION

The career of Robert Dodsley (1703-1764), or "Doddy" as Samuel Johnson affectionately called him, resembles nothing so much as the rise of Francis Goodchild in Hogarth's *Industry and Idleness* (1747) series. Like Goodchild, Dodsley began as a humble apprentice and, through energy, ingenuity, and laudable ambition, grew prosperous and gained the esteem of all London. Today Dodsley is remembered as the most important publisher of his period, a man who numbered among his authors Pope, Young, Akenside, Gray, Johnson, Burke, Shenstone, and Sterne. His long-labored *Collection of Poems* (1748) rescued many of his contemporaries' works from pamphlet obscurity and even now provides both the best and the most representative introduction to mid-eighteenth-century English poetry. His twelve-volume *A Select Collection of Old Plays* (1744) made the lesser Elizabethan dramatists, long out of print, available again.

It is one of the minor ironies of literary history that the man who did so much to insure the survival of the poems and plays of others has had his own almost entirely forgotten. For Dodsley was not always a bookseller. When he escaped his country apprenticeship and fled to London to work as a footman, Dodsley had his heart set on literary distinction; and it was first as poet and later as playwright that he came to the attention of the Town. Although a few of his poems are as ingratiating as Dodsley himself is reported to have been, most are now aesthetically irretrievable. His dramas, in contrast, remain interesting. Two of the best — *The Toy-Shop* (1735) and *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* (1737) – were much more popular than his earlier poems and for a time made him seem the equal of fellow dramatist Henry Fielding. So great was the vogue of these two works that Dodsley has been described as the principal developer of the sentimental or moralizing afterpiece.¹ Both works are short afterpieces intended to complement or contrast with the full-length play on the day's bill and both moralize conspicuously; the two plays could, however, hardly be more different in tone and technique.

The Toy-Shop grew out of Dodsley's admiration of and consequent desire to emulate the witty raillery of Augustan satire. When he sent Pope his newly minted collected poems, *A Muse in Livery* (1732), Dodsley also included an orphan muse

¹ Leo Hughes, *A Century of English Farce* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 126.

in the packet. In February of 1733 Pope politely responded that he liked the play and would encourage John Rich to produce it, but that he doubted whether it had sufficient action to engage an audience. Dodsley apparently did all he could to strengthen his acquaintance with Pope, including publishing a laudatory *Epistle to Mr. Pope, Occasion'd by His Essay on Man* in 1734; and the following February when Rich finally produced *The Toy-Shop* at Covent Garden, some thought that Pope was the author and Dodsley's alleged authorship a diversion. Understandably, Dodsley was delighted to have his play even momentarily mistaken for the work of Alexander Pope.

The Toy-Shop was enormously popular. "This little Performance, without any Theatrical Merit whatsoever," the *Prompter* wrote on 18 February, "received the loudest Applauses that I have heard this long while, only on Account of its General and well-Adapted Satire on the Follies of Mankind."² Dodsley's afterpiece was performed thirty-four times during the 1735 season. In print it was even more in demand. For his benefit performance on 6 February, Dodsley advertised that "Books of the Toy-Shop will be sold in the House."³ There were at least six legitimate editions of the piece within the year. It was pirated, translated into French, and subsequently anthologized in almost

² *The London Stage 1660-1800: Part 3: 1729-1747*, ed. Arthur H. Scouten (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), 457.

³ *Ibid.*, 458.

every collection of English farces.⁴

Every critic has concurred with Pope in finding the play plotless. The short first scene establishes the premise: that the Master of the shop is "a general Satyrist, yet not rude nor ill-natur'd," who moralizes "upon every Trifle he sells, and will strike a Lesson of Instruction out of a Snuff-box, a Thimble, or a Cockle-shell" (p. 10). Working within a tradition that includes Lucian's sale of philosophers and, just after *The Toy-Shop*, Fielding's auction in *The Historical Register, For the Year 1736* (1737), Dodsley acknowledged that his premise was adopted directly from Thomas Randolph's *Conceited Pedlar* (1630). His metaphor of the world as "a great Toy-shop, and all it's [*sic*] Inhabitants run mad for Rattles" (p. 45) recalls the brilliant penultimate verse paragraph of "Epistle II" of Pope's *Essay on Man*, wherein mankind is shown as eternally addicted to "toys" of one kind or another:

Pleas'd with this bauble still, as that before;
Till tir'd he sleeps, and Life's poor play is o'er!

(*Lines 281-82*)

With so many unmistakable resemblances to Pope in Dodsley's play, it is not surprising that some spectators thought they detected the hand of the author of *The Rape of the Lock*.

Following a hint from Pope that the strength of his afterpiece

⁴ Ralph Straus, *Robert Dodsley: Poet, Publisher and Playwright* (London: John Lane, 1910), 35.

lay in its mixture of morality and satire, Dodsley titled his work "A Dramatick Satire" and begged indulgence in the epilogue for his "dull grave Sermon" (p. 5). In fact, the merit of the work is the wit with which the Master of the shop extemporizes over each sale. "Why, Sir," one character says, "methinks you are a new Kind of a Satirical Parson, your Shop is your Scripture, and every piece of Goods a different Text, from which you expose the Vices and Follies of Mankind in a very fine allegorical Sermon" (p. 17). Jean Kern lists the satiric allegory as one of the five major forms of dramatic satire during this period, but judges *The Toy-Shop* a failure in that genre because, instead of a sustained allegory, Dodsley provides "a jumble of annotated sales of abstractions with no controlling metaphor. The toys for sale are interesting only for the value which the characters assign to them; the result is a miscellany of characters assigning a miscellany of values."⁵ Thus, the problematic nature of a genre that attempts to dramatize satire with no more than perfunctory recourse to plot or characterization and Dodsley's failure to sustain consistently his comparison between those objects that mankind values and mere toys both contribute to the play's lack of "Theatrical Merit." It may also suggest why *The Toy-Shop* was even more popular in print than on the stage. Nevertheless, even with all its dramatic inadequacies acknowledged, the play retains a charming Tatleresque ingenuity that still amuses.

⁵ Jean B. Kern, *Dramatic Satire in the Age of Walpole, 1720-1750* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1976), 149.

Income from *The Toy-Shop* and the gift of a hundred pounds from Pope allowed Dodsley to open, under the sign of Tully's Head, the bookshop that was to become so important in the history of English literature. Dodsley the bookseller did not cease writing; when *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* opened at Drury Lane on 29 January 1737, with young Colley Cibber in the role of Henry II, it was evident that Dodsley's stagecraft had improved. The play was a triumph, with thirty-seven performances in 1737 – the most popular play of the year and one of the most popular plays of the century.

The Toy-Shop had been Dodsley's attempt to adopt sophisticated city ways; *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* is a return to his "native Sherwood." Instead of indulging in the sometimes labored, sometimes second-hand wit and contemptuous satiric stance of the earlier play, *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* reflects the earnest sentimentality and democratic impulse of the ballad, later printed in Percy's *Reliques* (1765), upon which the play is modeled. The plot is simple. Henry II, lost and separated from his courtiers in Sherwood Forest, is given shelter by honest John Cockle, a miller in nearby Mansfield and one of His Majesty's Keepers of the Forest. Meanwhile, at the miller's house, his son Dick and Dick's former sweetheart Peggy plan how to gain access to the king so that he might redress the wrongs done to their innocent love by the lust of the haughty Lord Lurewell. By coincidence Lurewell is one of the courtiers lost in the forest. In the final scene, with

all the principals assembled, the king's identity is made known and distributive justice dispensed.

Allardyce Nicoll argues that the success of *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* makes Dodsley the most important sentimentalist of the thirties.⁶ Certainly the play was frequently produced with revivals of earlier sentimental works like Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* (1696) and Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1723); and, in fact, it would be difficult to find a list of definitive characteristics of sentimental drama that Dodsley's play does not satisfy in every particular. The bourgeois nobility and integrity of Dick and Peggy poignantly engage the audience's pity and admiration, while the improbable resolution affirms the inevitable triumph of goodness. There is even – what some critics have required of sentimental drama – love of rural scenery and use of native setting.⁷

Dodsley has cleverly integrated scene and theme in *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*. The moral and social problem stressed in the play is the existence and abuse of aristocratic privilege. Implicitly the play assumes that rank should correlate with goodness. The king himself is the best example of this. Alone at night in Sherwood Forest, Henry asks himself, "Of what Advantage is it now to be a King? Night shews me no Respect:

⁶ Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900*, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955-60), 2:204.

⁷ For a survey of attempts to characterize sentimental drama, see Arthur Sherbo, *English Sentimental Drama* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1957).

I cannot see better, nor walk so well as another Man" (p. 11). Cut off from the trappings of monarchy he finds his common humanity and, at the conclusion of the play, redresses the wrongs of rank when he knights the instinctively noble miller and reproves the vicious but hereditarily titled Lord Lurewell. His accidental separation from the corruption of court and courtiers initiates Henry's contact with John Cockle, representative of all the middle-class virtues. Significantly, they are in the miller's environment: rural England, symbol of uncorrupted beauty, correlative to the innocent beauty of young Peggy before her acquaintance with Lords "of Prerogative."⁸

As critics have noted, the whole sentimental movement in English drama is opposed in tone to the cynical ethos of aristocratic privilege; but Dodsley explicitly advocates a democratic sensibility that estimates individual worth independent of the accident of birth. The "bourgeois sententiae" of *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* are certainly as ideologically explicit as the arguments for the value of the mercantile middle class in Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731).⁹ Dodsley did, after all, have working-class credentials; his years in "service" furnished the materials for *Servitude: A Poem* (1729) and *A Muse in Livery* (1732). The allegorical frontispiece to *A*

⁸ John Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 116-17.

⁹ Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 148.

Muse in Livery shows a young man aspiring to knowledge, virtue, and happiness but manacled by poverty to misery, folly, and ignorance, his foot chained to a giant stone inscribed "Despair."

Despite the play's clear egalitarian sympathies, it seems excessive to characterize Dodsley's work as "revolutionary" and to be reminded too forcibly of the coming events in France. And yet, as has also been suggested, things might now look different had there been a revolution in England. Plays like Dodsley's discomfited the government. As Fielding notes in the dedication of *The Historical Register, For the Year 1736*, the *Gazetteer* of 7 May 1737 had accused his play and Dodsley's *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* of aiming at the overthrow of Walpole's ministry. "Bob Booty" reacted to this threat from the stage by enacting legislation in June requiring that all new plays and all alterations of old plays be approved by the Lord Chamberlain; in contrast, the reaction of the monarchy to Dodsley's work was much more ingenious. The third performance of *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*, that from which the author was to receive the proceeds, was held "By Command of their Royal Highness the Prince and Princess of Wales." Both royal personages were present to honor the apprentice from Mansfield. "The Boxes not being equal to the Demand for Places, for the better Accommodation of the Ladies, Side Boxes [were] made on the Stage."¹⁰ Although the production of Dodsley's best play, *Cleone* (1758), was still twenty years in

¹⁰ *London Stage: Part 3*, 635.

the future, it seems safe to regard this night as the height of Dodsley's dramatic career.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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EPILOGUE

*Well, Heav'n be prais'd, this dull grave Sermon's done.
(For faith our Author might have call'd it one)
I wonder who the Devil he thought to please!
Is this a Time o' Day for Things like these?
Good Sense and honest Satire now offend;
We're grown too wise to learn, too proud to mend.
And so divinely wrapt in Songs and Tunes,
The next wise Age will all be – Fiddlers Sons.
And did he think plain Truth wou'd Favour find?
Ah! 'tis a Sign he little knows Mankind!
To please, he ought to have a Song or Dance,
The Tune from Italy, the Caper France:
These, these might charm – But hope to do't with Sense!
Alas, alas, how vain is the Pretence!
But, tho' we told him, – Faith, 'twill never do. —
Pho, never fear, he cry'd, tho' grave, 'tis new:
The Whim, perhaps, may please, if not the Wit.
And, tho' they don't approve, they may permit.
If neither this nor that will intercede,
Submissive bond, and thus for Pardon plead.*

*"To gen'rous Few, to you our Author sues
His first Essay with Candour to excuse.
'T has Faults, he owns, but, if they are but small,*

He hopes your kind Applause will hide them all."

Dramatis Personæ

MEN

Master of the Shop, Mr. *Chapman*.

1 } Mr. *Bridgewater*.

2 } Mr. *Wignell*.

3 } Gentleman, Mr. *Hallam*.

4 } Mr. *Hale*.

Beau. Mr. *Neale*.

1 } Mr. *James*.

2 } Old Man, Mr. *Hippisley*.

WOMEN

1 } Mrs. *Bullock*.

2 } Miss *Norsa*.

3 } Lady, Mrs. *Mullart*.

4 } Miss *Bincks*.

THE TOY-SHOP

SCENE *a Parlour. A Gentleman and two Ladies, drinking Tea*

Gent. And you have never been at this extraordinary Toy-shop, you say, Madam?

1 La. No, Sir: I have heard of the Man, indeed; but most People say, he's a very impertinent, silly Fellow.

Gent. That's because he sometimes tells them of their Faults.

1 La. And that's sufficient. I should think any Man impertinent that should pretend to tell me of my Faults, if they did not concern him.

Gent. Yes, Madam. But People that know him take no Exceptions. And really, tho' some may think him impertinent, in my Opinion, he's very entertaining.

2 La. Pray, who is this Man you're talking of? I never heard of him.

Gent. He's one who has lately set up a Toy-shop, Madam, and is, perhaps, the most extraordinary Person in his Way that ever was heard of. He is a general Satyrist, yet not rude nor ill-natur'd. He has got a Custom of moralizing upon every Trifle he sells, and will strike a Lesson of Instruction out of a Snuff-box, a Thimble,

or a Cockle-shell.

1 La. Isn't he cras'd?

Gent. Madam, he may be call'd a Humourist; but he does not want Sense, I do assure you.

2 La. Methinks I should be glad to see him.

Gent. I dare say you will be very much diverted. And if you'll please to give me Leave, I'll wait on you. I'm particularly acquainted with him.

2 La. What say you, Madam, shall we go?

1 La. I can't help thinking he's a Coxcomb; however, to satisfy Curiosity I don't care if I do.

Gent. I believe the Coach is at the Door.

2 La. I hope he won't affront us.

Gent. He won't designedly, I'm sure, Madam.

[Exeunt.

Scene changes to the Toy-Shop, the Master standing behind the Counter looking over his Books

Mast. Methinks I have had a tolerable good Day of it to-day. A Gold Watch, Five and Thirty Guineas – Let me see – What did that Watch stand me in? – Where is it? O here – Lent [*Turning to another book backwards and forwards.*] to Lady Basset Eighteen Guineas upon her Gold Watch. Ay, she died and never redeem'd it. – A Set of old China, Five Pounds. – Bought of an old Cloaths

Man for Five Shillings. Right. – A curious Shell for a Snuff-box, Two Guineas. – Bought of a poor Fisher-boy for a Half-penny. Now, if I had offer'd that Shell for Sixpence, no body would have bought it. Well, Thanks to the whimsical Extravagance and Folly of Mankind, I believe, from these childish Toys and gilded Baubles, I shall pick up a comfortable Maintenance. For, really, as it is a trifling Age, so Nothing but Trifles are valued in it. Men read none but trifling Authors, pursue none but trifling Amusements, and contend for none but trifling Opinions. A trifling Fellow is prefer'd, a trifling Woman admir'd. Nay, as if there were not real Trifles enow, they now make Trifles of the most serious and valuable Things. Their Time, their Health, their Money, their Reputation, are trifled away. Honestly is become a Trifle, Conscience a Trifle, Honour a mere Trifle, and Religion the greatest Trifle of all.

Enter the Gentleman and the two Ladies

Mast. Sir, your humble Servant, I'm very glad to see you.

Gent. Sir, I am yours. I have brought you some Customers here.

Mast. You are very good, Sir. What do you please to want, Ladies?

I La. Please to want! People seldom please to want any thing, Sir.

Mast. O dear Madam, yes; I always imagine when People

come into a Toy-shop, it must be for something they please to want.

2 *La.* Here's a mighty pretty Looking Glass; Pray, Sir, what's the Price of it?

Mast. This Looking Glass, Madam, is the finest in all *England*. In this Glass a Coquet may see her Vanity, and a Prude her Hypocrisy. Some fine Ladies may see more Beauty than Modesty, more Airs than Graces, and more Wit than Good-nature.

1 *La.* [*Aside.*] He begins already.

Mast. If a Beau was to buy this Glass, and look earnestly in it, he might see his Folly almost as soon as his Finery. 'Tis true, some People may not see their Generosity in it, nor others their Charity, yet it is a very clear Glass. Some fine Gentlemen may not see their Good-manners in it perhaps, nor some Parsons their Religion, yet it is a very clear Glass. In short, tho' every one that passes for a Maid should not happen to see a Maidenhead in it, yet it may be a very clear Glass, you know, for all that.

2 *La.* Yes, Sir, but I did not ask you the Virtues of it, I ask'd you the Price.

Mast. It was necessary to tell you the Virtues, Madam, in order to prevent your scrupling the Price, which is five Guineas, and for so extraordinary a Glass, in my Opinion, it is but a Trifle.

2 *La.* Lord, I'm afraid to look in it, methinks, lest it should show me more of my Faults than I care to see.

1 *La.* Pray, Sir, what can be the Use of this very diminutive

piece of Goods here?

Mast. This Box, Madam? In the first Place, it is a very great Curiosity, being the least Box that ever was seen in *England*.

1 La. Then a very little Curiosity had been more proper.

Mast. Right, Madam. Yet, would you think it, in this same little Box, a Courtier may deposite his Sincerity, a Lawyer may screw up his Honesty, and a Poet may – hoard his Money.

Gent. Ha, ha, ha, I will make a Present of it to Mr. *Stanza* for the very same Purpose.

2 La. Here's a fine Perspective. Now, I think, Madam, in the Country these are a very pretty Amusement.

Mast. O, Madam, the most useful and diverting things imaginable either in Town or Country. The Nature of this Glass, Madam, (pardon my impertinence in pretending to tell you what to be sure you are as well acquainted with as myself) is this. If you look thro' it at this end every Object is magnified, brought near, and discern'd with the greatest Plainness; but turn it the other way, do ye see, and they are all lessen'd, cast at a great Distance, and rendered almost imperceptible. Thro' this End it is that we look at our own Faults, but when other People's are to be examined, we are ready enough to turn the other. Thro' this End are view'd all the Benefits and Advantages we at any time receive from others; but if ever we happen to confer any, they are sure to be shown in their greatest Magnitude thro' the other. Thro' this we enviously darken and contract the Virtue, the Merit, the Beauty of all the World around us; but fondly Compliment our

own with the most agreeable and advantageous Light thro' the other.

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