

**Jackson, William** (1730–1803), musician, painter, and author, was born in Exeter, Devon, on 28 May 1730, the son of an Exeter grocer, also named William Jackson, who squandered his 'little Fortune' (W. Jackson, *Short Sketch*, 58), became a clerk in the counting-house of Thomas Heath, and was later master of the city workhouse. Though he had nothing to bequeath his son, Jackson's father took care with his education. Jackson studied classics from the age of seven and in the following year took up drawing, copying illustrations from George Bickham's *Musical Entertainer* (1737–8) and topographical etchings by Wenceslaus Hollar. His musical studies began about 1742 in the choir at Exeter Cathedral, where the organist (from 1741 to 1753) was John Silvester. After three years he was sent to London to study with John Travers (1703?–1758), organist at the Chapel Royal and himself a pupil of John Christopher Pepusch. During this period Jackson made his first attempts at composition and came into contact with the Academy of Ancient Music (founded by Pepusch and others about 1726). Jackson remembered how he 'squeezed in' (*ibid.*, 60) among the choir for rehearsals of *Judas Maccabaeus* (first performed at Covent Garden on 1 April 1747) and so became acquainted with Handel.

Lack of funds forced Jackson to return to Exeter about 1748. There, while pursuing his studies in a variety of subjects, he began to earn his living as a musician. A year later he found himself a few pounds in debt, but thereafter 'never wanted money in his life' (Rogers, 125). In 1753 he married Mary Bartlett, a milliner, 'a sober, virtuous, good Woman, but as totally unfit for her Husband as he was for Her' (W. Jackson, *Short Sketch*, 62).

1755 saw the publication of Jackson's *Twelve Songs* op. 1; this was followed about 1757 by the first of only two published instrumental works, *Six Sonatas* op. 2. Jackson was passionately committed to national traditions of melody and to vocal settings that eschewed 'descriptive word-painting' in favour of an emphasis on the 'inherent sentiment' of a text (McGrady, 725). Accordingly, secular and sacred vocal works comprise the largest part of his output. His *Elegies* op. 3 of 1760, which were widely appreciated and brought some financial success, were probably written for the series of Bath concerts promoted by Thomas Linley the elder; his subsequent collections of songs include many pieces first heard in Bath. Jackson later recalled that his *Ode to Fancy* op. 8 (c.1770), an oratorio setting of Joseph Warton's poem, had its only satisfactory performance in the city with Elizabeth Linley as solo soprano. His first dramatic work, a setting of John Milton's 'Lycidas' composed to commemorate the death of Edward, duke of York, George III's brother, was performed at Covent Garden and Bath in November 1767. A very successful comic opera, *The Lord of the Manor* op. 12, with a libretto by General John Burgoyne (1722–1792), was produced by Richard Brinsley Sheridan at Drury Lane in December 1780.

Jackson's first attempts at painting landscapes in oil were made about 1757. Though these were later taken for works of Richard Wilson, Jackson lamented a deficiency in the techniques of painting which he said he did not correct until he had reached the advanced age of seventy. His earliest instruction came from Samuel Collins (*d.* 1768), the Bath miniaturist, through whom he was introduced to Thomas Gainsborough, probably in 1763. Gainsborough exhibited Jackson's portrait at the Royal Academy in 1770. The intimacy between the two men, nourished by Gainsborough's obsessive love of music, is revealed in the surviving letters to Jackson. This animated and uninhibited correspondence shows Gainsborough receiving help with musical problems and giving Jackson lessons in drawing. About 1770 Jackson's interest developed to the point where he considered taking up painting professionally, and in 1771 he exhibited two paintings at the Royal Academy.

The exchanges about art with Gainsborough doubtless provided an important stimulus for Jackson's projected treatise on landscape painting, one of his many 'fine Designs to be executed' but 'left undone' (W. Jackson, *Short Sketch*, 101). Other literary projects were, however, brought to fruition. The first of his published writings was the preface to his *Elegies* (1760), and it was succeeded by several other prefaces to his musical works, two collections of miscellaneous essays (*Thirty Letters*, which reached its third edition in 1795; *The Four Ages*, 1798), and *Observations on the Present State of Music in London* (1791). *The Royalist*, a historical novel inspired by Defoe that was much admired by Samuel Rogers, remains undiscovered. Jackson had a number of collaborators, among them Oliver Goldsmith, with whom he planned a periodical modelled on *The Spectator*; John Wolcot (Peter Pindar), who began to supply Jackson with lyrics in the late 1760s; and William Kendall, who provided the text for Jackson's *Fairy Fantasies* op. 16 (c.1790). In 1792 Jackson was instrumental in establishing the Society of Gentlemen at Exeter, a forum for literary and philosophical discussion.

Despite Gainsborough's attempts to persuade him to leave his native city in the late 1760s, Jackson continued to live and work in Exeter. His financial situation was greatly eased in October 1777 when he obtained the post of organist at Exeter Cathedral, which he held until his death and which led him to compose a number of sacred vocal works, notably his service in F. In the summer of that year he took a sketching tour through Devon with his son Thomas (1759–1828), a highly accomplished amateur artist and later a diplomat, and the poet John Bampfylde, whose extraordinary musical abilities Jackson described in a preface prepared for a projected edition of Bampfylde's verse. Jackson's only trip outside England was undertaken in the summer of 1785 when he travelled with his lifelong friend James White (whose nephew John White Abbott was himself a gifted amateur painter) through France to Turin, where Thomas Jackson was then chargé d'affaires. The narrative of the trip, accompanied by an interesting set of sketches, forms a substantial part of Jackson's *A Short Sketch of my Own Life*.

Jackson's marriage to Mary Bartlett produced at least eight children, three of whom survived their father: William (1754–1842), who made his fortune as an employee of the United East India Company; Thomas, the diplomat, who died in Vienna; and Mary (c.1760–1808), who married the painter John Downman (1750–1824) little more than a year before her death. Late in life, Jackson's liaison with Jane Bradford,

the daughter of an Exeter clergyman, produced an illegitimate son, later known as William Elmsley QC (1797–1866), who was born in Bristol. Jane Bradford died in childbirth. Elmsley remained in Bristol until, after his father's death, he was taken to Exeter, where he became the adopted son of his half-brother William Jackson and William's wife, Frances, *née* Baring. Jackson died of dropsy on 12 July 1803, in Exeter, and was buried in St Stephen's Church, Exeter. A monument there was commissioned by his daughter Mary and designed by John White Abbott. His wife survived him.

Jackson's posthumous reputation was adversely affected as the result of a quarrel with Charles Burney. The two were apparently on reasonably good terms until 1789–90, when Jackson published a two-part review of Burney's *General History of Music* (*Critical Review*, 68.94–103; 70.618–32). Burney, unused to criticism even of the mildest sort, responded with a vehement attack on Jackson's *Observations on the Present State of Music* (*Monthly Review*, October 1791, 196–202) and was evidently still smarting almost thirty years later when he asserted in his article on Jackson in Abraham Rees's *Cyclopaedia* (1819–20) that any good qualities Jackson might have had were 'strongly alloyed by a mixture of selfishness, arrogance, and an insatiable rage for superiority'. Late twentieth-century scholarship has provided a more balanced assessment of Jackson's character and attested to the unusual range of his interests and achievements.

#### PAUL WILLIAMSON

**Sources** W. Jackson, *A short sketch of my own life and Twenty letters*, ed. A. Asfour and P. Williamson, *Gainsborough's House Review* (1996–7), 39–151 · G. Jackson, 'Studien zur Biographie und zum literarischen Nachlass des William Jackson of Exeter, 1730–1803', *English Miscellany*, 22 (1971), 269–332 · R. McGrady, 'Jackson, William', *New Grove*, 2nd edn · *The letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, ed. J. Hayes (2001) · A. Asfour and P. Williamson, 'Ut pictura poesis: William Jackson and John Bampfylde on the Teign', *Apollo*, 146 (Aug 1997), 37–41 · S. Rogers, commonplace book, UCL, Sharpe MSS 34, 125–7 · R. Lonsdale, *Dr Charles Burney: a literary biography* (1965) · J. Hayes, 'William Jackson of Exeter', *The Connoisseur*, 173 (1970), 17–24 · *DNB* · *IGI* · private information (2004) [David Johnson]

**Archives** RA, letters and papers

**Likenesses** T. Gainsborough, oils, 1770, repro. in Jackson, *Short sketch of my own life* · J. Downman, watercolour, 1779, repro. in Jackson, 'Studien zur Biographie' · mezzotint, pubd 1785 (after J. Downman), BM · J. Keenan, oils, 1800, Devon and Exeter Institution, Exeter · mezzotint, pubd 1818 (after Walker), BM, NPG · J. Walker, aquatint, pubd 1819 (after unknown artist), NPG · T. Gainsborough, oils, Exeter City Museum and Art Gallery

**Wealth at death** £10,000: will, TNA: PRO, PROB 10/3637

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