Literary London: Imagining the City
Drs. Christopher and Hope Hodgkins
Wednesday, April 5
Eighteenth Century & Romantic London
London 1688--Glorious Revolution
St. Paul’s Cathedral, 1675-1711

by Sir Christopher Wren
St. Paul’s Dome
Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich (Originally Royal Hospital for Seamen, now National Maritime Museum), 1696-1712, by Sir Christopher Wren
National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, from Flamsteed Hill
Alexander Pope (1688-1744) in 1719
Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (1712)
Canto 1
A SUBLIMELY SILLY MOCK-HEROIC POEM PARODYING...
Paradise Lost (1674)
by John Milton
Based on a Hair-Trimming Incident...
...involving Arabella Fermor...
(alias Belinda)
...some flying Sylphs...
...and the snip heard 'round the world
...taking place west of London (1720 map)...

near Twickenham where Pope would soon build his grotto (1720)
...recently reopened to visitors
While Pope retired to the country, young Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) arrived in London from Lichfield...
...which he found appealing and appalling as “the new Rome”...
So in 1738 he published a satire in the style of the 2nd Century Roman poet Juvenal...
...mocking the capital’s greed, lust, crime, and imperial excess...
...nevertheless, settling into a tall house in Gough Square in the Strand...
...where soon after Pope’s death in 1744...
...Johnson began work on his huge *Dictionary of the English Language*...published 1755
Some sample definitions:

LEXICO’ GRAPHER, $n$.
A writer of dictionaries; a harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the signification, of words.

OATS, $n$.
A grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.
PA’ TRON, n.
One who countenances, supports, or protects. Commonly, a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery.

PEN’ SION, n.
An allowance given to anyone without an equivalent. In England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country.
He worked largely alone in his 4th-floor Dictionary Room...
...while in his parlor below befriending the greatest people of his time...
Including novelist Oliver Goldsmith and actor David Garrick...
Portraitist Joshua Reynolds...

...and Johnson’s own biographer James Boswell
Johnson wrote the *Lives of the English Poets* and the great Preface to *Shakespeare*...

**PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE.**

Published in the Year 1763.

**THAT praises are without reason lavished on the dead, and that the honours due only to excellence are paid to antiquity, is a complaint likely to be always continued by those, who, being able to add nothing to truth, hope for eminence from the heresies of paradox; or those, who, being forced by disappointment upon consolatory expediency, are willing to hope from posterity what the present age refuses, and flatter themselves that the regard, which is yet denied by envy, will be at last bestowed by time.**

Antiquity, like every other quality that attracts the notice of mankind, has undoubtedly votaries that reverence it, nor from reason, but from prejudice. Some seem to admire indifferently whatever has been long preferred, without considering that time has sometimes co-operated with chance; all perhaps are more willing to honour past
...and though Johnson was London’s harshest critic, he loved the city...
While his demeanor might look severe...
...his morality is loaded with humor...

No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned... a man in a jail has more room, better food, and commonly better company.

Samuel Johnson
English writer
1709-1784
...suffering no fools...

“Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.”

- Samuel Johnson
...yet touched by Christian compassion.

The **true measure of a man** is how he **treats someone** who can do him absolutely no good.

— *Samuel Johnson*
Try to forget these once you’ve heard them:

- “The wise man applauds he who he thinks most virtuous; the rest of the world applauds the wealthy.”
- “Prejudice, not being founded on reason, cannot be removed by argument.”
- “Fraud and falsehood only dread examination. Truth invites it.”
- “Bachelors have consciences, married men have wives.”
- Of second marriages: “The triumph of hope over experience.”
- Editing: “Your manuscript is both good and original, but the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good.”
- “Almost every man wastes part of his life attempting to display qualities which he does not possess.”
- “The majority have no other reason for their opinions than that they are the fashion.”
- “A horse that can count to ten is a remarkable horse, not a remarkable mathematician.”
- “When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.”
- “A man seldom thinks with more earnestness of anything than he does of his dinner.”
- Spoken of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: “No one wished it longer.”
- To Boswell on an unnamed skeptic: “But if he does really think that there is no distinction between virtue and vice, why, Sir, when he leaves our houses, let us count our spoons.”
An arch-Tory, he loathed slavery...

- When given an honorary degree at Oxford, he proposed this toast:
  - “Here's to the next insurrection of the Negroes in the West Indies.”

- And in a 1775 tract against the Patriot Revolutionaries in America, he asked:
  - “How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?”
Widowed and childless, he adopted tradesman Francis Barber as his son and heir...
...and Johnson admired the 1772 decision of Lord Chief Justice William Murray...
...owner of Kenwood House in Hampstead Heath...
...and adoptive father of Dido Elizabeth Belle Lindsay (l.), here with Murray’s niece (and Dido’s cousin) Elizabeth...
...and in the film "Belle" (2013)
Justice Murray decided the Somerset Case codifying long-standing common-law prohibition of slavery in England...
...and when Boswell sought Johnson’s advice in a similar Scottish “man-stealing” case in 1778...
Johnson wrote “A Brief to Free a Slave”:

- It must be agreed that in most ages many countries have had part of their inhabitants in a state of slavery; yet it may be doubted whether slavery can ever be supposed the natural condition of man. It is impossible not to conceive that men in their original state were equal; and very difficult to imagine how one would be subjected to another but by violent compulsion. An individual may, indeed, forfeit his liberty by a crime; but he cannot by that crime forfeit the liberty of his children. What is true of a criminal seems true likewise of a captive. A man may accept life from a conquering enemy on condition of perpetual servitude; but it is very doubtful whether he can entail that servitude on his descendants; for no man can stipulate without commission for another. The condition which he himself accepts, his son or grandson perhaps would have rejected…
The laws of Jamaica afford a Negro no redress. His colour is considered as a sufficient testimony against him. It is to be lamented that moral right should ever give way to political convenience. But if temptations of interest are sometimes too strong for human virtue, let us at least retain a virtue where there is no temptation to quit it. In the present case there is apparent right on one side, and no convenience on the other. Inhabitants of this island can neither gain riches nor power by taking away the liberty of any part of the human species. The sum of the argument is this:—No man is by nature the property of another: The defendant is, therefore, by nature free: The rights of nature must be some way forfeited before they can be justly taken away: That the defendant has by any act forfeited the rights of nature we require to be proved; and if no proof of such forfeiture can be given, we doubt not but the justice of the court will declare him free.
...and the man in question, Joseph Knight, went free.
Johnson had met young James Boswell in 1763...
...and for the next 21 years Boswell followed, cajoled, provoked, and recorded Johnson’s conversation...
produc[ing what many call the greatest biography ever written...
...including this memorable advice:

• “My dear friend, clear your mind of cant. You may talk as other people do. You may say to a man, ‘Sir, I am your most humble servant.’ You are not his most humble servant. You may say, ‘These are sad times; it is a melancholy thing to be reserved to such times.’ You don’t mind the times. You tell a man, ‘I am sorry you had such bad weather the last day of your journey, and were so much wet.’ You don’t care six-pence whether he was wet or dry. You may talk in this manner; it is a mode of talking in Society: but don’t think foolishly.”
...and converted back into cant by the internet...
If Johnson’s portrait of London life was neoclassical, witty, yet grave...
...William Blake’s (1757-1827)...

[Image of William Blake]
...was ecstatic...
...obsessive...
...and apocalyptic...
...seeking to fuse London with the New Jerusalem—but fearing that London was becoming Babylon instead.
Blake also fused image and word to stunning effect:
THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry "'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved, so I said,
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.
LONDON

I wander thro' each chartered street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe
In every cry of every Man
In every Infant's cry of fear
In every voice: in every ban.
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blacking Church appals,
And the hapless Soldier's sigh,
Rung in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blows the new-born Infant's tear
And Wights with plagues the Marriage hearse
LONDON

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
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But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse
The Stolen and Perverted Writings of Homer & Ovid of Plato & Cicero, which old Men ought to consume; are set up by armies to chase the Sublime of the Bible, but what they do, to Broach; all will be set right. For these Grand Works of the wise, mature, and discreetly inspired Men, will hold their proper rank; & the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration. Shakespeare & Milton, were both buried by the General Mulberry. & election from the sly Greek & Roman slaves of the Sword. Are those up New-Angle avow your forefathers against the ignorant Farthings, & we have hidden ins the Camp, the Court, & the University, who would it they could, for ever expose Men of & promote Corrected, War, Painters, & you & call, "Soldiers"! Architects. Judge not the fashionable fools to depress your country by the prices they pretend to give for contemptible works of the expensive authors books that they make of such works, believe God to his grace that there is a class of Men whose whole delight is in Destroying. We do not want either Greek or Roman Models. If we are but true to our own Constitution, these Worlds of Eternity in which we shall live for ever, in Jesus our Lord.

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green:
And was the Holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
Bring me my Arrows of desire;
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold;
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand;
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green & pleasant Land

Would to God that all the Lords' people were Prophets Numbers XI.6
JERUSALEM

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon Englands mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On Englands pleasant pastures seen!

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Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
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Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In Englands green & pleasant Land.
Here lies
WILLIAM
BLAKE
1757-1827
Poet Artist
Prophet
I give you the end
of a golden string
Only wind it
into a ball
It will lead you in
at Heavens gate
Built in
Jerusalems wall
William Wordsworth, 1770-1850
London and Westminster, 1800
“Westminster Bridge” by Joseph Farrington 1789

“Earth has not any thing to show more fair. . . .”
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Westminster Bridge today
General Toussaint Louverture
(1743-1803)
To Toussaint L'Ouverture

Toussaint – the most unhappy of men! – Whether the rural milkmaid by her cow Sing in thy hearing, or thou liest now Alone in some deep dungeon’s earless den, Oh miserable Chieftain, where and when Wilt thou find patience? Yet die not! Do thou Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow; Though fallen thyself, never to rise again, Live, and take comfort! Thou hast left behind Powers that will work for thee – air, earth, and skies There’s not a breathing of the common wind That will forget thee! Thou hast great allies: Thy friends are exultations, agonies, And love, and man’s unconquerable mind.

William Wordsworth (1802, 1803)
John Keats (1795-1821):

“With a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration.”
Wentworth Place (Keats House), Hampstead
From Parliament Hill, Hampstead Heath
Frances (Fanny) Brawne Linden (1800-1865); John Keats
Keats’s bedroom, Wentworth Place
Keats on his deathbed in Rome
(Joseph Severn sketch)
“Here lies one whose name was writ in water.”
Joseph Severn, “John Keats at Wentworth Place”

Sehnsucht
The Elgin Marbles from the Parthenon, British Museum
On Seeing the Elgin Marbles

My spirit is too weak—mortality
Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
And each imagined pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.
Yet ’tis a gentle luxury to weep
That I have not the cloudy winds to keep
Fresh for the opening of the morning’s eye.
Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
Bring round the heart an undescribable feud;
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
Wasting of old time—with a billowy main—
A sun—a shadow of a magnitude.

John Keats (1817)
Keats House Garden
Joseph Severn, “John Keats at Wentworth Place”

Sehnsucht
Ode to the Nightingale. 1819.

My heart aches and a drowsy sickness pains
My sense, as tho' of hemlock I had drunk,
Prompted some dull operation to the brain.
One minute past, and both words sank;
'Is not that sound of the happy lot,
But being too happy in their happiness
That they, lighteningorgas of the trees
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Sweetest of summers in full throstalease.

O, for a draught of vintage, that has been
Cool'd a long age in the deep delved earth,
Tasting of Flood, and the country green,
Planted, and Provencal song, and sensual mist.
O, for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the nectar and Balm of Hesperus,
With heady, bubbling wine, dancing in the bowl.
The purple Island, mouth
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade into the forest dim.
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
   And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
   What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
   Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
   Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies.
   Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
   Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
   Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.
I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
   Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
   Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
   White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
       Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
   The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
   The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
   I have been half in love with easeful Death,
   *         *
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
   To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
   While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
   In such an ecstasy!
“Sehnsucht”

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn….