

John Bugg, ed., *The Joseph Johnson Letterbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. 186. £65. ISBN 9780199644247.

Although Gerald P. Tyson's ground-breaking biography of the famous Romantic-era bookseller and publisher, Joseph Johnson, was first published in 1979, it wasn't until 1994 that the sale of a manuscript copy of the 'Joseph Johnson Letterbook' brought a selection of the publisher's correspondence into the reach of contemporary scholars. Now held at the Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle at the New York Public Library, the 'Letterbook' covers the period from 1794 until 1809, a tumultuous time in Johnson's life during which he spent the best part of a year in prison following his famous conviction for sedition. While the manuscript edition of the 'Letterbook' offers an engaging view into the life and times of its author, John Bugg's new edition, *The Joseph Johnson Letterbook*, provides the fullest collection of Johnson's correspondence to date. Beginning with letters from 1766, Bugg's edition expands the 'Letterbook' to include previously unpublished material from several sources. Providing clean, well-annotated versions of Johnson's letters, Bugg's edition also offers its readers a useful glossary of correspondents, as well as a deeply-researched and informative biography of Johnson in its introduction.

Bookseller, editor and co-founder of the *Analytical Review*, Johnson, in the words of Bugg, has come to be 'something of a folk hero in Romantic-era critical discourse' (lxii), with his list of politically engaged publications being viewed by many scholars as representative of his radical outlook. Within the pages of *The Joseph Johnson Letterbook*, however, Bugg's selection of letters offers a more nuanced view of Johnson as both an international bookseller and a politically engaged man who fell victim to Pitt's repressive ministry. Over the forty years of correspondence documented within his new edition, Bugg identifies five key recurring themes throughout Johnson's letters including: 'the business of the book trade, scientific publishing, women's writing, the American book trade, and the contemporary political scene' (xxvii). With *The Joseph Johnson Letterbook* covering such a broad range of issues, it perhaps goes without saying that Bugg's new edition could be of potential benefit to scholarship across a number of fields. For those interested in print culture, Johnson's often acerbic letters in which he 'chased bad accounts, alternately lauded and chastised his writers, and troubled over the relative quality of paper stock in London, Edinburgh and New York' (lxii) offer a valuable insight into the competitive publishing industry of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. With Johnson's letters documenting the publisher's substantive feedback to his writers, the Bugg edition also provides an important account of the tastes of the British reading public.

Just as twenty-first century publishers are increasingly attempting to bring science to a general readership, Johnson's letters offer advice about the most effective ways to communicate scientific knowledge to a broad audience. In one letter to the eminent physician Erasmus Darwin, for instance, Johnson at once praises the botanical research of Darwin's friend Maria Elizabeth Jackson, but advises that the work lacks the kind of 'amusing manner [which] interest[s] children or young people' (19). With Johnson's list of scientific publications including the works not only of Erasmus Darwin and M.E. Jackson, but also a number of other eminent scientists including Humphrey Davy and Thomas Beddoes, Bugg's edition makes clear Johnson's position at 'the vanguard of scientific developments' (xli) throughout the Georgian period.

As well Johnson's correspondence representing his business acumen, the broad chronological range of Bugg's edition also spans a particularly turbulent period in British history, with the American and French Revolutions featuring prominently in Johnson's missives. Trading with American booksellers, Johnson, as Bugg makes clear in his introduction, was especially active in publishing works related to the American Revolution

from such writers as Richard Price, Joshua Tomlin and Samuel Adams. It was such an engagement with revolutionary writings, in fact, which led to Johnson's imprisonment in 1799. As well as offering a selection of Johnson's letters composed during this period of imprisonment, *The Joseph Johnson Letterbook* also provides useful supplementary materials regarding popular opinion on Johnson's conviction.

For many, however, the Bugg edition's special emphasis on Johnson's role in publishing women writers will be the most informative element of this important new volume. Developing our understandings of Johnson's relationship with Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Joseph Johnson Letterbook* also highlights the ambivalent position occupied by women in the literary sphere, with Johnson often providing women writers with well-intentioned feedback about societal opinions on the appropriate boundaries of women's publishing. With the sheer breadth of Johnson's correspondence offering Bugg's readers insights into so many of the key political and social issues of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this new edition will also provide scholars with an invaluable opportunity to evaluate and question how we are to understand the complexities of radical thought and publishing during the Romantic period.

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