

THE BUSINESS CHARACTER OF JACOB TONSON

by 3735

RICHARD EDWARD CHRISTIANSON

B. A., Wisconsin State University at Eau Claire, 1968

--

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1970

Approved by:


Major Professor

LD
2668
R4
1970
C487
C.2

CONTENTS

The Business Character of Jacob Tonson	1
List of Works Cited	39

In 1677 young Jacob Tonson opened his own bookselling and publishing shop at the sign of the Judge's Head in Chancery Lane, thus founding a publishing house which flourished for ninety years¹ and served most of the great writers of the age. In his years with the firm Jacob Tonson became both a business and a social success drawing writers and Whig statesmen to his company. In his book The Earlier History of English Bookselling, William Roberts says, "Jacob Tonson is a clear and distinct figure in the annals of English literature. There is, perhaps, no name recorded so little directly, and yet so inseparably connected with certain and important parts of that history."² When Tonson's name has appeared, it has most often been in histories of the book trade and in biographies of Augustan writers such as Edmond Malone's biography of Dryden (The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden, London, 1800), which, along with Roberts' book, is the basis for much of the modern work on Tonson. A study similar to Roberts' and just as useful, in terms of historical fact, is Frank Mumby's The Romance of Bookselling (Boston, 1911) which was revised in

¹Tonson's firm passed through three generations of Jacob Tonsons (Jacob Tonson I, his nephew Jacob Tonson II and his son, Jacob Tonson III) and lasted from 1677 to 1767 when Jacob Tonson III, grandnephew of the original Jacob, died.

²(London, 1889), 150.

1930 and re-issued under the title Publishing and Bookselling: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present Day (New York, 1930). Editions of letters important to Tonson's biography include S.L.C. Clapp's Jacob Tonson in Ten Letters By and About Him (Austin, 1948) and Charles Ward's The Letters of John Dryden (Durham, 1942). And finally, Harry M. Geduld's Prince of Publishers: A Study of the Work and Career of Jacob Tonson (Bloomington, 1969) synthesizes much of the material from the above works. But even it does not completely explain how or why it is that Tonson became so important to the history of English literature. It may be a useful project, then, to examine briefly his career and attempt to determine exactly what it was about Jacob Tonson that made him the first great English publisher.

At first he sold mostly second-hand books and, now and then, published plays by Otway and Tate in cooperation with his brother, Richard. It must have been during this first year of self-employment that he developed his keen sense for business opportunities, for he had been in business less than two years when he secured John Dryden as his poet with the purchase of Troilus and Cressida. But the Poet Laureate was only the first of Tonson's great poets. In 1688 he acquired Milton's Paradise Lost and in 1709 published a collection of Shakespeare's works, edited by Rowe. He also had a hand in publishing the Tatler and the Spectator as well as other works of Addison and Steele including Cato, The Christian Hero and The Conscious Lovers. Congreve, Prior, Rowe, Dennis, Arbuthnot and Garth were other contemporaries with whom Tonson did business. William Roberts

notes that Tonson also "acted as 'sponsor' for a large number of publications, and partly shared, in addition, the responsibility of much other literature than that on the imprint of which his name alone appeared. He had become a great figure in the publishing line, and few poets--except, perhaps, the ultra-Tories--were there whose productions were not issued more or less under the direction of Tonson."³ No other publisher of the age could boast of such acquisitions.

Of course, it was no accident that Tonson was able to attract such a group of distinguished writers. He had to pay for them. But social, economic, and political conditions were right for a man of Tonson's talents and disposition to become able to afford such writers. The business end of literary productions was no longer what it once had been. From the fifteenth century, when the first sheets passed through Caxton's press, until well into the seventeenth century, the printer had been the dominant force, apart from the author, in the production of literature. The small reading public and, accordingly, the small demand for reading material allowed the printers to select very carefully what they wanted to print and how much they were willing to pay for the right to print it. Because of this commercial autocracy, writers were often forced to play the sycophant by flattering and fawning over the wealthy in hopes of winning a patron. But as the seventeenth century drew to a close social changes altered this situation. Increased literacy, and with it a developing interest in a wider variety of printed

³(London, 1889), 163.

matter, brought miscellanies, anthologies, translations of the classics and serial publications onto the booksellers' tables in increasing numbers.

It was this new-found appetite for any and all forms of printed material that helped to raise booksellers to a higher economic position, a position with bargaining power. The bookseller was now in the position to see which works the public wanted most, and how many copies of each were needed--decisions formerly made by the printer and the author. Now they were forced to rely upon the judgment of the bookseller, and the authors, at least, found this a welcome change. Writers no longer had to depend upon the favor and generosity of the Court or the wealthy; nor did they have to bargain any longer with the less successful, and in turn, less generous printers. They were able instead to offer their services to the highest bidder and hold out for the best price. Naturally, it was to each bookseller's advantage to submit the highest reasonable bid. So, as in most economic ventures, the booksellers and authors noted that with increased demand came increased profit, and with increased profit came increased competition. Good authors could expect to sell their works for good prices. Dryden's former publisher, Herringman, refused to pay the £20 the poet asked for Troilus and Cressida and lost him. Tonson paid what was asked, knowing that once he had Dryden he could keep him by paying him well. He did both. A.S. Collins writes that "Jacob Tonson the First gave Dryden those means of living which his Court friends forgot to. The alliance of author and bookseller to make patrons

unnecessary was thus initiated and grew apace."⁴ Ian Watt makes much the same point: Pope, he says, could afford to laugh at and criticize the booksellers in the Dunciad only "as a result of the very considerable increase in the scale of payments to authors from the days of Dryden onwards. It was Tonson, apparently, who was responsible for the change."⁵

While Tonson may very well have been generous--indeed there is evidence to suggest that he was--it is not entirely correct to attribute the rising scale of payments to him alone. As was the case with all the other booksellers, Tonson was merely trying to outbid his competitors. But because of the pre-eminence of Dryden and many of the other poets on his list, he was quite naturally forced to lead the other booksellers in the amounts he was paying for literature. Because of this vanguard position, he has at times been given some of the credit which should go to social and economic forces, for liberating the poet from dependence on patrons and abuse at the hands of the printers.

Though Tonson was not entirely responsible for the increased payments to writers, he did participate in the trend to his own advantage, for it was through his understanding of the changing economic climate and his willingness to accept it that he was able, in the early years especially, to draw the best writers to himself. During the later years of his career he was able to depend upon his reputation and his personality, which served

⁴Authorship in the Days of Johnson (London, 1927), p. 221.

⁵"Publishers and Sinners: The Augustan View," SIB, XII (1959), 10.

him then as increased payments had earlier. But in the beginning he had to rely mainly upon his knowledge of the book industry and the reading public.

For instance, Tonson seems to have had the ability, more than his contemporaries, to make use of the past, drawing from it old material and techniques. As Harry Geduld comments, "In his hands nothing was allowed to lapse--revivals were the order of the day."⁶ In 1684, though he already had Dryden in his employ, Tonson was still at the beginning of his career and was looking for a venture that would give his business the boost it needed. That lift came in the form of a publication which today bears either Dryden's or Tonson's name since it was with the assistance of Dryden that Tonson published the first four volumes of a series of six poetical miscellanies which, according to Richard Boys, "set the fashion for . . . the general miscellany, a type revived by the Augustans and destined to become important in the eighteenth century."⁷ Indeed, the first volume was so successful that Tonson published three more in the ten-year period between 1684 and 1694, each of which was reprinted more than once. The success of his miscellany induced several other publishers, including Bernard Lintot, to bring out collections of their own to rival Tonson's.

Resembling the form of the popular seventeenth-century anthologies (such as Cupid's Posies and The Shepherd's Garland

⁶Prince of Publishers (Bloomington, 1969), p. 60.

⁷"Some Problems of Dryden's Miscellany," ELH, VII, June (1940), 140.

of Love, Loyalty and Delight), Tonson's Miscellany is a collection of short poems, prologues and epilogues, and verse translations of selections from the classics.⁸ The inclusion of these translations proved to be a wise move, for the miscellany was a means by which bookseller and translator alike could profit doubly. Dryden, for example, was able to publish selections from Virgil in the 1684, 1685, and 1694 miscellanies, profit from them, and then in 1697 publish the complete works of Virgil and profit from them again. Tonson profited in the same way, as publisher, and also saved money on advertising for a complete translation which the public could readily see was in preparation. So, in publishing the miscellanies, Tonson was able to satisfy the growing demand for translations, and at the same time get double mileage from many of the selections.

He was especially skilled in this process of getting all he could from his publications. Though Dryden died in 1700, the income from the miscellanies did not die with him. Two more volumes, possibly under the editorship of Rowe,⁹ but still referred to as Dryden's Miscellanies, appeared in 1704 and 1709. Then

⁸There have been several studies of the 17th and 18th century miscellany, including: Boys, "Some Problems," 130-143; Raymond D. Havens, "Changing Taste in the Eighteenth Century: A Study of Dryden's and Dodsley's Miscellanies," PMLA, XLIV (1929), 501-536; and Earl R. Wasserman, "Pre-Restoration Poetry in Dryden's Miscellany," MLN, LII (1937), 545-555. Chapter Four (87-109) of Geduld is a useful survey of the Tonson miscellanies and the anthologies on which they are modelled.

⁹Boys, "Some Problems," 131-132. Mr. Boys cites as evidence for this a 1735 catalogue of books printed for E. Curll in which one entry reads, "The Original Genuine Edition of Miscellany Poems and Translations. Begun by Mr. Dryden in the year 1684, and continued by Mr. Rowe to 1709, concluding with Mr. Pope's Pastorals. In six volumes."

in 1716 the six volumes were collected, revised, and published to begin another round.

Another example of Tonson's alertness to matters of profit and, at the same time, to the literary appeal of the past, appears in the changes he made in the contents of the 1716 edition. Unlike the earlier anthologies, Tonson's miscellanies took at first a decidedly serious turn, due in part to the translations and in part to Dryden's editorship, under which the collection was directed at an elite audience. But in an article entitled "Pre-Restoration Poetry in Dryden's Miscellany," Earl Wasserman suggests that in 1716 Tonson attempted to popularize the volumes by eliminating some of the more sophisticated pieces and replacing them with lighter poems, thus returning to the tone of the anthologies of the previous century. "In his attempt to model the Miscellany partly on the late seventeenth-century anthologies in order to widen its appeal, Tonson turned . . . to the published works of many earlier poets--Tom Carew, Donne, Jonson, Corbet, Drayton, Suckling, and Marvell--and sandwiched selections from their works between more recent poems."¹⁰

It was at about the same time as Tonson discovered the profit in re-publishing the poetry of an earlier age that he realized the possibilities in subscription publication. In 1683 he purchased one half of Brabazon Aylmer's rights to Paradise Lost, and the other half in 1690. Three editions of the poem had already

¹⁰MLN, LII, December (1937), 554. Tonson's realization of the continued popularity of earlier poets is further evidenced by his 1709 edition of Shakespeare, his 1711 edition of Beaumont and Fletcher, and his 1719 edition of Donne's collected poetry.

appeared by 1688 when Tonson finally published it, but they had been no great success. In order to assure the success of his edition, Tonson, with the assistance of Dryden,¹¹ cast about for five hundred people who were willing to promise, in advance, to purchase one or more copies of a new edition of Milton's work. In this way he avoided practically all the initial financial risk and was almost assured of a handsome profit.

For his use of the principle of "subscription" Tonson has often been given too much credit, and more important, credit for the wrong reason. Though there has been some argument as to when publishing by subscription was accepted by the book trade as common practice, the procedure was not unknown at the time, nor was Tonson the first to use it. But what is unique about Tonson's venture, and what he should be given credit for, is that, according to John Barnard, "this was the first time that the system had been used for selling English literature."¹² Tonson simply gave a new application to a technique already in use. Lawrence Edwards points out that, after the Milton, Tonson published at least nineteen more works by subscription, establishing the method as

¹¹Geduld writes that "A glance through the subscription list is highly rewarding when we reflect that the five-guinea subscribers were solicited by Dryden, himself, and the remainder by Godfrey Kneller, John Closterman, and Jacob Tonson." (p. 80)

¹²"Dryden, Tonson, and Subscriptions for the 1697 Virgil," PBSA, LVII (1963), 146. Other informative articles on the subject include: S.L.C. Clapp, "The Beginning of Subscription Publication in the Seventeenth Century," MP, XXIX (1931); Clapp, "The Subscription Enterprises of John Ogilby and Richard Blome," MP, XXX (1933); and Clapp, "Subscription Publishers Prior to Jacob Tonson," Library, XIII (1932). F.E. Compton also has an article on the subject and a useful bibliography. Both are found in "Subscription Books," Bowker Lectures in Book Publishing (New York, 1957), 56-78. Geduld discusses Tonson's part in subscription publishing also (pp. 69-71).

a popular and effective approach to publication.¹³

To this point only the results of Tonson's acumen and professional skill have been considered, since it is for these he is remembered. However, no list of successful business ventures and innovations can give us a true picture of what Jacob Tonson was like, how he thought, or why he was a success. We are best able to see his personal traits emerging as a significant factor in the growth of his business and social status through the Whig politico-literary organization, the Kit-Cat Club. There are varying contemporary accounts of the origins of the Club but most of them agree on Tonson's part in it. Organized about 1700, with Tonson serving as its Secretary, it met once a week at the shop of Christopher Cat in Shire Lane and later at Jacob's estate at Barn Elms, Barnes. Its membership, according to Laurence Whistler was made up of four elements: "(1) The most intelligent and active Whig Lords; (2) Several foolish and repulsive Whig Lords; (3) The most brilliant Whig writers; (4) Jacob Tonson."¹⁴ As the quotation suggests, Tonson seems somehow out of place in the organization, being the only businessman, but nowhere is there any indication from the members that they looked upon him as an ugly duckling. In fact letters from Vanbrugh and the Duke of Somerset to Tonson

¹³"Jacob Tonson's Death and Burial," TSL, III (1958), 25. Edwards states that Tonson was responsible for "initiating the practice of that method of bringing out great pieces of literature;" however, Clapp and Compton indicate that this is not the case. According to those scholars, Tonson was merely one of the first to use the technique effectively.

¹⁴Sir John Vanbrugh: Architect and Dramatist (New York, 1939), p. 79.

suggest that he was much admired and greatly missed when absent.¹⁵ However, Tory writers, looking for a way to attack the Club, found their opening in Jacob. The short, stout, unattractive gentleman,¹⁶ by his profession, blood, and appearance was literally out-classed by his fellow Club members, and because of this was an obvious target for the satire of the opposition's bards. For example, William Shippen's poem "Faction Displayed" was an attempt to discredit the Club simply by placing Tonson at its head.

Now the Assembly to adjourn prepar'd
When Bibliopolo /Tonson/ from behind appear'd
As well describ'd by th' old Satyrick Bard:
With learing Looks, Bull fac'd and Freckled fair,
With two left Legs, and Judas-colour'd Hair,
With Frowzy pores, that taint the ambient Air.

Though the last three lines are borrowed from a better poet and are misquoted in the process, they remain as uncomplimentary as they were when Dryden first used them. But in Shippen's poem they serve mainly as a point of departure for further satirical comment:

Sweating and puffing for awhile he stood,
And then broke forth in this insulting mood,
'I am the touchstone of all modern wit;
Without my stamp in vain your poets write;
Those only purchase ever-living fame,
That in my Miscellany plant their name.
Nor therefore think that I can bring no aid,
Because I follow a mechanic trade:--
I'll print your pamphlets and your humours spread.
I am the founder of your loved Kit-Kat,
A club that gave direction to the State:
'Twas there we first instructed all our youth

¹⁵See below, p. 35.

¹⁶Dryden's poetic description of Tonson, prompted by a financial disagreement, is probably the most famous:

With leering looks, bull-faced, and freckled fair;
With frowzy pores poisoning the ambient air,
With two left leggs and Judas coloured hair.
Malone, I, 528.

To talk profane, and laugh at sacred truth:
 We taught them how to boast and rhyme, and bite,
 To sleep away the day, and drink away the night.¹⁷

Shippen's main intent was not to flay Tonson, but rather to discredit the politicians in the Club. His method was caricature, making Tonson's social inferiority and his apparent malodorousness ideal subjects for exaggeration by which the Whigs might be embarrassed.

But successful caricature demands that various features of the subject be recognizable. Thus, despite the exaggeration, Shippen must have been writing about observable features in Tonson's appearance, personality, and career. We know from sources other than Shippen that the publisher could strike an observer as both crude and avaricious. Dryden referred at least once to his "insulting mood"¹⁸ and Pope seems to have resented Tonson's acquisitiveness.¹⁹ And in the suggestion that the Club was founded on mutual interest, Shippen recognized something that was

¹⁷(London, 1704), p. 15.

¹⁸According to Dr. Johnson, Lord Bolingbroke once told of how the unexpected arrival of Tonson at Dryden's house caused the poet to say, "This is Tonson. You will take care not to depart before he goes away; for I have not completed the sheet which I promised him; and, if you leave me unprotected I must suffer all the rudeness to which his resentment can prompt his tongue" [Lives of the English Poets, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1905), I, 407/].

¹⁹In a 1708 letter to Henry Cromwell, Pope refers to the "sovereign power of Jacob Tonson" suggesting that the bookseller was looked upon as a sort of monarch of the publishing world. And in 1709, in a letter to Wycherley, he returns to the metaphor, saying, "Jacob creates poets, as kings sometimes do knights, not for their honour but for their money" [The Correspondence of Alexander Pope, ed. George W. Sherburn, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1956), I, 51 and 60/].

most certainly true. Through the Club young Whig writers were brought into the presence of Whig statesmen so each could serve the other, and, according to Whistler, "the noblemen enjoyed the company of the writers, the writers enjoyed the patronage of the noblemen, and Tonson 'having riggl'd himself into the Company of a parcel of Poetical young Sprigs' had the publication of the serious works and the first refusal of their inexhaustible verse."²⁰ Serving as a tributary to his publishing firm, then, the Club brought him works by Addison, Garth, Vanbrugh, and through Walsh and Congreve, Pope. And Tonson even printed toasts proposed by Club members in his fifth miscellany (1704). From the non-literary members came political appointments as well as imposing subscription lists in support of costly literary ventures. It is not to be supposed that "genial Jacob" was above ingratiating himself by extending small favors such as pastry and ale in order to get his friends, especially his poets, into a position of obligation. Both Gay and Otway owed him money; Dryden received melons, wines, and small services from him; and Kneller was apparently flattered into painting portraits of the Kit-Cats. Richard Blackmore saw through Tonson's seeming generosity when he wrote, in a 1709 verse satire,

He still caressed the unregarded Tribe,
And did all their various Tasks prescribe;
From whence to Both great Acquisitions came,
To him the Profit, and to them the Fame.²¹

It is easy to conclude from general information about Tonson's

²⁰Sir John Vanbrugh, p. 79. Whistler is quoting Ned Ward.

²¹(London, 1709), 4.

successes and advancements that he was a shrewd man with a keen understanding of the business and social worlds and the points of tangency between them. But there is more that needs to be said about the character of the man to understand why he was a success.

Prior to his connection with the Kit-Cats, or at least before his business was firmly established by major successes such as the miscellanies and Dryden's Virgil, Tonson was extremely cautious and slow to act, making no risky speculations, selling proven material, and staying clear of controversial issues. His first notable transaction was characteristically prudent when, wanting the copyright to Troilus and Cressida yet fearing to give the £20 Dryden was asking, he managed to share the expenses with another bookseller, Abel Swalle.²² For a young businessman to risk such a large percentage of his capital on one work, Dryden's or otherwise, required a great deal more recklessness than was in Tonson's nature.²³

²²Such cooperative ventures were not unusual in the trade. Tonson's exceptionally cautious approach to publishing made such agreements ideal for his purposes. At one time he even shared profits and expenses with Bernard Lintot through the joint publication of several of the plays of Richard Steele. But his most frequent associate was his brother, Richard, especially during the early years of 1680 to 1690.

²³As late as 1697, and particularly with Dryden's translation of Virgil, Tonson continued to work cautiously. Apparently misjudging the demand for the work, both he and Dryden were surprised by the early over-subscription and Dryden complained that too few people had been allowed to subscribe. John Barnard /"Dryden, Tonson, and Subscriptions for the 1697 Virgil," PBSA, LVII (1963), 148/ makes note of an interesting feature of the Virgil, and at the same time reveals what appears to be more of Tonson's caution, or more likely, his frugality. "The volume, a major expression of early Augustan sensibility, was reduced to using the plates originally cut for John Ogilby's Virgil. /1654/ The only gesture toward refurbishing them was the rather clumsy attempt to alter Aeneas' nose to resemble King William's." See below, pp. 21-22.

Expense was only one of Tonson's concerns in the early years, however. As was previously mentioned, he relied heavily upon proven techniques and known successes throughout his career. In 1683 when Brabazon Aylmer offered to sell Tonson his rights to Paradise Lost, Tonson hesitated and considered carefully matters of politics and economics. He knew Milton's political reputation and he knew that the man's poem had appeared in three editions with only moderate success. So, before deciding one way or the other, he turned to Dryden, who had based his opera, The State of Innocence, on Paradise Lost and undoubtedly knew something of the poem. Encouraged by Dryden's praise of the work, yet not fully convinced of its money-making potential, he agreed to buy only half of the copyright--just enough to give him the right to have it printed. But even after all the questioning and the financial precautions, Tonson again hesitated and did not print the poem. Only after five successful years of business did Tonson publish his folio edition of Paradise Lost--by subscription. Two years later he purchased the second half of the copyright to become sole owner of the poem.²⁴

One more instance (an involved but revealing one) of Tonson's

²⁴ Tonson's caution was not limited exclusively to the early years, however, for in a note of 1706 addressed to Alexander Pope, Tonson wrote:

Sir--I have lately seen a Pastoral of yours in Mr. Walsh's and Mr. Congreve's hands, which is extremely fine, and is generally approved of by the best judges in poetry. I remember I have formerly seen you in my shop, and am sorry I did not improve my acquaintance with you. If you design your poem for the press, no person shall be more careful in the printing of it, nor no

measured pace indicates that he may have been especially cautious in matters of religion. In 1681, when Tonson was in his fourth year as member of the Stationer's Company, a young man named Henry Dickinson asked Tonson to publish his translation of Father Simon's Critical History of the Old Testament. Being offered favorable terms, Tonson agreed to do it. For fifty percent of the profits the publisher was simply to arrange the printing and pay one half the costs. Perhaps his eagerness to realize his fifty percent caused him to overlook or to underestimate the work's religious significance. It was only after the manuscript was already moving through the presses that Tonson learned the book had been burned in Paris, and began to fear that all of Christianity was attacked and undermined it it. According to a Chancery suit instituted by Tonson in 1683, shortly after he had learned the book was controversial he began to fear legal action on religious grounds and had informed Dickinson that the printing would be stopped. In stopping the printing Tonson must also have taken into consideration the fact that unfavorable publicity might hurt sales and money would be lost.²⁵ However, by promising to give

one can give greater encouragement to it . . .
 (The Correspondence of Alexander Pope, I, 51).

A flattering letter indeed, including a courtly compliment and an apology for having previously slighted the young man, it shows clearly that Tonson was capable of some charm and knew how to apply it to his business. But it is also clear that despite several years of successful publishing, Tonson was still cautious and unwilling to depend entirely upon his own taste and instincts.

²⁵It is possible that personal piety entered into his decision to stop the printing though there is no evidence to support this conclusion. It seems that financial matters were his major concern.

Tonson a note which would free the publisher from any legal responsibility, Dickinson was able to see the work through the presses. In his suit Tonson claimed that the note never came to him, and that, even though he was offered the entire profit so that Dickinson could see his work in print, he refused to publish it.²⁶ Though it is difficult to imagine Tonson refusing an offer of one hundred percent of the profits, his account of the transaction, if it can be believed, clearly illustrates the fears of the young man where religious controversy might be involved,²⁷ and, at the same time, implicitly suggests his fear of losing money on the deal.

The latter fear was probably the stronger, however, for throughout his career Tonson's first concern seems to have been to make money, a quest which is not always looked upon with favor by those at whose expense the profit is made. There is a natural polarity which develops in the business of literature between the publisher "whose ultimate concern," according to Ian Watt, "is only to get the right kind of copy at the right time for the agreed price" and the poet who "comes to what is essentially an economic transaction with a not wholly material view of his role."²⁸ This

²⁶The details of this suit are carefully outlined in two places: 1) Phillip Harth, Contexts of Dryden's Thought (Chicago, 1968), pp. 407-410; and 2) Charles E. Ward, "'Religio Laici' and Father Simon's History," MLN, LXI (1946), 407-412.

²⁷When Dryden returned to the theater after losing the Poet Laureateship, his first play, Don Sebastian, was published by Hindmarsh, not by Tonson. He may have feared political pressure resulting from a business relationship with the Roman Catholic poet. Another possible reason for this shift will be suggested. See below, p. 19.

²⁸"Publishers and Sinners," 10.

difference in attitude was the cause of many quarrels between Tonson and his poets, especially Dryden. Certainly, when Dryden wrote sarcastically to Tonson, "The Notes and Prefaces shall be short: because you shall get the more by saving paper,"²⁹ he was, to quote J.W. Saunders, expressing the attitude of the "courtly neo-classical poet, who saw in literature something more valuable than a commodity, to be bought and sold by the thousand lines."³⁰ However, when Tonson wrote to Dryden in about November of 1692, he was writing from the publisher's point of view:

Consider how much dearer I pay than you offered
it to y^e other Bookseller; for he might have had
too y^e Story of Daphnis for 20 guynneas, wch is
in yo^r translation 759 lines;
& then suppose 20 guynneas more for
the same number 759 lines;
that makes for 40 guynneas 1518 lines;
And all that I have for fifty guynneas are but
1446; soe that if I have noe more, I pay 10
guynneas above 40, & have 72 lines less for fifty,
in proportion, than the other Bookseller shoud
have had for 40, at y^e rate you offered him y^e
ffirst part.³¹

So, while both men are essentially arguing for more profit, in Tonson's case the argument seems mercenary and insensitive, and Dryden's indignation seems justified.

There is also a series of letters between Dryden and Tonson in which Dryden is constantly complaining of being paid in clipped coinage and brass shillings. In a letter dated October 29 of 1695, Dryden writes, "I expect fifty pounds in good silver;

²⁹The Letters of John Dryden, ed. Charles E. Ward (Durham, 1942), p. 78.

³⁰The Profession of English Letters (London, 1964), p. 130.

³¹The Letters of John Dryden, p. 51.

not such as I have had formerly. I am not obligd to take gold, neither will I"32 And in a letter of December or January of the same year he again writes, "Upon triall I find all of your trade are Sharpers & you not more than others; therefore I have not wholly left you."33

We may be sure that Dryden did not suffer greatly from Tonson's alleged stinginess since there was, by the 1690s, more than one publisher who would gladly have snatched the poet from Tonson-- had Dryden been willing to be snatched! It is true that after ten years of successful dealings with Tonson, Dryden did sell Don Sebastian to Joseph Hindmarsh--perhaps, as Charles Ward suggests, because he found him eager to pay more for the play than Tonson. But this temporary shift "proved salutary, for thereafter Tonson published regularly for Dryden, and despite some bickering over financial matters, the poet usually received what he considered fair treatment."34 Apparently all that was needed was a little coercion.

In the later years of the 1690s, after the Virgil was published and had proven successful, Dryden began to consider supplementing the earlier translation with an edition of Homer. It would appear that he was quite satisfied with his returns from the Virgil, for he was willing to work with Tonson again. He told Richard Graham, who was negotiating for him, "When you h'driven him [Tonson] as low as you can by y^e agreem't of future Dealing w^h him f^r Homer,

³²The Letters of John Dryden, p. 77.

³³The Letters of John Dryden, p. 80.

³⁴Charles E. Ward, The Life of John Dryden (Chapel Hill, 1961), p. 242.

or some other Book, I see no Reason why I s'd not treat wh him again."³⁵ Judging from Dryden's remark and from his brief defection, it would seem that the poet was as crafty as the publisher. Each was a challenge and a match for the other, equally to blame for disagreements they may have had. "For," says Sir Walter Scott, "if we admit that the bookseller was penurious and churlish, we cannot deny that Dryden seems often to have been abundantly captious and irascible."³⁶

Of quarrels with his other poets less information is available. We do know that Addison came to resent Tonson's avariciousness and that Pope was also aware of that element in his character. He complained of his greed in the letter to Wycherley in which he says that money is Tonson's criterion for the creation of literary knights.³⁷ And John Gay must have known, better than most, his love of money. In a classic example of Tonson's business sense, the bookseller pulled a fortune from Law's Mississippi Scheme just before the Bubble broke. Part of that fortune may be said to have belonged to Gay who did not escape with his investment in time. As the prices began to slide and before Gay felt he could pull himself out, Tonson--perhaps coincidentally, though not necessarily so--wrote the poet a letter in which he strongly urged that money owed him be returned. Gay replied:

I cannot think your letter consists in the utmost civility, in five lines to press me twice to make

³⁵"Dryden, Tonson, and Subscriptions for the 1697 Virgil," 144.

³⁶The Life of John Dryden, ed. Bernard Kreissman (Lincoln, 1963), p. 333.

³⁷See note 19, p. 12 above.

up my account just at a time when it is impracticable to sell out of the stocks in which my fortune is engaged. . . . To go to the strictness of the matter, I own that my note engages me to make the whole payment in the beginning of September; had it been in my power, I had not given you occasion to send to me, for I can assure you I am as impatient and uneasy to pay the money I owe, as some men are to receive it and 'tis no small mortification to me to refuse you so reasonable a request, which is that I may no longer be obliged to you.³⁸

Though we do not have Tonson's original letter, it is apparent that he was anxious to be paid before Gay's money disappeared. One cannot help but feel that the poet's offhand comment about "some men" (referring to Tonson) was justified in this case.

But Tonson was not always so heavy-handed. He was equally capable of being subtle and cunning. Proof of this comes from the late 1690s when the Virgil was in preparation. During the three years it took to translate the work, Tonson had assumed that Dryden's dedication would be addressed to King William--a natural assumption for a Protestant Whig. But Dryden was a Catholic Tory who had been deprived of his positions as Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal, to say nothing of the income that supposedly went with them. It was not likely that he would change his position. Though the work certainly would not fail without a dedication to the King, Tonson felt the gesture would be not only appropriate, but profitable. And so, unwilling to be thwarted by the poet's resolution, Tonson devised a plan of his own to circumvent Dryden's position and still obtain the same effect as a dedication. The action he took is described by Dryden

³⁸Phoebe Fenwick Gaye, John Gay: His Place in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1938), p. 215.

in a letter to his sons: ". . . he has missd of his design in the Dedication: though He had prepard the Book for it: for in every figure of Eneas, he has causd him to be drawn like K. William, with a hookd Nose."³⁹ That Tonson's trick aided the sale of the book is doubtful, but the incident does illustrate his shrewdness. It would seem that he was well prepared for any obstruction.

An earlier incident, this time involving commendatory verses, gives us a further insight into the character of Jacob Tonson. While one cannot help but admire his tenacity and his ingenuity in managing a most difficult situation, the way he solves this problem is, at best, unscrupulous. In 1682 Thomas Creech's translation of Lucretius was about to run into its second edition. Creech, impressed with his own abilities, felt that a second edition might sell even better if it contained commendatory poems by a prominent poet or so, perhaps Dryden and Waller. Thinking Tonson was quite influential with those poets, Creech asked if he would persuade them to write some verses commending his translation. Dryden (to use Tonson's word) "envied" Creech's success and would have nothing to do with such a plan, and Waller was too old and ill to comply. So, having tried the honest, straightforward approach and failed, and fearing the loss of a likely young author, Tonson tried a slightly different tack. In a letter of 1728 addressed to his nephew, Jacob explained:

being loath to appear not to have interest
enough I resolv'd to try to write a copy that

³⁹The Letters of John Dryden, p. 93.

should bee taken for Drydens & soe I wrote
that copy w^{ch} begins--

How happy had our English tongue
 been made
Were but o^r wit industrious as
 our trade--&c.

It was taken by Creech & everyone else for
Drydens & I trusted noe body wth y^e Secret.⁴⁰

Finding this a successful tactic he wrote another, but under this one placed an "E.W." Creech, naturally, passed the word that Dryden and Waller had written commendatory verses for him, and for years no one knew otherwise, though Tonson admitted that, in the case of the latter poem, "the 6 or 8 last lines are enough to convince any one that it could not be mr Wallers."⁴¹ Judging from this statement, he seems to have had no pretensions concerning the quality of his verses, and yet he apparently felt they were good enough, at the time, to fool Creech.

Such trickery was no doubt required of Tonson from time to time, and was learned early in his career. During the difficult years of the 1680s, and about the same time he was indulging his poetic inclinations, he was also deeply involved in the business of the Dickinson translation. Having refused to take the final step of publishing the translation, but still owing the printer for paper and printing, he offered Dickinson, in late 1681, the rights to the book simply for paying the printer. To this Dickinson agreed; however, he declared that he could not pay

⁴⁰ Jacob Tonson in Ten Letters, ed. S.L.C. Clapp (Austin, 1948), p. 11. The letter is also printed in an article by Miss Clapp in "Jacob Tonson, Eminent Hand," TLC, III, Summer (1949), 136-145.

⁴¹ Jacob Tonson in Ten Letters, p. 11.

without first selling the book and asked Tonson to help sell it, on the condition that the imprint of Walter Davis would appear on the title page. Though Tonson agreed to this proposal it is clear that he still wanted to avoid any close association with the book. But this arrangement failed also, for by January of 1682 Dickinson was in real trouble. The book was not selling and the £150 owed the printer was not being paid. It was at this time that he approached the publisher with a final plan. All that was required of Tonson now was that he pay the printer, and the books were his, complete with full publishing rights. Dickinson reminded him that the book had been in circulation for some time and no controversy had as yet arisen. Apparently convinced by the argument, or else unable to resist the offer of one hundred percent profit a second time, Tonson agreed and the book was his. Now his only problem was to sell it. Of course a new edition would be required with his own title and imprint, and perhaps some commendatory verses to set off the contents. When the translation appeared in May three poems introduced the volume: one by Richard Duke, a second by Nathaniel Lee, and a third by Nahum Tate. Phillip Harth has noticed an interesting parallel and has built a case attempting to prove that it is no coincidence. He writes,

Since November of the previous year, Tonson had been publishing Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel⁴² in a joint arrangement with Walter Davis /publisher

⁴²Geduld notes that in neither the first nor the second editions of the poem was Dryden's name indicated. Tonson was characteristically cautious, for he signed himself "J.T.," possibly fearing an attack from Shaftesbury or his partisans. The copies were sold by another bookseller (p. 57).

of Dickinson's first edition⁷, and the sales had been extremely encouraging. In the spring of 1682 the poem had reached a third edition, and Tonson had enlarged the little book by including three commendatory poems to introduce Dryden's work. The three poems were by Richard Duke, Nathanael [sic] Lee, and Nahum Tate, the same trio who were now, within a few weeks, called upon to boost another book published by Tonson and sold by Davis.⁴³

From all indications, then, it appears that Tonson, finding himself in difficulty, turned to Dryden for help. The poet in turn asked three of his former collaborators and supporters to write commendatory lines to be used as a sales aid for Dickinson's translation. The poems apparently helped, for Tonson managed to sell and barter away the greater share of his edition.

Perhaps another, but more legitimate, manifestation of Tonson's shrewdness may be seen in his ability to recognize especially promising poets and projects. In A Discourse on Epic Poetry Dryden explains to John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, the circumstances behind the translation of his Virgil: "The late Earl of Lauderdale sent me over his new translation of the Aeneis, which he had ended before I engaged in the same design. Neither did I then intend it; but some proposals being afterwards made me by my bookseller, I desired his Lordship's leave, that I might accept them, which he freely granted; and I have his letter yet to shew for that permission."⁴⁴ Though Tonson's role as an initiator of the translation probably involved nothing more than suggesting publishing terms which seemed favorable to Dryden, he must still

⁴³Contexts of Dryden's Thought, (Chicago, 1968), p. 189.

⁴⁴The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden, III, 546.

be given credit for recognizing the market and for making the project worthwhile for the poet.

Of course, we may be sure it was worthwhile for Tonson as well--even more so than he had expected. In the early arrangements for publication he exhibited signs of caution: he chose to publish by subscription--a financially safe method--and he underestimated the number of likely subscribers. In late December or early January of 1695, Dryden wrote to Tonson complaining that because of personal solicitation, wherein a set number of possible subscribers were contacted individually, sales were unduly limited: "you might have spared almost all your trouble, if you had thought fit to publish the proposals for the first Subscriptions: for I have guineas offered me every day, if there had been room; I believe modestly speaking I have refused already 25."⁴⁵ Before the translation appeared on the shelves success was assured and Jacob's confidence in his own abilities and taste was bolstered. Despite his initial temerity the Virgil became his second grand success, almost as impressive as the 1688 Paradise Lost. But, more than that, he had been the one to see its potential.

Not the least of successes which followed was his acquisition of Joseph Addison. They had known each other from Addison's days at Oxford in the early 1690s when he appears to have served as a liaison between Tonson and the university scholars. There are indications, however, that Tonson did not see Addison simply as a messenger or a hack, but rather as a poet of some merit and a talent

⁴⁵The Letters of John Dryden, p. 81.

worth cultivating. For instance, in 1694 Tonson published four of Addison's poems in the fourth volume of the miscellanies, and a letter from Addison to Tonson, dated May of 1695, supports the claim for Tonson's faith in Addison as a poet.

Your discourse with me about translating
Ovid, made such an impression on me at my
first coming down from London, that I
ventured on the 2nd Book which I turned at
my leisure hours, and will give yourself
the trouble of reading it . . . tho' I
despair of serving you in this way. . . .⁴⁶

Addison's translation of the Second Book of the Metamorphoses appeared in the 1697 miscellany, indicating that Tonson recognized both the poet and the project as useful.

Nor did their relationship end there. In 1703, while both men were in Amsterdam, Addison let Tonson see an early version of Cato, but it was not until April of 1712 that Tonson finally saw the play produced. Though the performance he saw was only a rehearsal, he "liked the much corrected piece, for the next day he purchased the copyright for the sum of £107. 10s., a considerable price, but probably one of the most remunerative that he ever paid. . . ." ⁴⁷ The play was so successful that within a year it had gone through eight London editions, not counting at least one that was pirated, a translation in French, and other editions printed in Dublin, Edinburgh, and The Hague. ⁴⁸ The price Tonson paid and the short time it took him to decide attest to the fact that he knew the

⁴⁶Peter Smithers, The Life of Joseph Addison (Oxford, 1954), p. 23.

⁴⁷Smithers, p. 262.

⁴⁸Smithers, p. 265.

English public, recognized an eminently saleable work,⁴⁹ and had become confident and successful enough to risk a considerable amount of money in testing his judgment.

While it was well into the eighteenth century and a number of successes before Tonson began risking large sums of money, he had always known that in order to make money he had to spend money. So, like the salesman with his expense account, Tonson made himself seem generous while waiting to realize his profit. We know, for example, that when contract agreements were finally reached between Tonson and his poets, the publisher invariably treated his partner to a meal. Dryden wrote in 1695, "Be pleasd to send me word what day will be most convenient to you; & be ready with the price of paper, & of the Books. No matter for any Dinner; for that is a charge to you, & I care not for it."⁵⁰ And out of this tradition

⁴⁹It was not only for immediate financial gain that Tonson was in the book trade. While he watched for techniques and works that could bring in a quick profit, he also looked to the future for later gains. For example, James Osborn, in John Dryden: Some Biographical Facts and Problems, p. 241 writes that "In the library of Trinity, Dryden's old college at Cambridge, is a copy of the 1679 edition of Spenser which contains numerous manuscript notes and corrections. On the flyleaf is scribbled

The corrections made in this book are of
Mr. Dryden's own handwriting.

J. Tonson

Being in the book trade, Tonson knew the future value of the notes.

In a letter to his nephew, William Congreve, Letters and Documents, ed. John C. Hodges (New York, 1964), no. 99/ Tonson advises him to buy Congreve's "gentel and wel chosen" library for its future value.

⁵⁰The Letters of John Dryden, p. 76. While his refusal may suggest a disagreement between the two men, the point is that the dinner was a regular occurrence and Dryden was aware of that fact.

apparently grew the weekly gatherings where

Indulgent Bocaj [Jacob] did the Muses treat:
 Their drink was gen'rous wine and Kit-Cat's pies
 the meat.
 Hence did the Assembly's title first arise,
 And Kit-Cat wits sprang first from Kit-Cat pies.⁵¹

Those meetings were much enjoyed by Tonson, for when he purchased his first estate, at Barn Elms, Barnes, he set aside a large room to be used as the meeting place of the organization--a fine gesture, certainly.

But as was suggested earlier, all this treating and generosity may have served Tonson in two ways. He enjoyed the feasting and the merry-making as much as his guests did, but, at the same time, it is possible that he also enjoyed the sense of obligation the young poets must have felt after being treated to a meal and fine company. The first evidence of Tonson's apparent generosity appears in a 1684 letter from Dryden in which he thanks the publisher for his gift of two melons.⁵² Later messages include thanks for the gift of sherry, for Tonson's assistance in delivering rent payments, and for carrying letters and messages from himself to his wife, as well as thanks for a gift of cider which was sent for no apparent reason other than as a friendly gesture. Geduld comments that "Tonson throughout the 1690s seems to have served Dryden voluntarily as steward, messenger, informant, travelling companion and friend. When the poet was out of town Tonson negotiated his business and received his letters. . . . He regarded serving the poet as an

⁵¹The Kit-Cats; a Poem, p. 5.

⁵²The Letters of John Dryden, p. 22.

honorable duty."⁵³

Vanbrugh, a close friend of Tonson, also received special favors. In 1722 he writes, "You have regaled me with the best sider I ever drank since I was born."⁵⁴ And this acknowledgment of kindness is not exceptional, for most of Vanbrugh's letters to Tonson include messages of thanks for some gift received or favor done by the publisher. Addison, too, was indebted to Tonson. Besides other favors Tonson did for him, it was through the recommendations of the publisher and Lord Halifax that Addison became a member of the Kit-Cat Club.

At this point, and in the light of what seem to be examples of Jacob Tonson's benevolence, one might almost be inclined to dismiss suspicions of double-dealing or devious intentions on his part. Therefore, before those incidents become too convincing, other instances of Tonson's "generosity" need to be considered. For example, Alexander Pope, in Spence's Anecdotes, is quoted as saying, "Old Jacob Tonson got a great man fine pictures, and two of himself, by this means [flattery and gifts of food]. Sir Godfrey [Kneller] was very curious, but then he was very vain, and a great glutton; so he [Tonson] played these passions against the other; besides telling him he was the greatest master that ever was, sending him, every now and then a haunch of venison, and dozens of excellent claret.--'O, my G--, man, (said he once to VanderGutch), this old Jacob loves me; he is a very good man;

⁵³Prince of Publishers, p. 65.

⁵⁴The Earlier History of English Bookselling, p. 183.

you see he loves me, he sends me good things; the venison was fat."⁵⁵

Another example of self-interest may be concealed behind what appears to be loyalty to his deceased associate, John Dryden. Prior to 1700 Dryden had been Tonson's greatest asset. In a sense Tonson owed his success to him since his association with the great poet naturally drew other poets, essayists, playwrights, and pamphleteers. Because of Tonson's indebtedness it is only natural that after Dryden's death he should work to support and protect his associate's reputation from those who would attempt to damage it. And there appear to have been those who would do so. Tonson said (according to Spence) that "Addison was eager to be the first name, that he and his friend Sir Richard Steele used to run down Dryden's character as far as they could."⁵⁶ Similar rumors were heard by John Dennis who expressed concern, in a letter to Tonson, that Dryden's reputation was being attacked.⁵⁷ Though Jacob could do little to stop such talk, he did manage to stop something that would add to it. According to Dr. Lockier, Dean of Peterborough, the publisher had a good key to Villiers' The Rehearsal, but refused to print it, because he had been so much obliged to Dryden."⁵⁸

Knowing something of the way Tonson operated, however, we

⁵⁵Joseph Spence, Anecdotes, Observations and Characters of Books and Men, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Carbondale, 1964), p. 121.

⁵⁶Spence, p. 57.

⁵⁷Mark Van Doren, John Dryden: A Study of His Poetry (New York, 1946), p. 121.

⁵⁸Spence, p. 65.

have little reason to imagine that his action was wholly altruistic. After all, Tonson still owned the copyrights to many of Dryden's works and was still selling the works themselves. Adverse criticism could do much to lower the sales of Dryden material. It would be in his own interest, then, for him to do all he could to support the man's reputation.

Another possible attack on it came in 1715 when Pope, wishing to gain praise for himself at the expense of others, suggested that Tonson and Lintot bind part of his translation of the Iliad into one volume with comparable translations by Tonson's poets-- Maynwaring, Dryden, and Tickell. According to a 1715 letter from Lintot to Pope,⁵⁹ Tonson rejected the challenge. It may be that he feared Dryden's translation would not compare favorably with Pope's and was, indeed, concerned for Dryden's reputation. But more likely loyalty was only a minor factor in the decision, for had Pope's translation proven to be the best, the sales of Dryden's and Maynwaring's already published translations would have fallen off, and Tickell's unpublished version probably would not have sold at all. In this case, at least, money more than loyalty was the deciding factor.

Though one cannot be much encouraged by the meager evidence of Tonson's generosity or his loyalty to Dryden, in 1713 he made a gesture which speaks well for him. The second edition of Dryden's Fables was not called for until 1713. Even Dryden's death had not improved the sales, and for twelve years copies remained on the shelves. The original contract for the work stipulated that a sum

⁵⁹The Correspondence of Alexander Pope, I, 298.

of three hundred pounds was to be paid upon publication of the second edition, so when the Fables were printed for the second time, Tonson was prepared to pay. The only problem was that there was no one left to be paid; Dryden and all his immediate descendants were dead. But Tonson, Scott tells us, felt that the contract must be honored, and paid the required amount "to Lady Sylvius, daughter of one of Lady Elizabeth Dryden's brothers, for the benefit of his widow, then in a state of lunacy."⁶⁰

This gesture makes it somewhat easier to understand why, despite his greed, his occasional sharpness, and even his pride,⁶¹ Tonson was admired and respected by most of his associates. Dryden, for example, was continually in financial difficulty and bickered often with him. Yet in those same letters that carry such unkind reports of financial disagreements, we also find signs of a close and warm relationship. After Tonson had accompanied the sixty-two-year-old Dryden to the estate of Sir Matthew Dudley, Dryden wrote a message of gratitude:

I am ashamed of myself, that I am so much behind hand with you in kindness. Above all things I am sensible of your good nature, in bearing my company to this place; wherein besides the cost, you must needs neglect your own business; but I will endeavour to make you some amends; & therefore I desire you to command me something

⁶⁰The Life of John Dryden, p. 366.

⁶¹Tonson's rise in the business and social worlds was so rapid that he perhaps became just a bit conceited. Whistler cites as evidence lines from "The Reconciliation Between Jacob Tonson and Mr. Congreve," by Nicholas Rowe.

While in your early days of reputation
You for blue garters had not such a passion;
While yet you did not use (as now your trade is)
To drink with noble lords, and toast their ladies. . . .
(Sir John Vanbrugh: Architect and Artist, p. 81).

for your service.⁶²

Dryden seems to have been sincerely touched by this favor since in the next letter he refers to it again. "I assure you I lay up your last kindnesses to me in my heart; & the less I say of them, I charge them to account so much the more."⁶³ And in a letter of December, 1697, Dryden wishes Tonson well. "I am glad to heare from all Hands, that my Ode is esteemd the best of all my poetry, by all the Town: I thought so my self when I writ it but being old, I mistrusted my own Judgment. I hope it has done you service, & will do more."⁶⁴

After Dryden's death in 1700 a new friendship supplanted the old. An even closer relationship seems to have developed between dramatist-architect Sir John Vanbrugh and Tonson. Letters between them are filled with good-humor and banter. When Tonson was on a business trip to the continent in 1703, Vanbrugh wrote a letter in which he facetiously warned Tonson of murmurings in England.

The Tory's [sic] (even the wisest of them) have been very grave upon your going to Holland; they often say (with a nod) that Caesar's 'Commentaries' might have been carried through without a voyage to Holland; there were meanings in that subscription, and list of names may serve for farther engagements than paying three guineas a piece for a book; in short I could win a hundred pounds if I were sure you had not made a trip to Holland, which you may possibly hear sworn when you arrive home again; so I'd advise you to bring a very exact journal, well attested.⁶⁵

⁶²The Letters of John Dryden, p. 58.

⁶³The Letters of John Dryden, p. 58.

⁶⁴The Letters of John Dryden, p. 60.

⁶⁵The Earlier History of English Bookselling, p. 176.

At the same time there appears to have been a bachelor's pact between the two men which, when finally dissolved by Vanbrugh, gave him reason to fear Tonson's wit. In July of 1719 he wrote:

I don't know whether you'll reckon me amongst the first or the last, since I have taken this great leap in the Dark, Marriage. But tho' you should rate me with the former, I know at least you would be glad to know how 'tis in this (perhaps) your future State: For you have not forget it was ever agreed, if I fell, you'd tremble.⁶⁶

In an earlier letter to the Duke of Newcastle, Vanbrugh contemplated the effects of his marriage on Tonson, who never did fall, despite Vanbrugh's fears.

Jacob will be frightened out of his Witts and his Religion too, when he hears I'm gone at last. If he is still in France, he'll certainly give himself to God, for fear he shou'd now be ravish'd by a Gentlewoman. I was the last Man left, between him and Ruin.⁶⁷

From the banter it is clear that there was a close friendship between Tonson and the ex-bachelor. Indeed, when Jacob was away, Vanbrugh, as well as other members of the Kit-Cat Club, felt his absence strongly. During his 1703 trip to Holland, Tonson received a letter from Vanbrugh, in which he wrote, "In short, the Kitt-Catt wants you, much more than you can do them. Those who remain in Town are in great desire of waiting on you at Barnes Elms,"⁶⁸ and in a letter from the Duke of Somerset he was told, "Our club is dissolved till you revive it again, which we are

⁶⁶The Complete Works of Sir John Vanbrugh, plays ed. Bonamy Dobrée, letters ed. G. Webb, 4 vols. (London, 1927), IV, 111.

⁶⁷Sir John Vanbrugh: Architect and Dramatist, p. 252.

⁶⁸George A. Aitken. The Life of Richard Steele, 2 vols. (New York, 1968), I, 99.

impatient of. Vanbrugh, also, is anxious."⁶⁹

Though Pope was not his closest friend, Tonson genuinely admired him,⁷⁰ and Pope seems to have appreciated "Old Jacob." In 1731 the poet offered to take his friend, Lord Oxford, to see the publisher. "To entertain you I will show you (as I promised him [Lord Bathhurst]) a Phenomenon worth seeing and hearing, Old Jacob Tonson, who is the perfect Image & Likeness of Bayle's Dictionary; so full of Matter, Secret History, & Wit & Spirit, at almost fourscore."⁷¹ This note may suggest a rather flippant, even disrespectful attitude,⁷² but a touching letter written to Tonson approximately four months prior to his death, records a different attitude:

I condole with you in the first place for the death of your Nephew, between whom & me a matter past a short time before which gave me concern, as I believe it will You when I tell

⁶⁹The Earlier History of English Bookselling, p. 173.

⁷⁰Francis Beauchesne Thornton, in Alexander Pope: Catholic Poet (New York, 1952), p. 272, cites a letter from Tonson as evidence of this admiration.

I wish you could let me know how I could in any way please Mr. Pope never any one in my opinion has so fine and just notions as him and I think his Prose excels all others as his verse-- He has noe equal or any pen near his--My hand is lame, & yet I can neavour be weary in writing my sincere thoughts about such a miracle of general knowledge.

⁷¹The Correspondence of Alexander Pope, III, 176.

⁷²One month later Pope wrote to the Earl of Oxford, (The Correspondence of Alexander Pope, III, 178. "I think you will not be displeased at My Phaenomenon [Tonson] & when I am able, we will go together to see it again I doubt not. . . ." In an age when watching lunatics was a favorite pastime, it would not be unfair to question Pope's attitude toward "it."

it you--I presume this occasion may have brought you to Town once more, and I hope it will not be without our seeing each other. Whether your Deafness will permit our Conversation to be on Equal terms, or whether I can only hear you, That will be a great pleasure to me, & I shall only be sorry to give you none on my part. Yet I think you love me well enough to find it some meerly to be face to face. As soon as you can, pray write me a line, when, & where we shall pass a day & a night together. I can show you papers, if you can't hear me talk, & I can ask you Questions at least in writing, & I don't care how prolix you are in answering: I've often thought of writing to you, but I believe you may have read too many of my Letters of late, which is a favour you owe to Curll. I took very kindly the Paragraph in yours which your Nephew communicated to me. I am glad if any of my Writings please you who have been used to so much better, and I am glad if the Writer pleases you, who have known so many better.⁷³

Pope's final sentence indicates that he held the old man in high esteem; and rightly so, for Jacob Tonson was an extraordinary businessman--an extraordinary man--whose life revolved about his business and whose character was securely anchored in it. His participation in the Kit-Cat Club, his caution and shrewdness, his occasional dishonesty and his sharpness in financial matters, and his cupidity and pseudo-generosity can all be attributed to his desire for success. But, of course, without taste and acumen, amiability and wit, common sense and great industry his desire would have been to no avail. To be successful he found it necessary to develop all of these qualities--good and bad alike--and a few to a greater degree than others. While some resented and were offended by the bad, and while others were won to him by the good, all were impressed by the man as a

⁷³The Correspondence of Alexander Pope, IV, 513-514.

whole. And how could they help but be impressed, for he had revived literature of an earlier age; he had popularized old forms and methods of publication; he had raised the bookseller to a higher position in the book trade; and he had introduced great poets and supported them in a manner to which they were unaccustomed. Jacob Tonson was, indeed, a "Phaenomenon."

List of Works Cited

- Aitken, George A. The Life of Richard Steele. 2 vols. (London, 1889), New York, 1968.
- Barnard, John. "Dryden, Tonson, and Subscriptions for the 1697 Virgil," PBSA, LVII (1963), 129-151.
- Blackmore, Richard. The Kit-Cats, a Poem. London, 1709.
- Boys, Richard C. "Some Problems of Dryden's Miscellany," ELH, VII (June 1940), 130-143.
- Clapp, Sarah L.C. "The Beginnings of Subscription Publication in the Seventeenth Century," MP, XXIX (November 1931), 199-224.
- _____. "Jacob Tonson, Eminent Hand," TLC, III, no. 3 (Summer 1949), 136-145.
- _____. "The Subscription Enterprises of John Ogilby and Richard Blome," MP, XXX (May 1933), 365-379.
- _____. "Subscription Publishers Prior to Jacob Tonson," The Library, 4th series, XIII (September 1932), 158-183.
- Collins, Arthur S. Authorship in the Days of Johnson. London, 1927.
- Compton, F.E. "Subscription Books," Bowker Lectures in Book Publishing, New York, 1957, 56-78.
- Congreve, William. The Letters and Documents of William Congreve, ed. John C. Hodges. New York, 1964.
- Dryden, John. The Letters of John Dryden, ed. Charles E. Ward. Durham, 1942.
- Edwards, Laurence. "Jacob Tonson's Death and Burial," TSL, III (1958), 25-28.
- Gaye, Phoebe Fenwick. John Gay: His Place in the Eighteenth Century. London, 1938.
- Geduld, Harry M. Prince of Publishers: A Study of the Work and Career of Jacob Tonson. Bloomington, 1969.
- Harth, Phillip. Contexts of Dryden's Thought. Chicago, 1968.
- Havens, Raymond D. "Changing Taste in the Eighteenth Century: A Study of Dryden's and Dodsley's Miscellanies," PMLA, XLIX (1929), 501-536.
- Johnson, Samuel. Lives of the English Poets, ed. George Birkbeck Hill. Oxford, 1905.

- Malone, Edmund. "Account of the Life and Writings of the Author," The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden, I, London, 1800.
- Mumby, Frank A. Publishing and Bookselling: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present Day. New York, 1930.
- _____. The Romance of Bookselling. Boston, 1911.
- Osborn, James M. John Dryden: Some Biographical Facts and Problems. Gainesville, 1965.
- Pope, Alexander. The Correspondence of Alexander Pope, ed. George Sherburn. 5 vols. Oxford, 1956.
- Roberts, William. The Earlier History of English Bookselling, (London, 1889), Detroit, 1967.
- Saunders, John Whiteside. The Profession of English Letters. London, 1964.
- Scott, Sir Walter. The Life of John Dryden, (London, 1834), ed. Bernard Kreissman. Lincoln, 1963.
- Shippen, William. Faction Display'd. London, 1704.
- Smithers, Peter. The Life of Joseph Addison. Oxford, 1954.
- Spence, Joseph. Anecdotes, Observations and Characters of Books and Men, (London, 1820), ed. Bonamy Dobrée, Carbondale, 1964.
- Thornton, Francis Beauchesne. Alexander Pope: Catholic Poet. New York, 1952.
- Tonson, Jacob. Jacob Tonson in Ten Letters By and About Him, ed. S.L.C. Clapp. Austin, 1948.
- Vanbrugh, Sir John. The Complete Works of Sir John Vanbrugh, ed. B. Dobrée and G. Webb. 4 vols. London, 1927-28.
- Van Doren, Mark. John Dryden: A Study of His Poetry. New York, 1946.
- Ward, Charles E. The Life of John Dryden. Chapel Hill, 1961.
- _____. "'Religio Laici' and Father Simon's History," MLN, LXI (1946), 407-412.
- Wasserman, Earl R. "Pre-Restoration Poetry in Dryden's Miscellany," MLN, LII (1937), 545-555.
- Watt, Ian. "Publishers and Sinners: The Augustan View," SIB, XII (1959), 3-20.

Whistler, Laurence. Sir John Vanbrugh: Architect and Dramatist.
New York, 1939.

THE BUSINESS CHARACTER OF JACOB TONSON

by

RICHARD EDWARD CHRISTIANSON

B. A., Wisconsin State University at Eau Claire, 1968

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1970

Jacob Tonson's name appears often in biographies of English Augustan writers and in histories of the book trade, but few pages have been solely devoted to a study of him. It may be useful, then, to examine briefly his career and attempt to determine exactly what it was about Jacob Tonson that made him such a successful publisher.

From the beginning of his career in the 1680s he collected poets such as Addison, Steele, Congreve, Prior, Rowe, Arbuthnot, and most important, Dryden. And for other reasons besides his connection with these poets, his firm quickly grew in size and importance: he paid more for literature; and he drew poetry, the general miscellany, and subscription publishing from the past and adapted them to the present. At the same time, he made the Kit-Cat Club (a Whig politico-literary organization) serve as a tributary to his publishing house; his membership in the Club was often ridiculed by Tory poets and his motives were questioned more than once, but Tonson continued to make use of the organization for pleasure and profit.

Though there were some who could accuse him, on excellent grounds, of avarice, and he may sometimes have misjudged his opportunities through an excess of natural caution, he was both a companionable and a clever man, and the more successful on that account. He very craftily managed to salvage a dubious tribute to King William in Dryden's Virgil; he disposed of unsold copies of a controversial work by means of poems purposely written to boost the sales of the work; and he wrote commendatory poems

and allowed them to be taken for the work of his betters. Perhaps more legitimate manifestations of his shrewdness--if indeed it was not simply his good taste--may be seen in his ability to recognize especially promising literary ventures. For instance, he suggested the translation of Virgil to Dryden and was first in line to secure the right to publish Addison's Cato.

It is reasonable to assume that in such ventures self-interest was his primary concern. Like the salesman with an expense account, he could afford to appear generous by making gifts to Vanbrugh and Kneller and running errands for Dryden, knowing all along that these favors were good for business. Even his desire to protect Dryden's reputation was perhaps not wholly altruistic. But there are occasional gestures of seemingly disinterested generosity that may entitle us to think more highly of him.

Certainly, letters from Dryden, Vanbrugh and Pope to Tonson indicate that they admired and respected him; and well they should have, for despite what many felt to be his faults Jacob Tonson became, in Pope's word, a "Phaenomenon"--one of the most important figures in the Augustan literary world.