

Burns, Milton, Lincoln: An Unlikely Trio

WILLIAM BUTTS

SUDDUTH, Elizabeth A. (compiler). *The G. Ross Roy Collection of Robert Burns: An Illustrated Catalogue.* Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009. Small 4to. Clothbound, dust jacket. xx, 456pp. Illustrations. **\$59.95.**

WICKENHEISER, Robert J. *The Robert J. Wickenheiser Collection of John Milton at the University of South Carolina: A Descriptive Account with Illustrations.* Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2008. 4to. Full leatherette. xvi, 839pp. Illustrations. **\$90.00.**

LEROY, David H. *Mr. Lincoln's Book: Publishing the Lincoln-Douglas Debates—With a Census of Signed Copies.* Oak Knoll Press and Abraham Lincoln Book Shop: New Castle and Chicago, 2009. Small 4to. Clothbound, dust jacket. xxxiv, 194pp. Illustrations, CD-ROM supplement. **\$49.95.**

What do Robert Burns, John Milton and Abraham Lincoln have in common? New books about each of interest to autograph collectors, of course! (All right, there's strong evidence from Robert Todd Lincoln and others that Lincoln was quite fond of both Burns and Milton, but that's beside the point.)

Funny how a choice new title for autograph collectors should cross my desk just when Robert Burns has been on my mind.

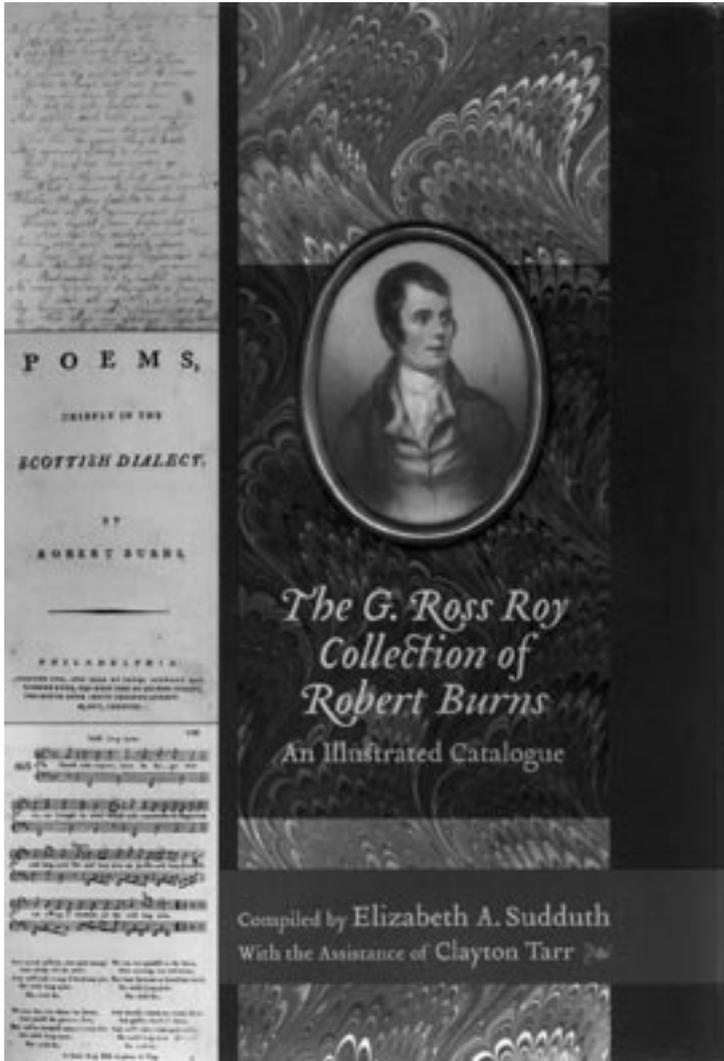
I'd recently been surprised to discover an achingly sad and sweet "new" arrangement of "Auld Lang Syne"—turns out what I assumed was a daring new melody for this mouldie oldie was the original melody to which it was sung, a poignant ballad far superior to the upbeat tune people stumble through each New Year's.

Supposedly retired academician and Burns collector extraordinary G. Ross Roy introduces his five thousand plus item collection (donated to University of South Carolina's Thomas Cooper Library—lucky them!). It's a remarkable testament to one collector's devotion to gathering the manuscripts, books, sheet music and memorabilia of Scotland's beloved national poet (1759-96). He began when he inherited his grandfather's collection in 1958, then selling off its 200 duplicate titles to a university and reinvesting the proceeds in more Burnsiana—and so began the snowball. In 1964, with an exhaustive Burns bibliography just published, "I was able to check on which editions I had and, more important, which I did not have. For more than four decades, I have been on a chase to obtain a copy of every volume listed...."

As I've harped before in this column, the publication of a first-rate author bibliography (or, in this case, specific collection catalogues) should be an event worth the notice of autograph collectors. Any bibliography or collection catalogue is primarily an organized list and detailed description of books and printed material—but any great one invariably includes a share of autograph material. Roy is certainly no exception. "While I did not set out to collect Burns manuscripts," he admits, "fate has determined that a few have ended up in my possession.... I had inherited some excise lines in Burns's hand from my grandfather, but the first manuscripts I bought were the two Sylvander letters to Clarinda, including the one with the famous teardrop statement."

As with any advanced specialist collector, naturally Roy has a wee tale or three to tell:

Two interesting letters came up for sale while I was working on my edition of the poet's letters. They were unknown, so I requested permission from the auction house that was handling the sale to copy them, but I was refused.... To my surprise they did not meet the reserve, so... by adding a good sum to the reserve [I] was able to take possession of them.



I obtained another letter, to Burns's friend Robert Cleghorn, enclosing a proof sheet of his poem "The Whistle," in a roundabout way. A keen collector of Walt Whitman learned that I had postcards from Whitman to John Burroughs, and he wrote to me asking if I would sell them. I replied that I was not interested in selling them, but if he could find an important Burns letter, I would exchange. He was obviously well connected: he soon offered me the letter, and the swap was agreed.

The “Manuscripts and Typescripts” section that opens *The G. Ross Roy Collection of Robert Burns* is modest but impressive, and precedes the large section of books, printed material and sheet music that forms the bulk of this volume. A number of fine Burns letters and holograph poems appear, several illustrated. There are also letters from Burns coevils or with good Burns content, from Burns’s day up through the 1970s. Here too are several volumes from Burn’s personal library with his ownership signature or gift inscriptions.

What ensues are 223 pages of primary Burns books. These range from a first edition of the 1786 *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, Burns’s first book, to the 2007 Alfred A. Knopf edition of *Burns: Poems*—with plenty of entries for just about each of the 221 years between these. A full bibliographical description for each is included. Of course a smattering of these are signed and/or inscribed by their editors, translators and others associated with the book—though few of these autograph additions happen to be illustrated.

If a lovely new reference volume such as *The G. Ross Roy Collection of Robert Burns* can’t transform some Burns buffs into Burns collectors—convincing autograph folks to branch out into rare Burns first editions or bibliophiles to consider the ultra-spendy autograph material—nothing can.

The Milton Collection

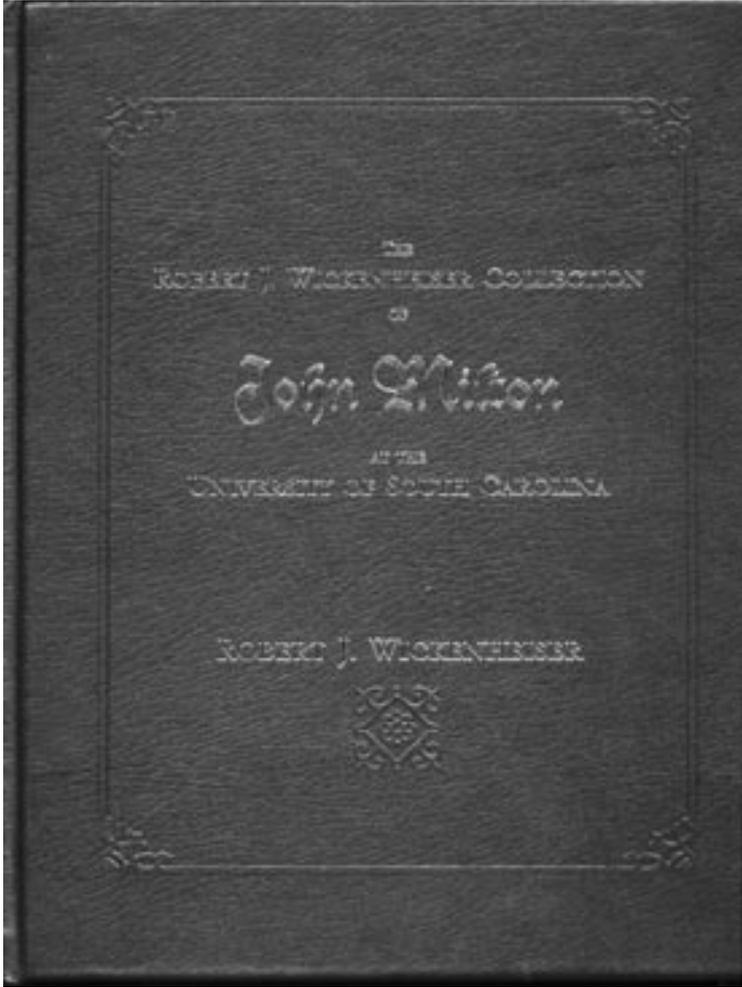
The Thomas Cooper Library must be doing something incredibly right, for another new volume profiles another massive high-profile collection they’ve acquired. *The Robert J. Wickenheiser Collection of John Milton at the University of South Carolina: A Descriptive Account with Illustrations* is in some ways a clone of the G. Ross Roy volume. It too is a monument to one collector’s decades-long dedication to a long-dead English author—in Milton’s case “over 6,000 books and Milton-related items in total, with some 3,450 editions and some 800 Miltoniana from all centuries.”

But Burns, a flamboyant, colorful 18th century poet who penned sometimes-bawdy poems and songs and died tragically at the young age of 37, remains a far easier “sell” to the public and to collectors than a 17th century poet who penned ponderous and difficult works such as *Paradise Lost* and died blind at age 66. From the autograph perspective, Burns and Milton are

both rarified commodities, up where the air is pretty thin. The slightest scratch in Burns's hand will fetch thousands (and a great many of them at that!), while Milton autograph material is virtually unattainable at any price—on the rare occasion when anything in Milton's hand comes on the market, it would require mighty deep pockets to play that game. One has to be content with, say, association and presentation copies and related autograph material from those in the centuries since who've compiled, edited, illustrated or in some other way been connected to Milton's work.

Wickenheiser's lengthy introduction to this volume is itself worth the price of admission: A delightful essay chronicles the indefatigable Wickenheiser's boundless passion for Milton and his growth as a collector. "This is a book about a collection put together based on a deep-seated affection for the poet John Milton and a love of books," he remarks. "It is a descriptive bibliography of an extensive collection of Milton editions and Miltoniana gathered together over thirty-five years. Wickenheiser's journey from a "perennially broke (what graduate student is not!)" novice in Minnesota in the 1960s to a habitu  of the best antiquarian bookshops New York and then London had to offer is a real treat. Seldom do collection catalogues include such a detailed account of the collector's odyssey. Wickenheiser's education—a journey from absolute amateur to erudite expert—holds lessons for any reader that takes it to heart, whether book or autograph collector. He doesn't hold back in discussing his evolving friendships with dealers far and wide, the advantages of collecting a single author ("enormously rewarding... taking me into fields I never expected"), learning to gauge true rarity ("determined by a great many factors, even though it is commonly believed that a book has to be old in order to be rare or scarce"), the difficulties of condition ("some copies were really too scarce or even rare to pass up, even though the condition was poor"), the issue of duplicates ("There is no such thing as a duplicate!... Buying a second or third copy or occasionally more copies... because the book is special, an extra-illustrated copy").

Of the many special presentation copies that pepper his collection, Wickenheiser picks out a handful for special mention. To mention just two, for many are distinguished copies with associations that a hardcore Miltonist would recognize, there's



Edward Gibbons's copy of the 1753 *Works of John Milton* with his armorial bookplate in each volume, and poet Siegfried Sassoon's copy of the 1765 edition of *Paradise Lost*. Wickenheiser's intro gets this hefty off to an entertaining start.

The 2,767 meticulously described entries on almost 650 pages that comprise the "Descriptive Listing of Editions" represents the cream of Wickenheiser's crop—primary Milton material. Separate chapters are devoted to Milton-related titles (52 from

the 17th century, 70 from the 18th century, 120 from the 19th century and 110 from the 20th century), Milton in anthologies (44 entries), an exceptional chapter highlighting “Original Drawings, Illustrations, Engravings, and Other” (31 entries), a selection of “Ephemera and Objets d’Art” and other oddities rounding out this mammoth mountain of Milton. A generous selection of high-quality illustrations are sprinkled throughout.

Each catalogue entry here is far more detailed and meticulous than those in the Burns collection. As with the G. Ross Roy volume, here too the autograph aficionado will benefit and perhaps gain inspiration from simply randomly flipping through its handsomely-set pages. Among this abundance of bibliographically significant (not to mention beautiful) editions you’ll find autograph gems. Here’s the 1755 three-volume *Le Paradis Perdu de Milton*, inscribed by the translator Louis Racine (son of famed dramatist Jean Racine).... William Hog’s 1690 translation of Milton’s poetical works bears a nice presentation inscription from Hog to the Marquess of Tweeddale in Latin.... Robert Bridges’ 1921 *Milton’s Prosody* inscribed by him to John Masefield.... Elbert Hubbard’s 1900 *Little Journeys to the Homes of English Authors: John Milton*, limited and (supposedly) signed by Hubbard.... a bizarre early full handwritten transcript of *Paradise Lost* made by a Mrs. Katherine Howard in 1733....

But of course these samples don’t scratch the surface of the Wickenheiser collection, a Milton extravaganza so rich, so provocative, that any perusers with a feel for literature and fondness for the printed word is liable to find themselves beginning their own quest for Miltoniana.

A Lincoln Book

The number 42 reverberates magically in the book collecting world, for it represents the number of text lines per page in the legendary circa 1450 Gutenberg Bible, the first book printed using moveable type. Now the number 42 may also reverberate magically in the autograph world, too, for it represents the number of known surviving signed copies of the 1860 volume *Political Debates Between Hon. Abraham Lincoln and Hon. Stephen A. Douglas in the Celebrated Campaign of 1858*—thanks to David H. Leroy, author of *Mr. Lincoln’s Book: Publishing the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*. Though there exist roughly equal quantities of each (48

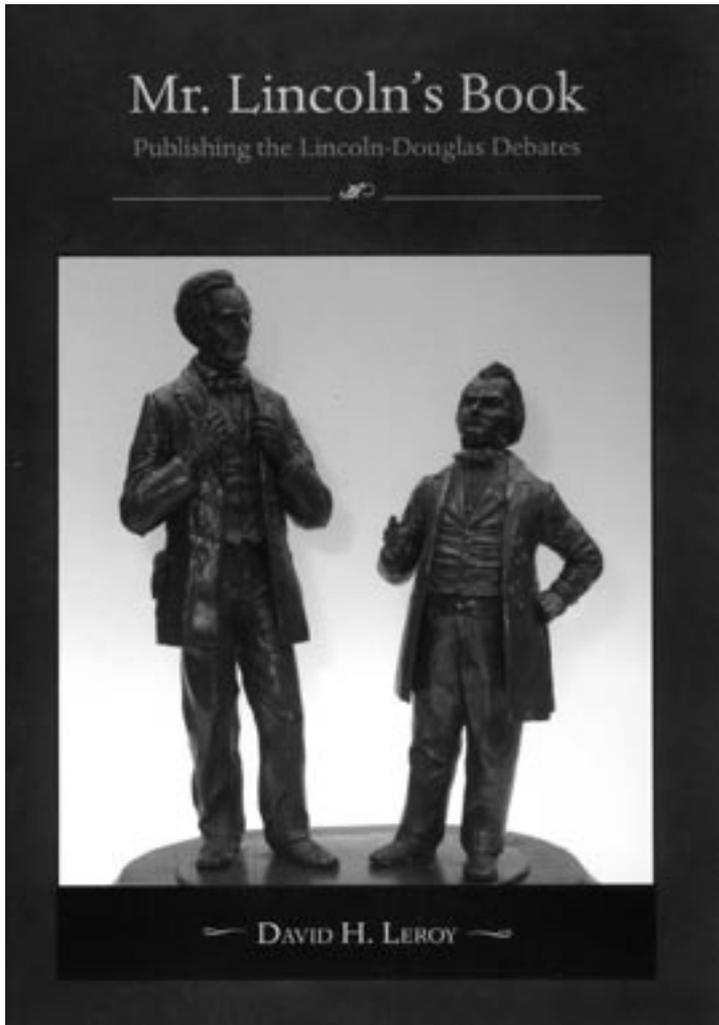
Gutenberg Bibles survive, only 21 complete), there the parallel ends, for while on the rare occasion a Gutenberg Bible enters the market it sells for many millions of dollars, a signed Lincoln-Douglas debates barely breaks six digits.

One of the Holy Grails in the world of Lincolniana (or, as one collector memorably malaproped to me, “Lincoln mania”) is a signed copy of the book version of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. It was 55 years ago, in the pages of this very publication, that the first-ever attempt at a census of those signed copies appeared. “Lincoln Autographed Debates” by the renowned Lincoln historian Harry E. Pratt filled just eight pages of the Summer 1954 issue of *Manuscripts* and itemizes 18 known authentic copies.

Our colleague Dan Weinberg, proprietor of Chicago’s famed Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, introduces this exciting new addition to the Lincoln literature. He deserves the gratitude of autograph collectors and Lincoln aficionados everywhere for co-publishing this important study with Oak Knoll Press.

The bulk of *Mr. Lincoln’s Book* consists of Leroy’s well-researched, well-written exploration of the circumstances surrounding the publication of the debates in book form. He recaps Lincoln’s original suggestion to Douglas that they debate, illustrating their correspondence. He elaborates at length the effort and expense Lincoln undertook to preserve newspaper copies of the texts—neatly mounted in two-column format in a large blank ledger book—his contacts with various publishers, concern with production aspects and other details. Leroy also duly notes Lincoln’s care in editing the texts in such a way that the book did not come across as a biased political endorsement of either candidate. “The only editing which Lincoln did,” he notes, “was to strike the crowd participation acts of ‘cheers’ or ‘laughter,’ in both candidates’ reported remarks, leaving solely the words of the debaters to vie for the readers’ attention. In a few places, injections or interruptions by the candidates or others also are deleted. However, Lincoln made no effort to improve his own readability or to disadvantage Douglas’s eloquence.”

Leroy also places this in context by demonstrating that this was truly Lincoln’s only real attempt at seeing a text through the publishing process—showing that other books appearing under his name are merely compilations of a couple of brief biographical statements he penned, usually combined with let-



ters and speeches he gave. Leroy leaves no shadow of doubt that the debates were Lincoln's sole foray into authorship. The fact that he signed and presented a goodly number of the 100 author copies he received gratis is further evidence of his pride of accomplishment.

The closing chapter, "A Census of All Known Signed Copies of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates," begins by describing the eight

different printings, their distinguishing points, and sales figures that were exceptional for their day—roughly 50,000 copies sold in relatively short order. As for the copies signed by Lincoln, Leroy first refutes the common notion that all copies are signed in pencil. “Only four known inscriptions are in ink,” he points out. “All of the other autographed copies are written in pencil”—and for good reason, which Leroy spells out. “It is surmised, from the look of the known ink copies, that because the paper of the end pages was too soft and porous to take a fountain pen’s writing without ‘feathering,’ Lincoln switched to and used a pencil to inscribe most copies. In many cases, the pencil writing has become somewhat faint.” And indeed, if you’ve ever handled a copy of the *Debates*, you’ll be familiar with those soft endpapers, which are unsized, unlike pages that are to be printed upon (“sizing” means treating paper with rosin or other chemicals to make a harder surface that ink rests upon). Leroy errs in stating “fountain pen”—I believe Lincoln used a steel-nibbed dip pen, fountain pens being crude and unreliable at that time—but his point about feathering is well taken.

The 42-copy census that follows is a remarkable bit of sleuthing and compilation. A complete transcript of every inscription is given, together with whatever is known about the recipient, the history of that particular copy, and its subsequent ownership on up through the present. Fifteen of these are illustrated. He also lists some signed copies known to exist (mentioned in historical accounts) whose whereabouts have never been ascertained. Leroy also notes that “Additional census copies will without doubt be discovered in coming years.”

We can only hope!

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The Manuscript Society Maass Research Grant For 2010-2011

The Manuscript Society, an international organization of persons and institutions devoted to the collection, preservation, use and enjoyment of autographs and manuscripts, is pleased to again announce the availability of a grant to support an individual's expenses related directly to research using original manuscripts. The grant is named in memory of humanitarian, benefactor and legendary collector Richard Maass, one of the founders of the Manuscript Society. Applicants must be pursuing a graduate degree at an accredited College or University that holds institutional membership in The Manuscript Society and be formally sponsored by that institutional member.

Purpose: The Manuscript Society was founded in 1948 to promote the collection, preservation and use of manuscripts. To this end, the Society has annually awarded up to two scholarships to institutions in cities hosting its annual meeting. This grant program, however, was established to broaden the Society's efforts to encourage research based on original manuscripts.

Requirements: Applicants must hold the bachelor's degree and be formally enrolled in an accredited College or University in an advanced degree program, with preference given to doctoral students. Applicants must demonstrate that their research involves considerable work with original manuscript material. The Grant is to be used solely for research purposes, e.g., travel to manuscript repositories, photocopy expenses, user fees, and may not be used for tuition expenses.

Application Procedures: Applicants must send a letter of application, a résumé, and a précis of their research proposal with a proposed budget to:

George L. Vogt, Executive Director,
Oregon Historical Society,
1200 SW Park Ave., Portland, OR 97225
george.vogt@ohs.org

The précis should not exceed three typed pages, double-spaced. In addition, applicants should arrange to have at least two but not more than three letters of recommendation sent to the Scholarship Committee. One of these reference letters should be from the applicant's thesis or dissertation advisor. Applications received after May 15, 2010 cannot be assured of consideration. All applicants will be notified of the Committee's decision shortly after June 1, 2010

The Grant: The Grant is \$5,000 for academic year 2010-2011. It is not renewable. The Grant is made to the recipient's sponsoring institution to be disbursed by that institution to the recipient on condition that the full Grant is made available to the recipient for the purpose stated. At the conclusion of the research project the recipient of the Grant agrees to submit a detailed report to the Scholarship Committee on the research undertaken with the assistance of the grant and to recognize the Manuscript Society's support in any publication that results from this research.