## WESTON'S LY-TANG, AN IMPERIAL POEM

This note focuses on Stephen Weston (1747–1830). While examining his *Ly-Tang, An Imperial Poem in Chinese by Kien Lung with a Translation and Note* (shortened as *Ly-Tang* in the following note), it also aims to situate Weston in the wider context of the British interests in Chinese literature and reveals some of the implications of his translation practice. In the studies of early Sino-British cultural exchanges, much attention has been given to travel narratives produced by members of the Macartney and Amherst Embassies whose significance has been well explored by scholars such as James Louis Hevia and Peter Kitson.[1] In contrast, not enough attention has been given to literature. The British reception of Chinese literature at the time still awaits research. In light of this, the present note might be of help to highlight the situation of Chinese poetry among British readers at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Weston, Fellow of the Royal Society (elected in 1792) and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries (elected in 1794), was a scholar with wide interests, mainly in foreign art objects, languages, and literatures, including Greek, French, Chinese, and Persian.[2] From 1809 to 1820, Weston's attention was split between Chinese and Persian. Some of his publications on Chinese language and literature include *Siao Cu Lin, or A Small Collection of Chinese Characters Analysed and Decompounded* (1809), *Specimen of a Chinese Dictionary* (1812), and *Fan-Hy-Cheu, A Tale* (1814). He also translated two poems by the Qing Emperor Qianlong (Kien Lung as commonly referred to at the time) that appeared in three publications. The first one *Ly Tang* was published in 1809, but as it was a flawed translation, Weston later revised and republished it in 1816 under a different name, *A Chinese Poem, Inscribed on Porcelain, in the Thirty-third Year of the Cycle, A.D. 1776. With a Double Translation and Notes* (shortened as *A Chinese Poem* later in this note). In between the revisions, Weston published his translation of another Qianlong poem in 1810, *The Conquest of the Miao-tse, an Imperial Poem by Kien Lung*.

The first interesting thing to note is that Weston was probably one of the earliest who attempted to translate directly from Chinese to English. In the time of his publications, British sinology was still at a rudimentary stage with few people knowing Chinese well enough to translate and not enough Chinese materials to work on. As Barrett's research suggests, though the Bodleian library had already possessed some fragments of Chinese works by 1613,[3] it was not until in 1824 when George Staunton donated his personal collection of one hundred and eighty-six Chinese books to the Royal Society that Chinese books appeared as a substantial collection in a public institution.[4] Weston did not have this resource at his disposal when he worked on the Qianlong poems. He came across 'Ly-Tang' on a wine-cup and was supplied with the Chinese original of 'The Conquest of the Miaotse' by Staunton.[5]

Despite the lack of access to Chinese books, British readers by the end of the eighteenth century were already aware of some Chinese literary works that were translated from another European language. Widely known is 'the Orphan of Zhao', introduced from Joseph Henri Marie de Prémare's 1731 translation, 'L'Orphelin de la Maison de Tchao'.[6] This play famously won admiration from Voltaire who later rewrote it into *L'Orphelin de la Chine* (1753). It also gained instant popularity in France, Italy, and Britain. Multiple English translations and adaptations appeared, notably by Richard Brookes in 1736, Thomas Percy in 1762, and Arthur Murphy in 1756. Discussions on how this play helped to ignite the interest in

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[1] See James Louis Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, NC, 1995) and Peter J. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China* (Cambridge, UK, 2013).

[2] See a detailed account of his publications in 'Obituary. Rev. Stephen Weston, F.R.S. F.S.A.', *Gentlemen's Magazine* (April 1830), 370–3.

[3] Timothy Hugh Barrett, *Singular Listlessness* (London, 1989), 36.

[4] *Ibid.*, 67.

[5] Stephen Weston, *The Conquest of the Miaotse* (London, 1810), 1.

[6] It appeared in Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's *Description Géographique, Historique, Chronologique, Politique et Physique de L'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie* (Paris, 1735) which was translated into English as *A Description of the Empire of China and Chinese-Tartary* (London, 1738).

China on the British stage and its moral implications can be found in works by Chi-Ming Yang and Ashely Trope.[7] In terms of translations from prose fiction, there was Percy's *Hau Kiou Choaan: or, The Pleasing History* (1761), which he completed based on the manuscript he obtained from a Captain Wilkinson whose uncle James Wilkinson, once a merchant in Canton, had first translated it in 1719. Wilkinson translated most of the novel but left it unfinished with part of it in Portuguese, which was believed to be his tutor's translation.[8] As Percy himself was not competent in Chinese, he edited Wilkinson's translation and translated the Portuguese part into English. Later, the same Chinese novel was translated in full from Chinese by John Francis Davis into English and published in 1829 under the name *The Fortunate Union, A Romance*.

In the same period when the play *Orphan of Zhao* and the novel *Hao Kiou Choaan* met the British readers, no substantial translation of Chinese poetry was published. It is not difficult to see the challenges in translating poetry, which is nicely summarized by David Hawkes who concludes that 'the language of poetry is essentially evocative, pregnant, and ambiguous, and a prolonged linguistic and cultural immersion is needed before the foreign reader can even begin to be aware of its implications'.[9] Early attempts include two poems by Qianlong translated into English from French, which this note will shortly discuss. Sir William Jones once planned to explore more about Shicing,[10] or Shijing, the Classics of Chinese Poetry, but there was not much fruitful outcome. Arthur Waley wrote off Jones' Chinese studies, suggesting that he was not even familiar with contemporary French works on Chinese poetry.[11] In 1789, appearing in the public eye was 'a Sage in Retirement' classified as 'Specimen of Chinese Poetry, Translated into English Prose' in *New London Magazine*. It takes just the space of a paragraph. Later in 1805, a short poem of twenty-two lines came out in *The Lady's Monthly Museum*, claiming to have been translated from the manuscript in Bodleian library. The author's explanation suggests that this poem in praise of a Prince's character is translated to commemorate William Henry, the Duke of Gloucester who had died in August of the same year.[12]

The situation of lacking substantial translations from Chinese poetry was commonly believed to have ended with Peter Perring Thoms' translation of a love story in verse, *Chinese Courtship in Verse* (1824). It was later translated into multiple European languages. Goethe once borrowed Thoms' translation from the Anna Amalia Bibliothek and B. Venkat Mani even speculates that the German writer might have had this translation in mind when claiming that poetry is the universal possession of mankind.[13] Five years after Thoms' endeavour on Chinese verse, Davis published 'On the Poetry of the Chinese' bringing more knowledge of Chinese poetry onto the table. In this work, he divides the discussion into two parts, part one explaining rules of versification, part two commenting on the styles and literary merits, followed by about a dozen more translations of Chinese poems.

Noteworthy is that both Thoms and Davis had placements in China and resources to work with. In fact, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the British isles, 'for all of its commercial contacts with China, still could not boast a single teacher of Chinese'.[14] Thus, it is interesting to see that Weston, having not spent any time in China nor been exposed to a great deal of Chinese literature, should have committed himself to translating directly from Chinese and published versions earlier than Thoms and Davis. *Ly-Tang* came out in 1809 and

[7] Chi-Ming Yang, *Performing China. Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660–1740* (Baltimore, 2011). Ashely Trope, *Performing China on the London Stage, Chinese Opera and Global Power, 1759–2008* (London, 2016).

[8] Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 43.

[9] David Hawkes, 'Chinese Poetry and the English Reader', in Raymond Dawson (ed.), *The Legacy of China* (Oxford, 1964), 90–114, at 90.

[10] 'Sketch of the Life of the Late Sir William Jones', *The New London Review* iii (1799), 209–14, at 213.

[11] Arthur David Waley, 'Sir William Jones as Sinologue', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* xi (1946), 842.

[12] 'A Copy of Chinese Verses, Translated from the Original in the Bodleian Library', *The Lady's Monthly Museum* (November 1805), 337.

[13] B. Venkat Mani, *Recoding World Literature: Libraries, Print Culture, and Germany's Pact with Books* (New York, 2017), 54.

[14] Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 58.

*The Conquest of the Miao-tse* in 1810, a few years earlier than the first part of Robert Morrison's *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language* in 1815. Contemporary to Weston's translations was what is commonly referred to as the first written Chinese work directly translated into English by Staunton in 1810, *Ta Tsing Leu Lee* (Fundamental Laws of China, also known as the Great Qing Penal Code). Of course, Weston's translations of two Chinese short poems are nowhere comparable to Staunton's book length work nor Thoms'. Actually, Weston's limitations in knowing the Chinese language was revealed in the dedication of *Ly-Tang*, in which he thanked Staunton for helping him understand certain parts of the poem. The dedication of *The Conquest of the Miao-tse* further discloses that it was Staunton who supplied Weston with the Chinese originals. How much Staunton was involved in Weston's project remains unknown so far, but he is definitely a figure casting a shadow in Weston's works. In 1814, Weston published *Fan-Hy-Cheu*, a Chinese story of how a rebel Fan-Hy-Cheu remained faithful to his wife, daughter of a Chinese official he kidnapped, and was reunited with her years after when Fan was transformed into a loyal solider in the state army. In this work, Weston provided Staunton's prose translation along with his own verse translation.

One way of looking at Weston's enthusiasm for translating Chinese poetry is that it was encouraged by and fed into the craze for the Emperor Qianlong in Britain at the turn of the century. According to Weston's account, he found the poem on a Chinese cup and was intrigued purely because of the author. Here is Weston,

> ... feeling a wish to know what it meant, principally indeed on account of the author's name, I set about a translation of the characters, and concluded with guessing at the sense they intended to convey; and having satisfied myself, leave my readers to give, with a better knowledge of the genius of the language, an improved version.[15]

[15] Weston, *Ly-Tang* (London, 1809), 3.

Before the Macartney Embassy, British readers had already known about the Chinese emperor and his literary talent from writings such as Voltaire's and Father Amiot's (Joseph Amoit, 1718–93). Having served as a translator at the Peking court, Amiot had direct contacts with the Emperor. His translation of a Qianlong poem in praise of the Moukden city *Eloge de la ville de Moukden* was published in 1770. Another translation of Qianlong's composition by Amiot, a poem on drinking tea, was translated into English in William Chambers' *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (1772). John Barrow also provided a verbal translation of the same poem in *Travels in China* (1804). These two poems were mentioned in Peter Pindar's (John Wolcot) dedication in *Odes to Kien Long* (1792), 'thy praises of Moukden, thy beautiful little Ode to Tea, &c. have afforded me infinite delight'.[16] Lord Byron also confesses that he 'never heard of any Chinese poet but the Emperor Kien Long, and his "Ode to Tea"'.[17] The emperor's reputation of being a man of letters earned him some respect among the British who had high hopes for the Macartney Embassy. An article in *The Weekly Entertainer* describes him as having 'distinguished himself by his taste for literature', and that 'Lord McCartney's love of science, and the affability of his manners, will no doubt secure to him a favourable reception at the court of Pekin'.[18] Indeed, a tendency to romanticize the Chinese emperor as a more capable leader than George III and William Pitt was common around the time of the Macartney Embassy before things turn sour. Peter Pindar produced at least two satirical pieces. Apart from *Odes to Kien Long* mentioned earlier, there was also 'A Pair of Lyric Epistles to Lord Macartney and his Ship' (1792). A fake translation of Qianlong's letter to George the Third by Thomas James Mathias in verse form came out in 1794. Although there was a craze for Qianlong, English translations directly from his writing were hard to find. This makes reviewing Weston's translations relevant both in the studies of translation of Chinese poetry and the image of the Emperor Qianlong

[16] Peter Pindar, *Odes to Kien Long* (London, 1792), 1.

[17] Byron, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, ed. Thomas Moore (London, 1860), 49.

[18] 'General Review of European Politics', *The Weekly Entertainer* (August 1792), 168–72, at 171.

in the British's eyes. While Weston's translation of 'The Conquest of the Miaotsee' remains largely true to the original, his translation of 'Ly-Tang' needs to be amended, which he did later in 'A Chinese Poem' in 1816.

What contributes to the mistranslation in 'Ly-Tang' is the literal approach Weston adopts. Translations of individual characters are given along with a verse or prose translation, with a brief introduction to the Chinese language. The reason to do so is explained in *Fan-Hy-Cheu* in which Weston justifies his literal approach as a way to show 'the genius of the original, which is but faintly exhibited in a paraphrase, and can be demonstrated in a literal translation'.[19] But this approach is not favoured by Davis who argues that a literary translation should transfer its spirit and effect and is not necessarily an exact verbal translation. Verbal translation may work between European languages since there are certain connections among them, but a verbal translation of the Chinese literature will 'degenerate into a horrible jargon, which few persons will undergo the disgust of pursuing'.[20]

Other mistakes in 'Ly-Tang' are naturally due to a lack of knowledge of Chinese poetry. His introduction to the poem does not say much about Chinese literature. It contains some comments on Qianlong's literary merits and contributions to the Chinese language, citing the dictionary the Emperor ordered to be compiled as an example. A few features of the Chinese language are discussed, and certain things particularly Chinese are mentioned, such as, the Chinese people using alum to purify water from the Yellow River. Also in the introduction are some comparisons between the Chinese and the Romans, the Greeks, and the Persians. As for the translation itself, Weston miscalculated line breaks, and this tampered with his understanding of the poem. The poem inscribed on the cup is in seventeen columns, with eight characters in the first fifteen columns and seven characters in column sixteen. Qianlong signs off in the last column (Figure 1). It is without punctuations (as Classical Chinese texts are) and meant to be read up down and right to left, but a shrewd reader would know where to pause to generate a meaning. The poem is written using seven-character lines, but Weston mistook each column (eight characters) to be a line. He did have an excuse for this mistake though, as some other Chinese poems he translated follow the rule that a column is a line, for example, the poem from Percy's *Hau Kiou Choaan*, which he quotes in *Fan-Hy-Cheu*.

Being new to the Chinese cultural and historical references does not help Weston either. As Davis observes, figurative allusions and references to certain event in history or romance constitute a great difficulty in understanding the Chinese poetry. For instance, Ly-Tang, mistaken by Weston as a person's name, means the Tang Dynasty established by the Li (Ly) family in the context of the poem, similar to the way 'Tudor England' is used. What might have caused this misunderstanding is that there was indeed a historical figure, the painter Li Tang (1066–1150) who was believed to have shaped the artistic taste in his own time and whose works were among Qianlong's collections, but we are not sure whether Weston knew this or if he had consulted with Staunton. A similar misunderstanding occurs in column six where Weston writes 'red and clear', which are literal translation of characters 朱 [Zhu] meaning 'red' and 明 [Ming)] meaning clear, but together in the context, it should be the Ming Dynasty established by the Zhu family.

As Weston's study of Chinese language and literature went deeper along with the overall development of Chinese scholarship in the country, he must have realized these mistakes and corrected them in the 1816 translation. Two things are interesting to notice in this revision, the first being downplaying Qianlong's presence in this poem. Weston changed the title into 'A Chinese Poem' and deleted the short introduction in the 1809 publication to the Emperor and Chinese things. These changes may have reflected a declining interest in Qianlong as the dynamic between the UK and China had also changed. The UK, having just won the Battle of Waterloo in the previous year and with its growing international trade, was on the rise. The year after 'A Chinese

[19] Weston, 'Advertisement', *Fan-Hy-Cheu: A Tale in Chinese and English* (London, 1814).

[20] John Francis Davis, 'On the Poetry of the Chinese', *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* ii (1829), 393–461, at 421.

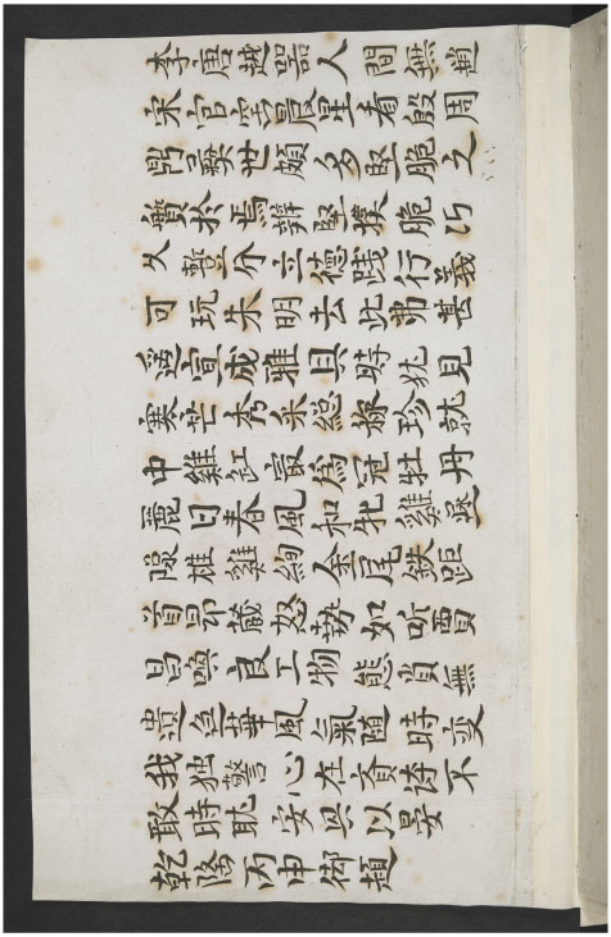

Figure 1. The poem as reproduced in Weston's *Ly-Tang*. © British Library Board 840.k.14.(6.), facing title page.

Poem' was published, journals and papers produced by the Amherst Embassy (1816) started to appear, which consolidated the impression of China as a stagnant empire, as explained by the update scholarships on this issue.[21] Weston might have sensed the changing attitudes towards China, or perhaps he would prefer a clean break from 'Ly-Tang' to avoid any embarrassment arising from the mistranslation. In fact, there was indeed a clean break, because the link between these two translations appeared to not have been discovered, and that they were still referred to as two different publications in Weston's obituary, as well as in indexes of book publications.[22]

[21] See Robert Markley, 'The Amherst Embassy in the Shadow of Tambora', in Peter J. Kitson and Robert Markley (eds), *Writing China: Essays on the Amherst Embassy (1816) and Sino-British Cultural Relations* (Cambridge, 2016), 83–104.

[22] For example, see Robert Watt, *Bibliotheca Britannica: or a General Index to British and Foreign Literature* (London, 1824), II, 958; *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1830), IV, 51.

Figure 2. The chicken cup from porcelain collections in the Capital Museum, Beijing. Permission to use granted.

Besides the title, the most important change Weston made in the 1816 translation is to amend the mistakes on line breaks and cultural references, turning it into an acceptable translation much more readable than the 1809 version. In his defence, Weston explained in the short introduction the confusing line arrangements and attributed it to the practical matter of saving space.

> The poem in question consists of eighteen lines and seven characters in a line; but in order to make the cup hold it and the decoration, it has been reduced to seventeen lines, with eight characters in a line, which has so much disturbed both the metre and the sense, that they are no longer intelligible.[23]

This is not quite true, because as discussed earlier in this note, such arrangement as not having line breaks is quite common in Chinese classic texts. Weston also reveals that consultations have been carried out with a native and 'very learned and ingenious Chinese scholars resident in the country',[24] whose names are not disclosed. Had we not known the mistranslation in 1809, we would not have detected the conversation this 1816 introduction held with its predecessor.

Before we end the investigation on Weston's translations, a brief explanatory note to the poem and the cup would probably be useful. Living up to his literary name, Emperor Qianlong was said to have composed at least 43, 630 poems. A royal collection was made in his own time. Although he confessed some were ghost-writings by his ministers, scholars argue that when the collection was made, Qianlong made sure that they spoke his mind before giving his permission.[25] One category of these poems is dedications to art objects, a painting, a piece of jade, or porcelain ware. They usually comment on the artistic styles and delicate skills artists used. Some end with meditative thoughts.

The poem discussed here is a special dedication to a type of wine-cup the Emperor was very fond of, which he ordered the state kilns to make with the poem inscribed on, as seen in Figure 2. The picture on Weston's title page in 1809 (Figure 3) suggests that the cup he obtained is very likely a reproduction of it. These wine-cups are in imitation of the style invented in the Ming Emperor Chenghua's time (1465–87) when colourings on porcelain tend to highlight the contrast between the dark and the bright, known as Doucai

[23] Weston, *A Chinese Poem, Inscribed on Porcelain* (London, 1816), a2.
[24] *Ibid.*, iv.
[25] See 'Introduction', *Qian Long, a Collection of Poems* (Beijing, 2013), I–IV.

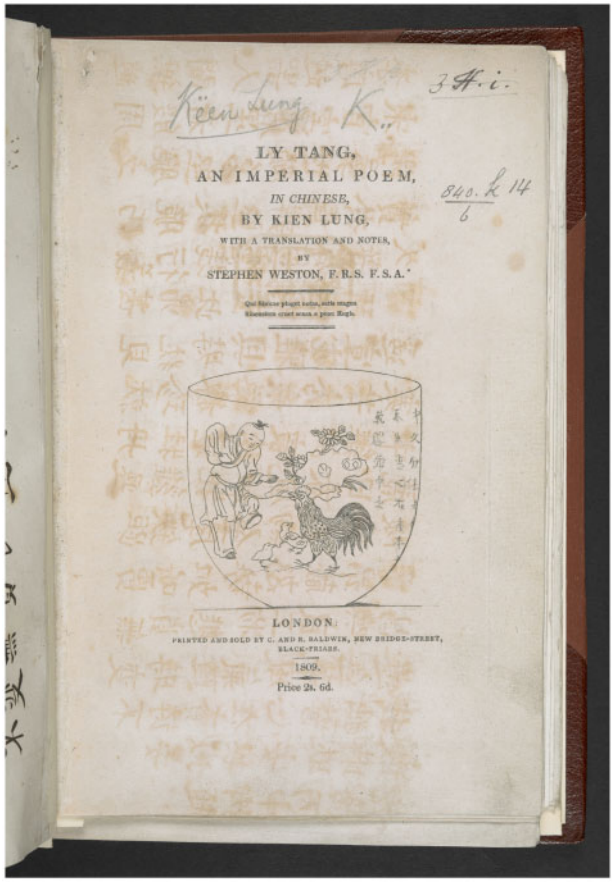


Figure 3. Picture on the cup on the title page of Weston's *Ly-Tang*. © British Library Board, 840.k.14.(6.), title page.

[斗彩], meaning contrasting colours. In the image on the cup, a brown hen and several white chickens were pecking. Next to them is a rooster larger and in brighter colours standing with its head high and chest out. Teasing the rooster is a boy in dusty pink whose name, as suggested in the poem, is Jia Chang, the royal chicken trainer who served Emperor Xuanzong (685–762) of the Tang dynasty. Based on this pattern, the cup is named 'the chicken cup' [Jigang Bei, 鸡缸杯] and the poem 'Ode to a Chicken Cup'. In this praise of the cup, Qianlong uses quick changes of artistic tastes as metaphors for dynasty changes. He cautions himself against indulging in the present and expresses the urge to work hard, protecting his subjects.

The British Museum has one of these cups on display when this note is written (location: G95/dc33/sh9, registration number PDF, A.823). It is also listed in the Museum's online collection with a modern translation of the inscribed poem in its caption.[26]

*Conflict of interest statement*. The author of this note would like to thank the reviewers, the

[26] See <https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3180958&partId=1> (accessed 16 Aug. 2019).

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## ATTRIBUTIONS OF AUTHORSHIP IN THE *GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE*, 1809–11: A SUPPLEMENT TO THE *UNION LIST*

The following list consists of eighty-seven new attributions of authorship (and two corrected attributions) of anonymous, pseudonymous, or incompletely signed letters, poems, articles, obituaries, or drawings appearing in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (hereafter *GM*) during the years 1809–1811, when the magazine was jointly edited and conducted by John Nichols and his son John Bowyer Nichols, partners since 1800 and the third and fourth incarnations, respectively, of the *GM*'s fictitious editor, 'Sylvanus Urban'. It thus constitutes the latest installment in my ongoing efforts to supplement my *Attributions of Authorship in the* Gentleman's Magazine*, 1731–1868: An Electronic Union List* (Charlottesville, VA: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 2003), http://bsuva.org/bsuva/gm2 (accessed 10 June 2019).

The new finds appearing below encompass items by over sixty contributors. Poets (including five women) and clergymen (among them an archbishop and a future bishop) dominate the list, followed by antiquaries and medical practitioners, with smaller numbers consisting of schoolmasters, civil servants, historians, scientists, draftsmen or architects, merchants, miscellaneous writers, and the like.

As in the *Union List*, each entry appears first in a chronological list displaying the title of the item (designated 'A' [article], 'L' [letter], 'V' [verses], 'O' [obituary], or 'P' [plate], respectively), followed by the author's name, the signature (if any), and the justification for the attribution. The chronological list is followed by a cross-referenced contributors' list providing birth and death dates and occupations if known. Short titles used in the text are as follows:

*Alumni Cantab*.: *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, ed. John Venn and J. A. Venn, 10 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922–54; rpt. Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2001), Print.

*CCEd: Clergy of the Church of England Database*, http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk.

*COPAC*: *COPAC* [Union Catalogue of U. K. and Irish Libraries], http://copac.jisc.ac.uk/copac.

*DNB*: *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1908–1909 edn.

*Fasti:* John Le Neve, *Fasti ecclesiae anglicanae, or A Calendar of the principal ecclesiastical dignitaries in England and Wales, and of the chief officers in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, from the earliest time to the year MDCCXV. Compiled by John Le Neve, corrected and continued from MDCCXV to the present time, by T. Duffus Hardy*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1854), Print.

*Illust*.: John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, 8 vols (London, 1817–58), Print.

Kuist: James M. Kuist, *The Nichols File of* The Gentleman's Magazine*: Attributions of Authorship and Other Documentation in Editorial Papers at the Folger Library* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), Print.

*Lit. Anec*.: John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, 9 vols (London, 1812–15), Print.

Lloyd: Charles Lloyd, trans., *The Epistles of Horace; translated into English Verse* (Birmingham, 1812), Print.

*Oxford DNB Online*: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Online)*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew *et al*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com (accessed 20 Dec. 2019).

Radcliffe: David Hill Radcliffe, *Spenser and the Tradition: English Poetry 1579-1830: A Gathering of Texts, Biography, and Criticism compiled by David Hill Radcliffe, Virginia Tech* (electronic database), http://spenserians.cath.vt.edu (accessed 20 Dec. 2019).