

THE NEW RAMBLER



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# The New Rambler

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## The Johnson Society of London

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SOME UNPUBLISHED EARLY VERSE OF HENRY FIELDING\*

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This subject in the New Rambler perhaps needs some justification. Not only has Fielding's newly-discovered verse nothing whatever to do with Dr. Johnson, but the Doctor was, as everyone knows, very far from being an admirer of Fielding. He called him "a blockhead" and "a barren rascal", who produced nothing but pictures of "very low life". He classified Fielding's novels as "characters of manners" in order to contrast them with Richardson's more profound "characters of nature", maintaining that one letter of Richardson's showed more "knowledge of the heart" than all Tom Jones.<sup>1</sup>

Happily, however, Johnson did pay Fielding one sincere and spontaneous compliment. He was speaking of the different impressions made on the mind by books read with, and without, inclination. "He told us", says Boswell, "he read Fielding's Amelia through without stopping."<sup>2</sup> This is very like what he told Mrs. Thrale about Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Embassy Letters: that "he never read but one book, which he did not consider as obligatory, through in his whole life (and Lady Mary Wortley's Letters was the book)."<sup>3</sup> This may be exaggerated: he did read two or three other books through. But then perhaps he considered them obligatory. At least in studying Fielding and Lady Mary we are studying two writers whom Johnson read with unusual pleasure. I hope this is justification enough.

The verses which have recently come to light were not read by Johnson. They were read by nobody, or almost nobody, but Fielding's cousin Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Fielding wrote them in his early twenties, and probably later regarded them as excursions down a blind alley, attempts at a kind of writing to which he made little pretence. Almost all the rest of his poetry was published in 1743, when "Laid up in the Gout, with a favourite Child dying in one Bed, and my Wife in a Condition very little better, on another, attended with other Circumstances, which served as very proper Decorations to such a Scene" - in such distresses he scraped together three volumes of Miscellanies in prose and verse, hoping to raise a little desperately-needed money. This "new" poetry could not possibly have been included. All his poems

\* A paper read to the Johnson Society of London on 18 January, 1969. Chairman: Miss Naomi Lewis, B.A.



were what he himself called "Productions of the Heart rather than of the Head";<sup>4</sup> these particular examples violently express the allegiances and enmities of ten or fifteen years before the Miscellanies, since when their writer's views had diametrically changed. But Lady Mary, his first patron, had been entrusted with the manuscripts, and she kept them. They were later bound up into a volume composed of loose papers, mainly verse, among which they have now been recognised for what they are.<sup>5</sup>

Fielding came to London in 1727, when he was twenty years old. His family was well-connected, and his situation perhaps less difficult than that of Johnson, who arrived in the capital ten years after Fielding, with "two-pence half-penny" in his pocket;<sup>6</sup> but Fielding's allowance from his father existed only in theory, and he told Lady Mary that he had no choice but to become "a Hackney Writer or a Hackney Coachman".<sup>7</sup> Again one is reminded of Johnson, who was advised by a London bookseller that he "had better buy a porter's knot" than attempt to live on his "literary labours".<sup>8</sup> The literary field chosen by each young man was that of the stage; but Johnson's classical tragedy Irene was not produced for a dozen years after his arrival in London, while Fielding's comedy of manners, Love in Several Masques, was performed early in 1728. These different results were no doubt partly due to the difference of subject; but Fielding's first success was also a result of the patronage of his cousin Lady Mary.

At this time a society lady of thirty-eight, Lady Mary was famous for her travels, and for championing the new and controversial practice of inoculation. In the words of an anonymous writer in 1728, she was "Renown'd for Wit, Beauty, and Politeness, long admir'd at Court; Author of many pretty Poems scatter'd abroad in Manuscript."<sup>9</sup> She thought most of the Fielding family were fools, but she was evidently quick to recognize an exception. The rapid production of Love in Several Masques was due in part to her influence, and it was quickly published with a grateful and flattering dedication to her.<sup>10</sup>

Fielding, however, was not yet to become a full-time professional playwright. Perhaps an instalment of his allowance had been paid: in any case, a month after the appearance of Love in Several Masques he enrolled as a student at Leyden University.<sup>11</sup> He remained in Holland until the summer of 1729, except for a visit to England during the long

vacation of '28. While he was away, Lady Mary's brilliant reputation was irrecoverably shattered, as her old friendship with Pope exploded into its last phase of bitter enmity. Pope had once praised and courted her in a series of brilliant letters. Now he published first a ballad called "The Capon's Tale", which accused her of "fathering her Lampoons upon her Acquaintance", and then his early version of the Dunciad, which contained innuendoes about a long-past flirtation, suggesting that she had jilted and financially cheated a lover.<sup>12</sup> A pamphlet-war followed, in which Lady Mary's various anonymous defenders unintentionally aggravated the situation. She herself tried her poetic skill against Pope in two fragments, not published till long after her death, in which the Dunciad machinery is reversed, and Pope appears as the favoured son of Dullness;<sup>13</sup> and these fragments are closely related to some of the Fielding verse she kept.

During his long-vacation visit, Fielding had composed several occasional poems which embody compliments to Lady Mary's wit and her eyes.<sup>14</sup> By the time of his final return to England he could no longer ignore the change which had come over her reputation. In his dedication he had pictured her "amid the Importunities of all the polite Admirers and Professors of Wit and Learning ... the Glory of her own Sex, and the Wonder of ours." Now that the admirers had fallen away, and her husband was angered by her knack of attracting adverse publicity, Fielding conceived an ambitious plan for attacking her literary attacker. He intended no less than an epic poem, or rather a mock-epic, modelled both on the ancients whom he loved, and on the Dunciad which he could not help but admire. But the writer of the Dunciad was to be discredited.

The design was never finished, but three parts remain. These are an apparently complete "Canto 2d" and "Canto 3d", following each other in Fielding's bold unmistakable hand and endorsed by Lady Mary with his initials; and also a fragment without a beginning, which was probably part of Canto I. All three pieces are full of Fielding's obliterations and corrections, and read as if he dashed them down with his usual facility. Perhaps he had Lady Mary's collaboration, since her fragments (already referred to) follow the same plan, and one couplet appears in both her verse and Fielding's.<sup>15</sup>

The fragment which I shall refer to as Canto I opens with (perhaps in the middle of) a speech of the goddess Dulness

to her son Pope, who is called in the poem Codrus. She recalls the past and speaks nostalgically of the Dark Ages, as a time of power for herself, her son Superstition (who is therefore Pope's brother), and his son Idolatry:

Equal in Europe's East our Power arose  
In Realms which once were my severest Foes.  
The Sun of Learning in his mid Career  
We routed down the Eastern Hemisphere.  
By Popery, that Phaeton was he hurl'd  
And peaceful Darkness long oerspread the World....<sup>16</sup>

Fielding's recently-completed classical education has lent him subject-matter and a sense of superiority:

The Deathless Fame which Horace, Ovid Boast,  
How nearly was it in Oblivion lost! ...  
Moths Homer eat on the neglected Shelf,  
Bards then were scarce more learned than thy Self.<sup>17</sup>

Anti-Catholicism always remained a factor in Fielding's changing political outlook; here he uses the weapon of Pope's religion against him:

But soon as Reformation first prevail'd  
My Cause and Popery's together fail'd:  
Popery still my nearest dearest Friend,  
To the same purpose both our Efforts tend,  
To lull the Mind in that serene Repose  
Which those who think or those who study lose.<sup>18</sup>

Now constitutional monarchy and Whig government, the latest effects of Reformation, are threatening the rule of Dulness. Unfortunately the historical representatives of these forces, George II and his Queen and children, are hardly equal to depiction in heroic poetry; Dulness is made to deliver an unwilling panegyric on the royal family which leaves us wondering whether the young poet is being consciously or unconsciously ironic. One might believe in Queen Caroline as one of "Wit's brightest Patrons", but not in her husband. Dulness enumerates most of the royal children, calling the future Duke of Cumberland "far superior to his years". If this is all intended as a joke, Fielding seems to be working against his own case - surely if Dulness's opponents are unworthy of her hate, it would be better not to mention them.

Dulness regains her dignity as she commands Codrus, or Pope, to work for the overthrow of this government and monarchy. Her departure is described in a passage burlesquing Venus's visit to her son Aeneas, as described by Virgil; and Codrus is left alone.

The Bard then rubbing oft his Iron Scull,  
Impenetrably hard, supremely Dull,  
Reflects with Pain, on what his Mother said,  
Willing - but knows not how - to give her Aid;  
In dreamy Slumbers pass'd the silent Night  
While visionary Glories court his Sight.<sup>19</sup>

The passage that follows skilfully suggests that the glories Pope aims at are purely mercenary ones.

With daybreak the scene of the poem shifts briefly to the real world - the harsh and bustling London which Fielding later depicted in his novels:

Now from his Mistress' Bed Apprentice Slop  
Had Sprung to ope his Absent Master's Shop.  
Sots with hot Heads to Rest by Day-light lurk,  
And Poets rise with cold dull Brains to work.<sup>20</sup>

In this world Codrus commands Bernardus - Pope's bookseller Bernard Lintot - to summon a council of his Grubstreet chiefs. Immediately fantasy again takes over, with an account of Codrus's visit to his other parent, the god of Rhime. His palace is a setting from romance:

Beneath a Russian Mountain where the Trees  
Are ever whistling with a rougher Breeze,  
Where ev'ry Bird frequents that knows to sing,  
With whose sweet Pipes the sounding valleys ring,  
Where twice three Cataracts impetuous flow  
From the high Hill into the Vale below,  
Whose Sound hoarse Echoe from her hollow Seats  
With mimick voice eternally repeats.<sup>21</sup>

To Rhime, Codrus makes the invocation expected of the epic hero:

O Rhime eternal if from thee I Sprung....  
So will I Festivals and Altars raise,  
So annual Hecatombs of Books shall blaze....  
Still to my Muse thy Influence impart

For Sense and Wit are needless where thou art....  
 Attend propitious to my strongest Hate  
 And teach me how to undermine the State.<sup>22</sup>

Codrus receives his father's blessing, and the fragment ends.

It has clearly established the main charges against Pope: his religion and the political views supposed to go with it, his ignorance of the classics, and the "softest-sounding Nonsense" of his poetry. To us the last accusation itself sounds like nonsense, for we are accustomed to regard Pope's handling of the couplet, and his pointed "Sense and Wit", as his highest excellences. The idea that he might have written in blank verse seems as ridiculous as the whole conception of him as a son of Dulness. Fielding, of course, had in mind not only the verse of Shakespeare and Milton (and Addison, whom he mentions in the fragment), but also that of the Greek and Latin poets. The opinion of Pope as a poor translator is one he seems to have laid aside during their later acquaintance, and resumed after Pope's death.

Canto I thus serves to establish the relationship of Codrus, on the one hand with Dulness, and through her with ignorance, "popery and slavery", and subversion, and on the other with rhyme, and therefore with meaninglessness, frivolity, poetic licence and even the lies of politicians. These relationships have to be imaginatively striking, since they would be difficult to maintain in rational argument. The second and third cantos make use of the figure thus defined, and of similarly distorted versions of his friends; Fielding's observation of London life provides a background at once solid and fantastic.

As "Canto 2d" opens, Dulness is paying another visit to Codrus in his room:

In Grubstreet's inmost Lane, whose narrow Bounds  
 Neere knew the rattling Hackney Coach's Sounds,  
 A Lofty Garret rears it's Shelvey Crest  
 And with superiour Height oerlooks the rest.<sup>23</sup>

Here the poet sits surrounded by paintings of scenes from his works.

There Homer sings - a Likeness sure as strong  
 Lives in the Colours as in Codrus' Song.

Ah! Codrus, had'st thou never told the Town  
Thy Song was Homer's, t'had been thought thy own.<sup>24</sup>

Fielding is still basing his criticism on his own knowledge,  
and Pope's ignorance, of the classics:

Far in a Corner twice two Shelves are spread  
With Books; such Books as pretty Fellows read.  
No Latin sham'd the courtly Shelf, no Greek,  
Which Obsolete tongues Pedants only speak.  
The French Romance, and English Poem there  
With his own works the dusty Region share.<sup>25</sup>

The tedium of Pope's poetry has become a fact not  
to be proved but to be illustrated with hyperbole: Codrus,  
attempting to revise "some favour'd Piece", has read himself  
to sleep when Dulness dramatically enters.

- Canst thou, O Son of Dulness, canst thou rest?  
No Chains of Slumbers should thy Eye-Lids keep,  
Let it be still thy Readers' Lot to Sleep.<sup>26</sup>

She rouses him to action by telling him of the success of his  
rival Addison - an interesting anachronism, since Addison  
had died in 1719. Apparently Fielding had at one time  
intended, as Lady Mary did in her anti-Pope pieces, to back-  
date the action to about 1713, the most recent period of Tory  
power. Dulness goes on to prophesy the events of 1728 and  
early 1729 - the official ban on Gay's ballad-opera Polly,  
and the banishment from Court of the Duchess of Queensbury,  
who tried to solicit subscriptions for its publication.  
Fielding introduces Polly, heroine of this piece and The  
Beggar's Opera, as "a batter'd Dame" who sings new ballads to  
former tunes. One of his complaints against her is that

She Newgate to St James's shall compare  
And charm with Ribaldry, the great, the Fair,  
While Beau and Footman, by the same applause  
Too true confess the Parallel she draws,<sup>27</sup>

and later that she appeals equally to "Peer and Porter".  
This snobbishness may be Lady Mary's rather than Fielding's,  
though she seldom writes in this strain until her old age.

The goddess leaves after a concluding exhortation:



Awake, my Son, shake off all thoughts of Ease.  
 Instant a writing Company erect  
 And damn all Bards but those whom you elect.  
 To proper Members I'll direct your choice,  
 Some fam'd like thee for Nonsense and for Noise.<sup>28</sup>

The poem continues with the Grubstreet council. This is closely modelled on the councils of the Greeks in the *Iliad* and of the fallen angels in *Paradise Lost*. The participants, apart from Codrus and Bernardus, are Ilar and Ochistes (Greek forms of the names of Gay and Swift); Caleb, who represents *The Craftsman*, chief newspaper of the political opposition to Walpole; and Scriblerus, who represents the works written under this name by Pope's circle. The different characters are brilliantly used for burlesque humour, and also to personify the separate strands of the political and literary opposition, as seen by a new recruit to Walpole's camp.

The Council is introduced with another "scene-setting" passage:

Now in the empty Church the Priest begins  
 T'avert the absent Congregation's sins,  
 Now Coffee-houses throng'd with Statesmen see  
 All Ladies (but St James's) at their Tea,  
 When met the Chiefs in Council - Codrus regr'd  
 On his own Works, above the rest appear'd.<sup>29</sup>

He repeats Dulness's call to action; and the journalist Caleb at once objects that he has been acting already, and is being undervalued.

Whatever Feuds in jarring Factions rage,  
 All, all arose from our exclaiming Page.  
 Squires thoughtless of their Hounds and Drink I've made,  
 Priests of the Gospel - Shop-keepers of Trade.  
 Not Orpheus (tho more tuneful was his song)  
 Could draw more stupid senseless things along,  
 For what each Saturday my Papers speak  
 The Realm my Eccho murmurs all the Week.  
 And can the Man who all this Service knows  
 Deny what Dulness to our Labour owes?<sup>30</sup>

His claim is denied by Ilar (the mock-heroic version of John Gay) who boasts of his own "Dull, senseless Libel levell'd at the Great".<sup>31</sup> His speech introduces the element

of rivalry among the gang, which is to dominate the Council, and at the same time stresses the political light in which Fielding is approaching literary questions. Ilar's attempt to divide Dulness from political subversion, "Wit certainly might stand tho Walpole fell",<sup>32</sup> is hotly denied by Caleb. (Surprising as it may seem, Sir Robert Walpole seems to have been at this time a hero to Fielding an upholder of wit as well as of political stability.) Caleb continues with a long speech which is central to the poem's argument.

Were Popery once Master of the Ball,  
How soon must Learning, Wit, and Knowledge fall!  
Wit (like a Summer Flower) can only thrive  
By Liberty's warm Beams preserv'd alive,  
And should the Star of Popery arise  
The Star of Liberty must quit the Skies.<sup>33</sup>

Caleb goes on to elaborate his methods of annoying the government, and rashly reveals that it is Walpole's "Place" that he is chiefly aiming at. This intensifies his accomplices' rivalry, and Codrus "hasty from his Cushion" springs to contest Caleb's claim:

Let Dulness judge whose Pen has done the most.  
Has he at Walpole struck - have not my Darts  
Been boldly thrown at much superior Hearts?  
And has he Aim'd at one Religion's Fall?  
I by my Writings will extirpate all.<sup>34</sup>

Ochistes - that is, Swift - attempts to calm the company by allotting various posts all round, but is shouted down by Codrus's determination not to take second place. This leads to the climax of the quarrel:

More had he spoke - but then Ochistes laid  
A mighty Hand beneath his Shoulder Blade  
And grasping fast, high lifted him in Air  
(Then Dulness, say, how great was thy Despair)!  
So have I seen some Boy a Squirrel take  
And spight of Grandmother's Entreaty shake.  
So Gulliver in Lilliput would rear  
The Pigmy Race half-dead with Shivering Fear, }  
And sure Ochistes was as strong as Gulliver. }  
Now the vast chief, the Lilliputian Bard  
To Squeeze to Death between his Thumbs prepar'd;  
But Scorn his tut'lar Goddess interpos'd,

Unbent his fiery Mind and fingers loos'd.  
 Her wrinkled Cheeks were to the Heroe known,  
 He bow'd, and set the trembling Poet down.<sup>35</sup>

Another burlesque heroic simile closes the canto;  
 and the next opens with due epic solemnity:

Long Silence held the chiefs - while Murmurs lowd  
 Began to buzz among the vulgar Crowd.<sup>36</sup>

The peace-making role is taken over by Ilar, who reveals  
 further depths in the company's cynicism:

Not what's the Bus'ness - what the Profits are,  
 Of ev'ry Office, is the Statesman's Care.  
 This on the Part of Codrus I agree:  
 Caleb's not fitter for that Place then He.<sup>37</sup>

A further round of boasting then takes place, in  
 which each member refers to some of his works, and the young  
 Fielding's personal opinions are clearly shown. Cchistes  
 confesses that he feels slighted by Fortune, and describes  
 himself:

But for the oddness of whose Mind and Pen,  
 Brobdingnag, Lilliput unknown had been;  
 Then whom none ee're more learned to disguise  
 In burlesque Shape of Truth - Politick Lies;  
 Who was the merry-Andrew of the Age  
 And left the Pulpit, for the dearer Stage.<sup>38</sup>

The old accusations are revived against Codrus, who says

let Odyssee all my Trophies raise.  
 Dulness from thence, shall still resound my Praise,  
 Where Nonsense, Fustian, grov'ling Diction speak,  
 Me scarce more skill'd in English then in Greek.<sup>39</sup>

Scriblerus recalls the gang's chief opponent:

Yet something sure for Dulness have I done,  
 I have abus'd immortal Addison.  
 Sense and Religion taught his Skilful Pen,  
 The best of Criticks, and the best of Men.  
 With Censure him the Bathos doth pursue:  
 To me - O Poets - is that Bathos due.<sup>40</sup>

But the highest bid is put in by Caleb, who once again stresses the political content of the opposition, and demonstrates the link between the corruption of language and the corruption of public life:

By easy Arts Men may the World deceive,  
The World will still malicious Lies believe.  
To call the Honest, Knaves, with Fool to brand  
The Wise - are easy Tricks to understand.  
But he who contradictions can persuade,  
That Knave and Fool one Man's by Nature made,  
He is indeed a Master of his Trade.<sup>41</sup>

This speech closes the council's deliberations, and Codrus introduces practical politics in the shape of "The Sequel to the Beggar's Opera" - i.e. Gay's Polly, promised by Dulness earlier in the poem. This is represented as a piecemeal collaboration; in performance it will be revealed "whose Song shall gain the most Encores" and who should therefore head the company. Ilar is despatched to submit the manuscript to a new character, Plutus - that is John Rich, producer of The Beggar's Opera. Rich, later a frequent butt of Fielding's dramatic satire, appears here as a votary of Dulness.

For Plutus, finding Wit was left i'th'Lurch,  
His Theatre as empty as a Church,  
And seeing too whene'er he look'd Abroad  
That Dulness was to Wealth the only Road....  
To her he instantly address'd his Prayer,  
Which Dulness heard with a propitious Ear,  
For She, good Queen, to Mortals ever kind,  
As soon as ask'd possesses ev'ry Mind.  
Hence see the Gods descend - and Devils rise  
While Plutus round the Stage like Lightning flies.  
Hear from the Clouds the rattling Thunder sound,  
Which soon in general Applause is drown'd.<sup>42</sup>

Plutus is about to receive the play when he is forbidden to do so, not as in fact by the Lord Chamberlain, but by "The God of Pantomime", on the grounds that

The Gods resolve no Nonsense shall be sung  
In any but the soft Italian Tongue.<sup>43</sup>

It appears that Fielding, as an aspiring dramatist, already

resented the easy competition of the Italian opera.

With this stroke "Canto 3d" ends, or breaks off. It is tempting to speculate how Fielding might have continued the story - and indeed why he did not. His difficulties are obvious. The epic form demands a complete history: in this case, that Codrus and his gang should either succeed in overthrowing Walpole, or be conclusively defeated by some leader of the anti-Dulness forces. But Fielding had committed himself, with the account of the ban on Polly, to the events of real life, and these were unlikely to supply the material he needed. Perhaps his invention failed; or he may simply not have found enough time, since he wrote two more plays by the end of 1729, and three more by mid-1730.

The value of what remains is less literary than biographical. It shows Fielding already a convinced Whig: not only supporting Walpole but regarding him as the embodiment of all political security; contemptuous not only of the organised opposition of the Craftsman, but of the whole fellow-travelling group of Pope and his friends. It is a bizarre episode in the early career of a future leader of the dissident Whigs, and provides an interesting comparison with present-day political satire. As usual, Johnson had a word for it, when he wrote (actually of Fielding's friend Lyttelton) about "that indistinct and headstrong ardour for liberty which a man of genius always catches when he enters the world."<sup>44</sup> In Fielding's case the ardour clarified and changed its object, but did not cool.

The last piece of newly-discovered verse was written about four years later than the cantos. In the interval Fielding had achieved success as a writer of comedies and farce - more than a dozen of his plays had now been staged, including the exceptionally popular Tom Thumb. He had probably not met the famous writers he had satirized in the cantos, but he had had plenty of opportunity to revise his early political and literary ideas. Understanding of the squalid day-to-day workings of political power had moderated his admiration for Walpole. He had treated both political parties disrespectfully on the stage, but had not yet finally joined the opposition. His position appeared secure, and he had no need to attract the attention of patrons with ambitious poetic schemes.

While Fielding was making a name for himself in the

boisterous world of the professional theatre, Lady Mary was becoming more and more notorious in the closed circle of London society. Her name was bandied about in indecorous pamphlets - whether she was blamed or praised in print made little difference to the result. Fielding, however, continued to respect her judgement, and sought her advice about another of his plays, *The Modern Husband*. When she received the most cutting of all Pope's blows, Fielding again set out to defend her in verse. The result is a poem quite different from the cantos, entitled "An Epistle to Mr Lyttleton occasioned by two Lines in Mr Pope's Paraphrase on the first Satire of the 2d Book of Horace." The lines in question are, regrettably, still the most widely remembered of everything written about Lady Mary:

From furious Sappho scarce a milder Fate [than hanging or  
Pox'd by her Love, or libell'd by her Hate.<sup>45</sup> poisoning]

Pope's poem had been published in February 1733. Lyttleton is the poet and future Lord - and incidentally an early acquaintance of Johnson. He was a close friend both of Fielding and of Pope, and therefore an appropriate channel for a serious rebuke to England's greatest living poet. Fielding's attitude had moderated, or his prejudice (perhaps derived from Lady Mary) had evaporated, since he wrote the Cantos. He now makes no mention of politics, and is prepared to praise Pope's genius. His only criticism is of the sharpness of Pope's satire; but on this subject he does not mince his words.

I too with thee, and with the World, admire  
The Bard in Windsor Groves who Strung his Lyre:  
When Eloise, when Fermor grac'd his Page,  
When Satire glow'd with no malicious Rage,  
Ee're Envy and Ingratitude broke forth  
And the bad Man ecclips'd the Poet's Worth.  
But oh! can Homer's Fire, can Virgil's Art,  
Ballance the Horrors of an evil Heart?<sup>46</sup>

The weapons of mockery and burlesque have been laid aside, and the tone of the verse is one of reasonable argument; but the picture of Pope which emerges is a more unpleasant one than the buffoon of the cantos. Fielding likens Pope's personal satire to assassination - a comparison which was used by others including Lady Mary herself, in the angry verse reply to Pope which she and Lord Hervey wrote at this time.<sup>47</sup>



The "Epistle to Lyttelton" is a less well organized poem than Fielding's other familiar verse epistles, printed in his Miscellanies. The person addressed is at first Lyttelton, at other times Lady Mary or Pope. Different passages repeat or contradict each other, perhaps because Fielding had difficulty in reconciling the opinions of the two people he was writing for, Lady Mary and Lyttelton. For instance, the consideration of "Sappho's Wrongs" prompts him to a strong vindication of the rights of women, presumably intended to please his cousin:

Man claims o'er Woman, by o'erbearing Might,  
A Pow'r which Nature never meant his Right.  
If partial, She to either Sex inclin'd,  
With partial Care, She form'd the female Mind.  
To greater Wisdom Men make false Pretence,  
Nature with Beauty gave Superiour Sense.<sup>48</sup>

Fielding claims that in writing of women he is following in the footsteps of Lyttelton himself, and he extravagantly praises the latter's recently-published poem, Advice to a Lady. That poem was judged by Johnson to be Lyttelton's best effort; but it was far from dealing with women's rights. On the contrary it firmly defined their duty as that of pleasing their husbands; and it was sardonically summarized by Lady Mary:

Be plain in Dress, and sober in your Diet,<sup>49</sup>  
In short, my dearee, kiss me and be quiet.

Lyttelton probably remained unaware of this exercise of Lady Mary's wit, which she scribbled on the back of her manuscript copy of his Advice. He could not have approved Fielding's talk of women's "Superiour Sense"; but the epistle had plenty of more conventionally gallant and chivalrous passages to reassure him.

In spite of its faults, this poem throws light on several more interesting subjects. It contains one of Fielding's earliest statements of the importance of what he was later to call good-nature:

the Benevolence that joys to please,  
The Heart that triumphs in another's Ease - 50

which in Tom Jones is represented as the essential quality of the Christian hero.

Linked with this is a protest at mankind's mistaken notions of greatness. In his preface to Jonathan Wild the Great, Fielding later said that "the Greatness which is commonly worshipped" really deserves to be set in a "disgraceful and contemptuous ... Light", and he compared it to "the False Sublime in Poetry";<sup>51</sup> here he says

It shocks me when I think, that what should raise  
The Horror of Mankind, Still meets their Praise:  
That Man, mistaking, Honour should afford  
To the Great Sland'rer's Pen or Cong'rour's Sword!  
To Philip's Son behold the Columns rise,  
While by his Arms, the World half ravag'd lies.  
Thee too we've read amid the Rolls of Fame  
While bleeding Reputations curs'd thy Name.<sup>52</sup>

He also discusses the aims and methods of satire, in a passage which is relevant both to his own practice in his theatrical career, and to the moral purpose that he claimed for his novels.

Satire, the Scourge of Vice, was sure design'd  
Like Laws, to profit, not to hurt Mankind.  
Nay, gentler and more friendly is its Course.  
It cures you by Persuasion, not by Force.  
Laws, while the bad they slay, the good defend,  
But Satire teaches ev'n the bad to mend.<sup>53</sup>

This is the civilized, Horatian tone which was correct form for the genre, but here it alternates with outbursts of indignation. At the conclusion of the poem, Fielding the moralist reaches a climax of rhetoric before giving way to Fielding the teller of a good story.

Go on, enjoy the Triumphs of thy Spite,  
And curse thy Self, and curse the World, and write.  
The great Reward of all thy Labours bear,  
To be both fear'd and hated by the Fair.  
Yet Sappho's Wrongs the Muse shall ne'ere forget,  
Ne'ere leave unpaid one Scruple of the Debt,  
'Till groveling in the Dirt thy Name shall lie,  
And Fools shall wonder whom they rais'd so high.

Thus runs some little Curr along the Streets,  
And barks, and snaps at ev'ry one he meets.  
Too much despis'd to find or Friends or Foes,

At all alike it's little Venom throws.  
 No Looks, no Words, no Threats it's Anger stir,  
 Only incens'd because it is a Curr.  
 But if the gen'rous Mastiff chance to stray,  
 Waiting his lovely Mistress' Steps that Way,  
 Her to attempt should the curs'd Urchin dare,  
 Aloft the Mastiff lifts him in the Air;  
 Awhile he shakes him for his bold Attack,  
 Then throws him in the Kennel on his Back.<sup>54</sup>

It is no wonder that Fielding was too prudent to publish this onslaught. In terms of literary reputation Pope was undoubtedly more like the heavyweight mastiff, and Fielding, though not without a motive for his hostility, like the snapping little dog. Fielding evidently regarded his poem as finished, for Lady Mary's is a fair copy. Another copy probably went to Lyttelton. The latter would surely have been too tactful to show it to Pope; but the memory of having written such a denunciation must have lingered in Fielding's mind when at last, in Ralph Allen's hospitable house at Bath, he met Pope on friendly terms. One would dearly love to know whether Lady Mary's name was ever mentioned between them; but that question, like so many others, must remain unanswered.

#### Documentation

1. Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. G. B. Hill and L.F. Powell, 1934, ii. 48-49, 173-4.
2. Ibid. iii. 43.
3. Johnsonian Miscellanies, ed. G. B. Hill, 1897, i. 319.
4. Fielding, Miscellanies, 1743, i. ii, [xxxv-xxxvi]; later pages of preface numbered wrongly.
5. My grateful thanks are due to the Right Honourable the Earl of Harrowby, descendant of Lady Mary and owner of her manuscripts, for permission to print this article and extracts from the verse.
6. Boswell, Life, i. 101 n. 1.
7. Lady Mary, Complete Letters, ed. R. Halsband, 1965-7, iii. 66.
8. J. L. Clifford, Young Samuel Johnson, 1955, p.175.
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10. Letters, iii. 311-12.
11. 16 March 1728: W. L. Cross, The History of Henry Fielding, 1918, i. 66.
12. Letters 1716-1718; "The Capon's Tale" March 1728; Dunciad May 1728.

13. Lady Mary, Letters and Works, ed. Lord Wharncliffe and W. Moy Thomas, 1861, ii. 468-74.
14. Miscellanies, i. 65, 71.
15. First canto, Harrowby MSS 81, ff. 182-5, lines 85-86. Lady Mary was involved in other literary partnerships, notably with Pope and Gay, and with Lord Hervey.
16. Ibid. lines 41-46. In all quotations Fielding's spelling and capitalization have been retained, but his punctuation has been altered or supplemented where necessary to help the reader.
17. Ibid. lines 11-17.
18. Ibid. lines 17-22.
19. Ibid. lines 91-96.
20. Ibid. lines 111-14.
21. Ibid. lines 125-32.
22. Ibid. lines 137-74 passim.
23. "Canto 2d", Harrowby MSS 81, ff. 172-7, lines 5-8.
24. Ibid. lines 19-22.
25. Ibid. lines 23-28.
26. Ibid. lines 44-46.
27. Ibid. lines 69-72.
28. Ibid. lines 78-82.
29. Ibid. lines 85-90.
30. Ibid. lines 123-32.
31. Ibid. line 142.
32. Ibid. line 147.
33. Ibid. lines 150-5.
34. Ibid. lines 199-203.
35. Ibid. lines 229-43.
36. "Canto 3d", Harrowby MSS 81, ff. 177-80, lines 1-2.
37. Ibid. lines 13-16.
38. Ibid. lines 26-30.
39. Ibid. lines 37-40.
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42. Ibid. lines 114-17, 128-35.
43. Ibid. lines 159-60.
44. Lives of the English Poets, ed. G. B. Hill, 1905, i. 446.
45. First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, lines 83-84.
46. "Epistle to Lyttleton", Harrowby MSS 81, ff. 57-58, 64-65, lines 58-65.
47. "Verses Address'd to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace", Lady Mary's Letters and Works, ii. 464-7.
48. "Epistle to Lyttleton", lines 20-25.
49. Letters and Works, ii. 494.
50. "Epistle to Lyttleton", lines 68-69.
51. Miscellanies, i. xxv, xxix.
52. "Epistle to Lyttleton", lines 82-89.
53. Ibid. lines 72-77.
54. Ibid. lines 158-77.

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At the March Meeting of the Society, the Secretary announced that our President, Dr. L. F. Powell, was to receive an honorary D.Litt. degree from Oxford University. On behalf of all the members of the Johnson Society of London he expressed our warmest congratulations and delight.

## JOHNSON AND PULPIT ELOQUENCE\*

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When we read of Johnson and Boswell setting out one fine Saturday in July 1763 to go by rowing-boat from Billingsgate to Greenwich "along the silver Thames", and enjoying "the beautiful country on each side of the river",<sup>1</sup> we realise that they were living in a different world from ours. Scarcely less alien to us is the fact that they were talking about preaching, and about the effectiveness of the "plain and familiar manner" of the Methodists and of the Scotch clergy. In the eighteenth century, people not only heard more and longer sermons than most of us do now; they read them, and they discussed them. Both the content and the style of sermons were not infrequent topics of conversation in the circles in which Johnson and Boswell moved. Johnson himself was for over thirty years a professional sermon-writer,<sup>2</sup> and he was an appreciative and discriminating reader of sermon literature. It is mainly the latter activity that is treated in this paper.

Preaching is a large topic, and I have deliberately limited myself by my choice of title. I have nothing to say about Johnson's often-quoted remark (the day after the Greenwich expedition) about a woman's preaching.<sup>3</sup> It referred to "a meeting of the people called Quakers": the utterance was not made from a pulpit, and it was not strictly speaking a sermon. By sermon, Johnson meant (according to his Dictionary) "a discourse of instruction pronounced by a divine for the edification of the people". His choice of illustrative quotations tells us two important things about his ideas of the nature and function of a sermon. They are not concerned with style or eloquence. In the first place, the sermon is scriptural: Hooker is cited to the effect that sermons are God's word only in the sense that that "is commonly the subject whereof they treat, and must be the rule whereby they are framed." Secondly, the sermon in Johnson's view is only an ancillary to the conduct of life. From Crashaw he quotes

Sermons he heard, yet not so many  
As left no time to practise any:  
He heard them reverently, and then  
His practice preached them o'er again.

\* A paper read to the Johnson Society of London on 19 April, 1969.  
Chairman: The Rev. F. N. Doubleday, M.R.C.S.

From South:

Many, while they have preached Christ in their sermons,  
have read a lecture of atheism in their practice.

And from Dryden

His preaching much, but more his practice wrought,  
A living sermon of the truths he taught.

Johnson was to make a similar point in another connection,  
much later. For Tuesday 8 May 1781, Boswell records that

Mr. Beauclerk's great library was this season sold in London by auction. Mr. Wilkes said, he wondered to find in it such a numerous collection of sermons; seeming to think it strange that a gentleman of Mr. Beauclerk's character in the gay world, should have chosen to have many compositions of that kind. JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, you are to consider, that sermons make a very considerable branch of English literature; so that a library must be very imperfect if it has not a numerous collection of sermons: and in all collections, Sir, the desire of augmenting it grows stronger in proportion to the advance in acquisition; as motion is accelerated by the continuance of the impetus. Besides, Sir, (looking at Mr. Wilkes with a placid but significant smile) a man may collect sermons with intention of making himself better by them. I hope Mr. Beauclerk intended, that some time or other that should be the case with him.'<sup>4</sup>

We should not overlook the significance behind Johnson's smile: it would be rare to find Johnson being merely placid on the subject of good intentions that were to be fulfilled "some time or other". He must have been aware of the possibly tragic irony of the valued friend, the gay dog, who had passed into eternity leaving behind a great library of unread and ineffectual sermons.

But I leave aside the question whether men may be made better by reading sermons. Nor can I add to what has already been written on Johnson's religion. I shall limit myself to the topic of sermons as "a very considerable branch of English literature", without forgetting their part in enabling the reader the better to enjoy life or the better to endure it. The importance that Johnson attached to sermons



as literature is clear from The Idler No. 91 (12 July 1760):

But our own language has from the Reformation to the present time, been chiefly dignified and adorned by the works of our divines, who, considered as commentators, controversialists or preachers, have undoubtedly left all other nations far behind them. No vulgar language can boast such treasures of theological knowledge, or such multitudes of authors at once learned, elegant and pious.... Of morality little is necessary to be said because it is comprehended in practical divinity, and is perhaps better taught in English sermons than in any other books ancient or modern.

There is also the evidence of the Dictionary, where Johnson frequently draws on sermon literature for illustrative quotations, not merely to explain theological or ecclesiastical terms, but to exemplify the usage of quite ordinary and general words, and at the same time to present the reader with some religious or moral idea, often expressed in a memorable form.

One of the best-known passages in the Life provides my title, and also a kind of text. On Tuesday 7 April 1778, Boswell and Johnson were at Thrale's:

Sir John Pringle had expressed a wish that I would ask Dr. Johnson's opinion what were the best English sermons for style. I took an opportunity to-day of mentioning several to him. 'Atterbury'? JOHNSON. 'Yes, Sir, one of the best.' BOSWELL. 'Tillotson'? JOHNSON. 'Why, not now. I should not advise a preacher at this day to imitate Tillotson's style; though I don't know; I should be cautious of objecting to what has been applauded by so many suffrages. - South is one of the best, if you except his peculiarities, and his violence, and sometimes coarseness of language. - Seed has a very fine style; but he is not very theological. - Jortin's sermons are very elegant. - Sherlock's style too is very elegant, though he has not made it his principal study. - And you may add Smallridge. All the latter preachers have a good style. Indeed, nobody now talks much of style: every body composes pretty well. There are no such unharmonious periods as there were a hundred years ago.'<sup>5</sup>

Johnson seems to have lost interest in the original question.

He has perhaps begun to think about content rather than style, for he goes on to mention Dr. Samuel Clarke - whose sermons we know he valued highly throughout his life<sup>6</sup> - with a warning against his unorthodoxy, which earlier had led him not to admit any quotations from Clarke into the Dictionary.<sup>7</sup> Boswell hopefully slips in his own favourite, Ogden, and Johnson replies politely "I should like to read all that Ogden has written". (It was an ambiguous answer: Boswell knew that Johnson had made two attempts at reading Ogden while they were in Scotland five years previously, and had not then succeeded in getting very far.<sup>8</sup>) So Boswell rephrases Pringle's query - and thus unwittingly helps to bring the discussion to an abrupt and unforeseen conclusion.

BOSWELL. 'What I wish to know is, what sermons afford the best specimen of English pulpit eloquence.'

JOHNSON. 'We have no sermons addressed to the passions that are good for anything, if you mean that kind of eloquence.'

A CLERGYMAN: (whose name I do not recollect.) 'Were not Dodd's sermons addressed to the passions?' JOHNSON. 'They were nothing, Sir, be they addressed to what they may.'<sup>9</sup>

Who spoke next we cannot guess. Boswell, with the sure instinct of the born story-teller, starts a new paragraph, with the company seated at dinner. The Olympian thunderbolt had fallen, at once annihilating its victim and immortalising him. The name that Boswell could not recollect was Mr. Embry. Their hostess knew it, but did not tell Boswell; forty years later she jotted it down in the margin of her copy of the Life.<sup>10</sup> But the puff of smoke that marks the disappearance of Mr. Embry and the even more unfortunate Dr. Dodd has tended to obscure the discussion that led up to it. What was the upshot of Johnson's answer to the question about the best English sermons for style? What might his final verdict have been if anyone had dared to press for it?

Johnson appears to have felt that he had exhausted the possibilities after three names had been mentioned: Boswell's two fairly obvious suggestions, Atterbury and Tillotson, and a much less predictable name which was the first to occur to Johnson himself - Robert South. We might well not have anticipated South's nomination, for Johnson makes very few other direct references to him, and his style resembles neither Johnson's own nor that of other authors whom we know him to have praised. We know only that Johnson

recommended South's sermons on prayer to Boswell in 1769, and that two days before his death in 1784 he gave his own copy of South to Metcalfe. But on the evidence of the Dictionary, South must have been one of Johnson's favourite authors. Even a cursory check indicates that South is called upon for illustrative quotations more often than any other sermon writer. Of a random sample of about 180 sermon quotations 89 are from South; next comes Atterbury with 42, then Tillotson with 23; no one else furnishes more than ten.<sup>11</sup> Of the other preachers mentioned in the conversation at Thrale's, the only one to figure at all is Seed, and he only once.

It may be of interest to put some of these writers into context and then briefly to ask how Johnson's own work in this kind relates to the comments he makes on them.

Johnson points out a difference between the style prevailing in his own time and that of a hundred years previous to it. If we take him with literal exactness, we have to go back to 1678; Tillotson would then have been 48, South 44 and Atterbury only 16. Johnson is undoubtedly right in his dating of the great alteration that came over the fashionable style of English pulpit oratory, especially in its literary form. The change began almost immediately after the Restoration of the monarchy and of the Church of England in 1660; and it was virtually complete by about 1680. Its two leading representatives, in their different ways, are Tillotson and South, though they are only part of the complex movement (which has both secular and religious origins) which resulted in the general prevalence of a simpler and plainer manner for all literary prose.

Johnson makes little reference to English preaching earlier than the Restoration period. Of the three greatest pulpit orators of the first half of the seventeenth century, Lancelot Andrewes seems to have been quite unknown to him as a preacher, John Donne familiar only as a poet, and Jeremy Taylor only as the author of Holy Living, Holy Dying, and Ductor Dubitantium. Yet he knew the work of the other great religious prose writers of the Elizabethan and early Stuart period, such as Hooker, Sanderson and Sir Thomas Browne - indeed, Boswell thought that they influenced Johnson's style and he seems to associate with them the "dignified march" of Johnson's sentences.<sup>12</sup> Akin to them in some respects is one of the greatest of the Restoration preachers, Isaac Barrow (1630-1677), who falls just outside the hundred years that

Johnson spoke of. It is rather surprising that Johnson shows no acquaintance with Barrow, whose works were still influential well into the eighteenth century. Boswell certainly knew them well, for in a footnote to the passage in the Life about the sale of Beauclerk's library, he quotes a long and typical passage of Barrow on the subject of "wit".<sup>13</sup> What strikes one about Barrow is his combination of precision and copiousness. Though he may seem at first to be merely piling up synonymous words and phrases, each one introduces a real distinction and a fresh aspect of truth. Here is a typical passage:

Not in its own nature only, but, [m]uch more its worthy consequences is Wisdom exceedingly pleasant and peaceable: in general, by disposing us to acquire and to enjoy all the good, delight and happiness we are capable of; and by freeing us from all the inconveniences, mischiefs and infelicities our condition is subject to. For whatever good from clear understanding, deliberate advice, sagacious foresight, stable resolution, dextrous address, right intention and orderly proceeding doth naturally result, Wisdom confers: whatever evil blind ignorance, false presumption, unwary credulity, precipitate rashness, unsteady purpose, ill contrivance, backwardness, inability, unweildiness and confusion of thought beget, Wisdom prevents.<sup>14</sup>

Here one might detect a mind, and a manner of setting words together, that are not unlike Johnson's own. Moreover, there is in Barrow a deeper spirit of Christian devotion and charity than in any of his contemporaries.

No such claim could be made for Robert South (1634-1716). More typical of South would be the fact that even in a sermon on the love of one's neighbour he inserts the hard-headed warning:

Love an ungrateful man, and he shall despise you.  
Commend him, and as occasion serves he shall revile you.  
Give to him, and he shall but laugh at your easiness.  
Save his life, but when you have done, look to your own.

South had a far more athletic mind than Barrow, and a far more aggressive one. He is a representative of the "new age" of the Restoration; there is something of the "angry young man" about him, with his brash belittling of centuries-old

rhetorical tradition and his strident, self-assured, rather resentful disparagement of the immediate past. Just as Sprat, the spokesman for the Royal Society, said that the new science aimed "to separate the knowledge of Nature, from the colours of Rhetorick, the devices of Fancy, or the delightful deceit of Fables", so the new generation of preachers wanted to dissociate the knowledge of divinity from mediaeval rhetoric, from fancy, and from fable, and to come back to demonstrable and useful truths. The clearance was begun within a few weeks of the Restoration. In July 1660 the King's Commissioners made a visitation of the University of Oxford, and the University Sermon at St. Mary's Church was preached by the newly appointed Public Orator, not yet twenty-seven, Robert South. In the sermon, published under the title of The Scribe instructed to the Kingdom of Heaven, South made a double-barrelled attack on two current kinds of preaching. First he dismisses all the mediaeval features of the traditional academic type of sermon, with its detailed verbal division of the text, the application of phrases from the learned languages, its allegorical method and its use of various kinds of word-play. He reproves

those who disparage and detract from the Gospel, by a puerile and indecent sort of Levity in their Discourses upon it, so extremely below the Subject discoursed of. All vain luxuriant Allegories, rhyming Cadencies of similiary Words, are such pitiful Embellishments of Speech, as serve for nothing but to embase Divinity.

He inveighs against "Sermons so garnished with Quibbles and Trifles, as if they played with Truth and Immortality" and against those would "now and then ... have cast in a Rhyme, with a Quid, a Quo, and a Quomodo and the like." He asserts that "as this can by no means be accounted Divinity, so neither can it pass for Wit." He goes on to say that

True Wit is a severe and manly Thing. Wit in Divinity is nothing else, but Sacred Truths suitable expressed. 'Tis not shreds of Latin or Greek, nor a Deus dixit and a Deus benedixit, nor those little Quirks, or Divisions ... or the Egress, Regress and Progress, and other such Stuff, (much like the Style of a Lease), that can properly be called Wit. For that is not Wit, which consists not with Wisdom.<sup>15</sup>

In South's sermons there is indeed plenty of wit in the usual modern sense. It is certainly severe, often caustic;

"manly", with an energetic, even heartless masculinity. Whether it is always "sacred truths suitably expressed" is sometimes open to question.

In The Scribe Instructed, South's second barrel was aimed at those Puritan preachers

who cry up their mean heavy, careless, and insipid way of handling Things sacred, as the only Spiritual and Evangelical way of Preaching, while they charge all their crude Incoherences, sawcy Familiarities with God, and nauseous Tautologies, upon the Spirit prompting such Things to them, and that as the most elevated and seraphick Heights of Religion.

(South in many ways anticipates Swift.)

He makes a lively attack on the jargon of the Puritans and what he regarded as their crude preaching methods, and then castigates their method of delivery:

Can any tolerable Reason be given for those strange new Postures used by some in the Delivery of the Word? Such as shutting the Eyes, distorting the Face, and speaking through the Nose, which I think cannot so properly be called Preaching, as Toning of a Sermon. Nor do I see, why the Word may not be altogether as effectual for the Conversion of Souls, delivered by one who has the Manners to look his Auditory in the Face, using his own Countenance, and his own native Voice without straining it to a lamentable and doleful Whine (never serving to any Purpose, but where some religious Cheat is to be carried on.) ... The Men of this method have sullied the noble science of Divinity, and can never warrant their Practice, either from Religion or Reason, or the Rules of decent and good behaviour, nor yet from the Example of the Apostles, and least of all from that of our Saviour Himself. For none surely will imagine, that these Mens speaking as never Man spoke before, can pass for any Imitation of Him.

"Sacred truths suitably expressed" - ? South ends the passage by asserting that "no Man's Dulness is, or can be, His Duty, and much less his Perfection".<sup>16</sup> "Piety," he held, "engages no man to be dull." Dulness is the one thing that South takes care to avoid; he acts on his own principle that "that which



is carried on with a continued unflagging vigour of expression can never be thought tedious, nor consequently long.<sup>17</sup> This is surely the main reason why he held Johnson's attention and remained in his mind over such a long period.

These passages sufficiently illustrate what Johnson called the "violence" of South's language. When he spoke also of its "coarseness", he was referring, I think, not so much to South's lapses of taste in content and tone, as to the racy, colloquial, down-to-earth quality of much of his actual diction - the use of idioms which we now accept as part of everyday speech, but that Johnson objected to on linguistic grounds. Bolster, for instance, used as a verb meaning "to support; to hold up; to maintain", Johnson describes in the Dictionary as "now an expression somewhat coarse and obsolete", and illustrates from South: "It was the way of many to bolster up their crazy, doating consciences with confidences." South is often quoted in the Dictionary to illustrate the use of hard, strong, vehement, potentially abusive words (such as beguile, blasphemous, blunder, blur, browbeat). Under beggarly comes the notorious passage about Cromwell that so amused King Charles II.

Johnson, despite his reservations, clearly found much that was congenial and memorable in South. Several features of his work must have attracted him: South's vigour and forthrightness, whatever the company he was addressing; his intense dislike of cant, affectation and jargon; his strong attachment to patriotic and Tory principles and to the Church of England as by law established; his formidable and relentless power in controversy; and the philosophical strength and range shown in the magnificent sermon preached at St. Paul's in 1662 on the endowments of Paradisal Man.<sup>18</sup> Most of all, Johnson appreciated South's terse ironical wit, his keen insight into human motivations, and his shrewd analyses of men's weakness and self-deception. One need read only a few pages of the Dictionary to cull an entertaining anthology of South's aphorisms, which is at the same time a mirror of Johnson's own ideas and predilections. Here is a selection. None of the words exemplified are particularly religious ones.

The church of England, the purest and best reformed church in the world; so well reformed that it will be found easier to alter than to better its constitution.

The old generous English spirit, which heretofore made this nation so great in the eyes of all the world, seems utterly extinct; and we are degenerated into a mean, sharking, fallacious, undermining converse, there being a snare and a trepan almost in every word we hear, and every action we see.

It cannot but be matter of just indignation to all good men to see a company of lewd shallow-brained huffs making atheism, and contempt of religion, the sole badge of wit.

Such as have had opportunity to sound these braggers thoroughly, by having sometimes endured the penance of their sottish company, have found them, in converse, empty and insipid.

The obstinate and schismatical are like to think themselves shrewdly hurt, forsooth, by being cut off from that body which they choose not to be of.

Though it is necessary, that some persons in the world should be in love with a splendid servitude, yet certainly they must be much beholding to their own fancy, that they can be pleased at it; for he that rises up early, and goes to bed late, only to receive addresses, is really as much abridged in his freedom, as he that waits to present one.

(Was the lexicographer thinking of his own waiting in Lord Chesterfield's outward rooms?)

What hurt can there be in all the slanders and disgraces of this world if they are but the arts and methods of providence to shame us into the glories of the next?

Men befool themselves infinitely when, by venting a few sighs, they will needs persuade themselves that they have repented.

God has corrected the boundlessness of man's voluptuous desires, by stunting his capacities.

Tell a miser of bounty to a friend, or mercy to the poor, and he will not understand it.

A command or call to be Liberal, all of a sudden impoverishes the rich, breaks the merchant, and shuts up every private man's exchequer.

Nobody is so weak but he is strong enough to bear the misfortunes that he does not feel.

One quotation sums up the reason why South is so strongly represented in a dictionary compiled by a great man of letters:

There is a certain bewitchery, or fascination in words which makes them operate with a force beyond what we can give an account of.

If we turn, however, to South's more famous contemporary, John Tillotson (1630-94), we find the "bewitchery" of words operating with much less force. Johnson could still commend South; of Tillotson he had to say "Not now", though he also had to acknowledge that Tillotson had rightly "been applauded by so many suffrages". Tillotson's reputation was past its peak by the middle of the eighteenth century, though his influence was still felt; indeed it was the chief reason why Johnson could say that "everybody composes pretty well", and why "nobody now talks much of style".

Though Tillotson was a Latitudinarian, his pulpit manner had won the admiration of Puritans, High Churchmen and Roman Catholics alike. He was a peaceable man, and disliked religious controversy. Unlike the pugnacious South, he made no particular attack on anybody else's way of proceeding; he simply set a different and more attractive example. As his friend Burnet said:

He was not only the best preacher of the age, but seemed to have brought preaching to perfection; his sermons were so well heard and liked, and so much read, that all the nation proposed him as a pattern, and studied to copy after him.<sup>19</sup>

Because he was widely read as well as heard, his literary influence flowed through many channels: partly through the fact that more and more preachers adopted his manner; partly through his direct influence on eminent men of letters, partly through the acceptability of his religious ideas, and his manner of expressing them, to the general educated public - not the specially educated, but the growing body of literate,

thoughtful, earnest people such as were later to read periodicals like The Spectator and eventually The Rambler.

If Tillotson's work did not seem to Johnson - or to us - to be very striking or original, it is because it so completely corresponds with the general movements of its time, in both its content and its style. In subject-matter, his sermons led men's attention away from abstruse theological topics, from appeals to outdated authorities, and from the heats and bitterness of sectarian controversies; and directed them instead to notions of reasonableness, benevolence, moral duty, and broadly based principles of decent behaviour.

All this contributes to the characteristic tone of Tillotson's writing - equable, courteous, pleasant, undemanding, but gently persuasive. He gave to the sermon the very qualities that were being admired and cultivated by contemporary prose writers in other fields: lucidity of idea and expression, the avoidance of display and pedantry, using only words that were in current English usage, and above all reconciling ease with correctness - the two Augustan qualities. More than any English preacher for a hundred years either side of him, he talked the language that his hearers actually used in their daily concerns. (That is why his diction is not sufficiently precise to satisfy Johnson.) What is more remarkable is that he managed to preserve this "natural" quality not only in the pulpit but in his published work. There is nothing more difficult. Tillotson's prose for the first time in English, manages to convey the effect of the speaking voice by means of the written word. That is what Dryden meant when he said that "if he had any talent for English prose, it was owing to his having often read the writing of the great Archbishop Tillotson".<sup>20</sup> Johnson paid high tribute to the ease of Dryden's prose - but it was Addison that he recommended as a model.

Tillotson not only shortened the sermon well below the hitherto conventional length of one hour; he also clarified its structure. Instead of the old academic "division" of the text, he gives simply the necessary minimum of explication, and reference to the context, and then deduces from his text three or four clear propositions, which he develops in a coherent sequence. The sermon, in its literary form is now on the way to becoming an essay, as it is for Johnson.

In short, in Tillotson's hands, the sermon has finally ceased to be a separate literary kind; it conforms with, and invites judgment by, the same criteria as apply to prose written for any other purpose. This partly explains why it was only the sermons of the post-Tillotsonian period that seemed to Johnson to "make a very considerable branch of English literature".

Tillotson's qualities are elusive; he does not lend himself readily to quotation. Johnson in the Dictionary resorts to him for the exemplification of some of the simplest and most neutral words, such as but and say. A characteristic Tillotson utterance provides illustration of the word "best-natured":

By this law of loving even our enemies, the christian religion discovers itself to be the most generous and best-natured institution that ever was in the world.

I doubt whether Johnson ever read very far into Tillotson's Works: most of the quotations come from the first half-dozen sermons, and especially from the first two, with the significant titles of The Wisdom of Being Religious and The Folly and Wickedness of Scoffing at Religion. From the latter, here are three quotations, drawn from a few adjacent pages of the Dictionary:

There is no greater argument of a light and inconsiderate person than to scoff at religion.

It is barbarous incivility scurrilously to sport with that which others count religion.

The proper use of wit is to season conversation, to represent what is praiseworthy to the best advantage, and to expose the vices and follies of men.

It would be interesting to develop a detailed comparison of the treatment of this subject of the abuse of wit by religious scoffers in the sermons of Barrow, South and Tillotson, and in Johnson's own sermon (No. XX) on the same topic. What to South might be empty-headedness, and to Tillotson might be no more than ill manners, was to Johnson something terrible, corrupting, and mortally dangerous.

Even in the Dictionary, Johnson does not allow us

to forget that Tillotson was a Whig dog, and must not be allowed to have the best of it. To exemplify the word serviceable, we are given only one quotation - from Swift:

A book to justify the revolution, archbishop Tillotson recommended to the king as the most serviceable treatise could have been published then.

There are no such side-blows at Atterbury; he was a Jacobite and a High Churchman as well as a polished writer and friend of writers. He is used in the Dictionary to illustrate more polite and more significant words. As a preacher, he belongs to the high Augustan age of Queen Anne, the age of elegance. He is the best representative of the many who, "without question attained their felicity and excellence of style by a careful apprenticeship in the school of Tillotson."<sup>21</sup> All the other preachers mentioned by Johnson belong to this later generation.

Boswell's question referred specifically to pulpit eloquence. We may usefully enquire what Johnson understood by "eloquence". In 1755 at least, he was quite clear:

- Eloquence 1. The power of speaking with fluency and oratory.  
2. Elegant language uttered with fluency.

This sends us to another key word:

- Elegance Beauty of art; rather soothing than striking; beauty without grandeur.  
Elegant 1. Pleasing with minuter beauties.  
2. Nice; not coarse; not gross  
Elegantly 1. In such a manner as to please without elevation.

What then is to be said of Seed and of Jortin, of Sherlock and of Smallridge?<sup>22</sup> Johnson calls them "elegant", and thereby implies that they are rather soothing than striking, beautiful without grandeur, pleasing with minuter beauties, but without elevation. To none of these writers, not even to Atterbury, does he appear to have turned for any of the things that really mattered to him, in either literature or life, in the way that he turned to South in search of enjoyment, and to Clarke for support in endurance.

Twenty years after the Dictionary, Johnson may have been willing to extend the idea of "eloquence" beyond the qualities of mere fluency and elegance. He implies as much by his words "We have no sermons addressed to the passions that are good for anything, if you mean that kind of eloquence". Passion in one sense meant only "violent commotion of the mind", and might be exemplified by means of a quotation from Locke:

All the art of rhetoric, besides order and perspicuity, only moves the passions, and thereby misleads the judgment.

But in another sense, as a quotation from Watts indicates:

... it signifies any of the affections of human nature; as love, fear, joy, sorrow:

and these are the very stuff of human existence. Johnson may have mistrusted the passions, but he did not underestimate the part that they in fact play in human motivation and behaviour, as almost any of his works will testify. He knew very well that when the judgment had done all it could, the salvation of men's souls called for more than "order and perspicuity", such as Tillotson could provide. There must be scope for a kind of eloquence that moves men by love or fear.

Johnson was not alone in regarding English pulpit oratory as deficient in sermons addressed to the passions. Hugh Blair had said that

... in the pulpit, the British divines have distinguished themselves by the most accurate and rational compositions which, perhaps, any nation can boast of. Many printed sermons we have, full of good sense, and of sound divinity and morality; but the eloquence to be found in them, the power of persuasion, of interesting and engaging the heart, which is, or ought to be, the great object of the pulpit, is far from bearing a suitable proportion to the excellence of the matter.<sup>23</sup>

Again, Bishop Warburton, in his Directions for the Study of Theology, written in 1769 though not then published, has a section on "Christian Eloquence", in which he distinguishes



three kinds of sermon. For the sermon which is to be employed in the illustration of the sacred Text, he recommends as the best model the sermons of Dr. Samuel Clarke; if the preacher "chooses to expatiate on the great Duties of Morality, Dr. Barrow should be his principal Guide". But the third kind, a

pathetic address to the passions and affections of penitent hearers, perhaps the most operative of all these various species of instruction, is that in which the English Pulpit, notwithstanding all its other superior advantages, is most defective. Here, the persuasive is apt to be barren of reasoning; and the pathetic to degenerate into cant. A perfect model of this kind we must seek abroad.<sup>24</sup>

The model he recommends is the French Jesuit, Bourdaloue. Again, Gibbon made an entry in his journal, 22 August 1762, in which he contrasts the philosophic method of the English with the rhetoric of the French preachers.<sup>25</sup> Horace Walpole in a letter of 1760 describes a sermon by Dodd,

haranguing entirely in the French style, and very eloquently and touchingly. He apostrophized the lost sheep, who sobbed and cried from their souls - and so did my Lady Hertford and Fanny Pelham, till I believe the City dames took them both for Jane Shores.<sup>26</sup>

Blair noted that

French and English writers of sermons proceed upon very different ideas of the eloquence of the pulpit; and seem indeed to have split it between them. A French sermon is, for the most part, a warm animated exhortation; an English one, is a piece of cool instructive reasoning. The French preachers address themselves chiefly to the imagination and the passions; the English, almost solely to the understanding. It is the union of these two kinds of composition, of the French earnestness and warmth, with the English accuracy and reason, that would form, according to my idea, the model of a perfect sermon.<sup>27</sup>

The English sermons that come nearest to this model must have been unknown to Blair in 1783. They were still being preached, most of them, by the Reverend Dr. John Taylor of Ashbourne and of St. Margaret's Westminster. Twenty-five were published by the Rev. Samuel Hayes in 1788 and 1789,

after the deaths of both Taylor and of their author, Samuel Johnson. Others - Johnson said he had written about forty - may have appeared in print under little-known names, but only one has been traced. Johnson, having received his payment (usually two guineas) relinquished all further claim to them.<sup>28</sup>

If I have disappointed by saying so little about Johnson's own sermons, it is because I now realise that they call for fuller and fairer treatment than could be given them in this paper. They seem to be less well known, even to Johnson admirers, than they deserve. I doubt whether justice has ever been done to them as examples of English pulpit oratory. Perhaps in the light of the foregoing sketch of Johnson's reactions to the sermon literature of the past, we may be better prepared to discover how his own sermons, firmly grounded as they are upon "instructive reasoning", and couched in language both vigorous and accurate, also have a power of striking rather than soothing, an elevation, a grandeur, that go far beyond mere "elegance". Some indeed stand among the few sermons addressed (at least in part) to the passions that are good for something. The most eloquent instance of Johnson's combination of intellectual and emotional power is his sermon said to have been composed for the funeral of his wife Tetty at Bromley in 1752, though it was never delivered. I can end no better than by quoting two paragraphs from its peroration.

It would not indeed be reasonable to expect, did we not know the inattention and perverseness of mankind, that any one who had followed a funeral, could fail to return home without new resolutions of a holy life: for, who can see the final period of all human schemes and undertakings, without conviction of the vanity of all that terminates in the present state? For, who can see the wise, the brave, the powerful, or the beauteous, carried to the grave, without reflection on the emptiness of all those distinctions, which set us here in opposition to each other? And who, when he sees the vanity of all terrestrial advantages, can forbear to wish for a more permanent and certain happiness? Such wishes, perhaps, often arise, and such resolutions are often formed; but, before the resolution can be exerted, before us, new impressions are received; the temptations of the world solicit, the passions of the heart are put into commotion; we plunge again into the tumult, engage again in the contest, and forget, that what we gain

cannot be kept, and that the life, for which we are thus busy to provide, must be quickly at an end.

But, let us not be thus shamefully deluded! Let us not thus idly perish in our folly, by neglecting the loudest call of providence; nor, when we have followed our friends, and our enemies, to the tomb, suffer ourselves to be surprised by the dreadful summons, and die, at last, amazed, and unprepared! Let everyone whose eye glances upon this bier, examine what would have been his condition, if the same hour had called him to judgment, and remember, that, though he is now spared, he may, perhaps, be to-morrow among separate spirits. The present moment is in our power; let us, therefore, from the present moment, begin our repentance! Let us not, any longer, harden our hearts, but hear, this day, the voice of our Saviour, and our God, and begin to do, with all our powers, whatever we shall wish to have done, when the grave shall open before us! Let those, who came hither weeping and lamenting, reflect, that they have not time for useless sorrow; that their own salvation is to be secured, and that the day is far spent, and the night cometh, when no man can work; that tears are of no value to the dead, and that their own danger may justly claim their whole attention! Let those who entered this place unaffected and indifferent, and whose only purpose was to behold this funeral spectacle, consider, that she, whom they thus behold with negligence, and pass by, was lately partaker of the same nature with themselves; and that they likewise are hastening to their end, and must soon, by others equally negligent, be buried and forgotten! Let all remember, that the day of life is short, and that the day of grace may be much shorter; that this may be the last warning which God will grant us, and that, perhaps, he, who looks on this grave unalarmed, may sink unreformed into his own!

#### Documentation

1. Boswell's Life of Johnson, ed. G. B. Hill, rev. L. F. Powell, I, 458. All subsequent references to the Life are to this edition.
2. See Life, III, 506-7.
3. Life, I, 463.
4. Life, IV, 105-7.
5. Life, III, 247-8.
6. See Life, I, 398; IV, 416, 524.
7. Life, I, 189n.

8. Life, V, 29, 88.
9. Life, III, 248.
10. Life, III, 518.
11. Dictionary entries S - Shu. It is not claimed that the count was a thorough or accurate one.
12. Life, I, 219, 222.
13. Life, IV, 105-7.
14. The Works of the Learned Isaac Barrow, D.D., 1716 edn., I, 1-2.
15. Sermons Preached upon Several Occasions by Robert South, D.D., 2nd edn., 1718, IV, 47-8.
16. Ibid., 52-3.
17. Ibid., I, 311-2.
18. See the admirable appreciation of South by James Sutherland in Review of English Literature, I (1960), 5-12.
19. Gilbert Burnet, Sermon Preached at the funeral of John (Tillotson), 1694, p.13.
20. Congreve, Dedication of The Dramatick Works of John Dryden, 1717.
21. W. Fraser Mitchell, English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson, p.341.
22. Their dates are: Sherlock 1641-1707, Atterbury 1662-1732, Smallridge 1663-1719, Clarke 1675-1729, Jortin 1698-1770, Seed 1700-1747.
23. Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres (published in 1783, though delivered earlier), Lecture XXVI.
24. Quoted in Charles Smyth, The Art of Preaching, 1940, pp. 248-9.
25. See Life, III, 517.
26. See Life, III, 139, n.4.
27. Blair, Lecture XXIX.
28. See Life, I, 24, 241; V, 67, 483-4.

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At the February Meeting of the Society, the Secretary announced the death of Professor Douglas Grant of the University of Leeds. The occasion was the more poignant as members will recall the memorable February Meeting of 1967 when Dr. Grant read a paper to the Johnson Society of London on "Samuel Johnson: Satire and Satirists" (published in The New Rambler June 1967).

Early in April, the sad news reached us of the death of Edward L. McAdam Jr., Professor of English at New York University. Dr. McAdam launched the great Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson with Volume I: Diaries, Prayers, and Annals, which he edited with Donald and Mary Hyde. Volume VI: Poems, edited with George Milne, appeared in 1964. We share with our American friends in the loss of so distinguished an Editor and Scholar.

SAMUEL JOHNSON AND WILLIAM LAUDER:

MALEVOLENCE IN THE CRITICISM OF MILTON

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Although the trend in Johnsonian studies now is to read *The Lives of the Poets* as predominantly objective and unemotional criticism, such was not the reaction of many eighteenth century men and women of literature. Even Dr. Johnson's friends, Bishop Newton and Charles J. Fox among them, expressed bitter disappointment with portions of the *Lives*, the portions in which Johnson seemed to attack their favourite poets. Johnson's adversaries in the literary squabbles of the age, opponents such as Horace Walpole and Anna Seward, found occasion to accuse Johnson of malevolence and malignity in his treatments of their favourite poets. Unfortunately for Johnson's reputation, his association with William Lauder may have added strength to the charges by his enemies, who seldom forgot or forgave an indiscretion.

Malevolence and malignity appear and reappear with a remarkable constancy in the letters and private papers of the literary disputants of the period; the terms were readily adopted to describe any opponent's motives. And in the eighteenth century the *litterati* seemed rather more ready to ascribe motives to critics than are the men of letters today. Motives, however, are difficult to prove; one must rely on the objective external evidence of what a man does rather than what he says or on what others say about him. More than two hundred years later, the task becomes even more difficult to determine the intention of William Lauder in his scheme to prove John Milton a plagiarist and just as difficult to assess the extent of Dr. Johnson's involvement in this literary scandal.

Roughly summarized, Lauder's fraud upon literature was attempted through his *Essay on Milton*, based on several articles he had written for *The Gentleman's Magazine* from 1747 to 1750. The pamphlet in its 1750 form contained an accusation against Milton which claimed that the poet had plagiarized several modern authors of Latin verses by borrowing too literally from their Latin poems and translating them into

English for use in Paradise Lost. Dr. Johnson was persuaded to provide a preface to the advertisement asking for subscriptions to Lauder's publication, the proposals for printing. A few months, perhaps, were required for scholars to obtain the supposedly plagiarized originals for a comparison; eventually they discovered that Lauder had forged Milton's so-called originals, had in fact stolen from a modern Latin translation of Paradise Lost, and had interpolated passages from this translation into the works of earlier modern Latin poets in order to accuse Milton of stealing from them. The scandal, of course, connected Johnson's preface to Lauder's forgeries.

James Boswell's account in his Life of Johnson offers this speculation:

This extraordinary attempt of Lauder was no sudden effort. He had brooded over it for many years; and to this hour it is uncertain what his principal motive was, unless it were a vain notion of his superiority, in being able, by whatever means, to deceive mankind.<sup>1</sup>

The delight in perpetrating a hoax, as suggested by Boswell, may indeed have been one of the motives for Lauder's forgeries. But several other motives have been suggested by other commentators.

The account of Lauder's biography as written by Sidney Lee for the Dictionary of National Biography stresses a series of disappointments and reversals in Lauder's life.<sup>2</sup> Soon after taking his degree at Edinburgh University in 1695, Lauder was watching a game of golf when he accidentally received a severe blow on the leg. Neglect or improper treatment of the wound resulted in amputation, perhaps the first in a series of misfortunes to fall in this man's career. Several times he was passed over in matters of promotion or of selection for a job in the Edinburgh schools. He became involved in a literary squabble concerning the selection of a Latin textbook by Buchanan in preference to one by Arthur Johnston, for which Lauder had written a preface. He tried to involve Pope in the controversy by sending him a copy of the Johnston book, but Pope did not reply. Later, in the Dunciad, Pope compared Johnston unfavourably with Milton, a comparison which rankled in the mind of Lauder, who developed an unreasonable hatred for both Pope and Milton. Sidney Lee's biography suggests, obviously, that a series of dis-

appointments created in Lauder a malevolence, perhaps to society as well as to individuals, which roused him to revenge himself on the poet Milton.

Another extremely interesting account of the life of William Lauder has been given by A. H. Millar in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine for September, 1899, an account which accepts but also supplements the Sidney Lee version of a life filled with disillusionments.<sup>3</sup> Millar traced many references to Lauder through the minutes of the meetings of the Town Council of Edinburgh. Although perfunctory and business-like, the minutes of these meetings present a picture of Lauder as an ambitious man, eager for advancement and anxious for a larger salary. The records of the Town Council record a rather grudging payment to Lauder of two guineas for his unsolicited poems, obviously an effort to get a little extra cash. The minutes also direct the Treasurer to intimate to Lauder "not to make any more of those poems without the Magistrates' approbation." Millar gives a more thorough account of the controversy over the Latin textbooks, and suggests that in his ambition to succeed in the business of a teacher of the humanities, Lauder was anxious to demonstrate his superiority as a Latin scholar. To demonstrate this superiority, Lauder hoped to perpetrate a hoax upon all the other scholars by his forgery of the supposed Latin models of Milton, in the expectation that other scholars would not recognize them.

Sir John Hawkins, in his Life of Samuel Johnson (1787), says merely that Lauder "had conceived a hatred against the memory of Milton."<sup>4</sup> This malevolence to Milton he also ascribes to Johnson when he says:

I could all along observe that Johnson seemed to approve, not only of the design but of the argument, and seemed to exult in a persuasion, that the reputation of Milton was likely to suffer by this discovery...

Hawkins makes a point of clearing Johnson from any suspicion of having any knowledge of the forgeries:

That he was not privy to the imposture I am well persuaded, but that he wished well to the argument must be inferred from the preface, which indubitably was written by Johnson.

Boswell, of course, frequently found fault with Hawkins's biography of Johnson, and he rose to this occasion to contradict



Hawkins's conclusions. Boswell's method of refutation was the same method most commonly used by modern commentators in a defence of Johnson: he pointed to passages in Johnson's writings which indicate that Johnson had a great admiration for Milton as a poet. Perhaps he missed the clue that Hawkins gave all Johnsonians; perhaps Boswell should have examined more closely the preface written by Johnson - not the preface as printed in the 1750 pamphlet by Lauder, but the preface printed in his 1747 proposals.

In collecting the prefaces and dedications written by Samuel Johnson, Allen T. Hazen found that the original version of Johnson's preface to Lauder's Essay on Milton appeared as part of the Proposals for printing by subscription Hugonis Grotii Adamus Exsul, tragoedia; with an English version, and the lines imitated from it by Milton subjoined to the pages, which appeared September 5, 1747, and again in the Gentleman's Magazine for August, 1747.<sup>5</sup> An important point to consider is that this version of the preface does not contain the final two paragraphs as printed in Lauder's Essay on Milton appearing a little more than two years later. The significance lies in the speculation that perhaps Johnson's understanding of the project in 1747 was different from the project as it finally appeared in 1749.

Lauder's early articles in the Gentleman's Magazine, starting in 1747, were fairly tentative suggestions that Milton had imitated certain Latin writers. The descriptive title of the proposals, in fact, indicates the extent of Lauder's early intimations; he suggests that Milton's Paradise Lost contained many similarities to Adam in Exile by Hugo Grotius, and that perhaps Milton owed a debt to Grotius for the original inspiration. This is certainly a tenable thesis, and he has support from a notebook in which Milton seems to have listed several topics he proposed to work on, among which is listed Adamus Exsul. Very probably, when Johnson wrote the preface for Lauder, the project was a legitimate critical investigation. A paragraph from the preface written by Johnson, although supposedly in the voice of the author of the pamphlet, reveals the kind of interest Johnson might properly have in such a project:

Among the inquiries to which this ardour of criticism has naturally given occasion, none is more obscure in itself, or more worthy of rational curiosity, than a retrospection of the progress of this mighty genius in

the construction of his work, a view of the fabric gradually rising, perhaps from small beginnings, till its foundation rests in the centre, and its turrets sparkle in the skies; to trace back the structure through all its varieties to the simplicity of its first plan, to find what was first projected, whence the scheme was taken, how it was improved, by what assistance it was executed, and from what stores the materials were collected; whether its founder dug them from the quarries of nature, or demolished other buildings to embellish his own.<sup>6</sup>

Lauder continued to contribute articles to The Gentleman's Magazine, each article more violent than the last in claiming that Milton had plagiarized the Latin poets. Not until two years later were two paragraphs added to the preface, probably by Lauder himself, which said that Lauder intended to use these articles, presumably including the later ones, in his expanded and altered project on Milton:

I cannot avoid acknowledging the CANDOUR of the author of that excellent monthly book, the GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE, in giving admission to the specimens in favour of this argument; and his IMPARTIALITY, in as freely inserting the several answers. I shall here subjoin some EXTRACTS from the xvii. volume of this work, which I think suitable to my purpose...

A change in tone and severity of the articles of 1747 compared to the articles of 1749 might plausibly indicate that Johnson was unaware of Lauder's purpose to prove Milton a plagiarist; he might have believed he was contributing a preface to a legitimate inquiry as to the sources and influences of Milton's Paradise Lost. This speculation offers a comfortable prospect of belief; many Johnsonians would like to believe it. The truth of the speculation would mean that Johnson entered into the Lauder affair with no ill will to Milton.

Few persons have offered to accuse Johnson of dishonesty. Even Horace Walpole, who seldom missed an opportunity to say something vicious about Johnson, does not appear to have accused him of anything but bad taste and poor judgment, although Walpole's letters to William Mason indicate they were aware of the scandal. Johnsonians need not defend Dr. Johnson from any charge of dishonesty, but many of them, like James Boswell, feel compelled to defend him from a charge of

malevolence toward Milton. Johnson seems, through an unfortunate accident of a slight acquaintance, to have had his motives and feelings toward Milton associated, will he nil he, with those of Lauder.

Arthur Murphy in his "Essay on Johnson's Life and Genius" (1791) uses nearly the same words as Hawkins in describing Lauder's motives: "One Lauder, a native of Scotland, who had been a teacher in the University of Edinburgh, had conceived a mortal antipathy to the name and character of Milton." Murphy also says that Lauder was "fired with resentment, and willing to reap the profits of a gross imposition." In a further elaboration of Lauder's motives, he has left later Johnsonians with a very uncomfortable problem in regard to the extent of Johnson's ill will to Milton. He offers as a reason for Lauder's malevolence that

... the prayer of Pamela, in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, was, as he supposed, maliciously inserted by the great poet in an edition of the *Icon Basilike*, in order to fix an imputation of impiety on the memory of the murdered king.<sup>8</sup>

If the date of the original preface to Lauder's *Essay*, 1747, offers a hope that Johnson did not really know or approve of Lauder's motives in 1749, the charge of ill will and malevolence is only partly alleviated, for Johnson continued to despise Milton's politics and to disapprove of some of his personal traits. Moreover, in his *Lives of the Poets* (1777), nearly thirty years later, Johnson continued to maintain, as did Lauder, that Milton had forged a portion of the *Icon Basilike* of Charles I, interpolating it in the text in order to use it in his pamphlet against the king. Johnson said:

But as faction seldom leaves a man honest, however it might find him, Milton is suspected of having interpolated the book called *Icon Basilike*, which the Council of State, to whom he was now made Latin secretary, employed him to censure, by inserting a prayer taken from Sidney's *Arcadia*, and imputing it to the King, whom he charges, in his *Iconoclastes*, with the use of this prayer, as with a heavy crime...<sup>9</sup>

Thus the objective evidence of the first text of Johnson's Preface to Lauder's *Essay on Milton* seems cancelled by the objective evidence of Johnson's "Life of Milton." Johnsonians are left to play more games of speculation in their

own hearts as to the proportions of ill will and malevolence they will grant an objective critic.

#### Documentation

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2. Sidney Lee, "William Lauder," Dictionary of National Biography (London, 1885-1900).
3. A. H. Millar, "William Lauder, the Literary Forger, An Unrecorded Episode in His Life," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, CLXVI (Sept. 1899), 381-396.
4. Sir John Hawkins, Knt., The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., ed. Bertram H. Davis (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p.119.
5. Allen T. Hazen, Samuel Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), p.78. Hazen says that although the issue was dated August, it actually was printed in the first week of September.
6. Hazen, p.81.
7. Hazen, p.82.
8. Arthur Murphy, "An Essay on the Life and Genius of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. [1792], in Johnsonian Miscellanies, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1897), I, 393-394.
9. Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1905), I, 110-111.

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In the January 1969 issue of The New Rambler, our reviewer of Dr. Johnson und Boswell by Carl Brinitzer referred to an illustration in the book labelled "London Coffee-House" which depicted a Regency buck in a tavern. Ross Wilson promptly wrote in to point out that "an 18th - early 19th century coffee-house was not restricted to coffee. Usually it was a pseudonym for a dram shop - more drams than coffee".

VANITY FAIR AND THE JOHNSONIAN TRADITION OF FICTION

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The first chapter of Thackeray's Vanity Fair closes on a dramatic note when Becky Sharp defiantly throws a copy of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary back into Miss Pinkerton's garden. This scene provides an early clue to Becky's personality, and it foreshadows her future actions. In the same respect Amelia's horrified but passive reaction to this incident adumbrates her future conduct. It seems likely, however, that Thackeray intended this scene to play a more significant role than the mere introduction of character. The fact that it is Dr. Johnson's Dictionary<sup>1</sup> that Becky tosses back into the garden suggests a great deal about Thackeray's intentions in the novel, for such an act could afford Thackeray a means of symbolically disapproving of Dr. Johnson and his view of fiction. It may well be a symbolic gesture which he supports in fact by creating a fictional world that runs counter to Dr. Johnson's theories of the novel.

With its opening in a finishing school and with its emphasis on two young ladies about to enter polite society, the novel appears to be a typical romance. Amelia, of course, fits into this tradition, and she receives Miss Pinkerton's accolades. In a letter of recommendation, Miss Pinkerton says of Amelia:

Those virtues which characterise the young English gentlewoman, those accomplishments which become her birth and station, will not be found wanting in the amiable Miss Sedley, whose industry and obedience have endeared her to her instructors....

In the principles of religion and morality, Miss Sedley will be found worthy of an establishment which has been honoured by the presence of The Great Lexicographer....<sup>2</sup>

Thackeray further associates Amelia with the tradition of Dr. Johnson by having Miss Pinkerton, in the tradition of the school, present her with an edition of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary. "On the cover," Thackeray says, "was inserted a copy of 'Lines

addressed to a young lady on quitting Miss Pinkerton's school, at the Mall; by the late revered Doctor Samuel Johnson."<sup>3</sup>

Miss Pinkerton, however, refuses to give Becky a Dictionary, and it immediately becomes obvious that she is not to be associated with the romantic, moral tradition of either Chiswick Mall or of the great Lexicographer. The kind-hearted Miss Jemima cannot stand to see Becky leave without the blessing of a Dictionary, and she secretly gives one to her. "But, lo! and just as the coach drove off, Miss Sharp put her pale face out the window, and actually flung the book back into the garden."<sup>4</sup> This act of insolence horrifies both Amelia and Miss Jemima, but Becky sinks back into the coach "in an easy frame of mind" and exclaims: "'So much for the Dictionary; and, thank God, I'm out of Chiswick.'"<sup>5</sup> Subsequent events bear out Thackeray's dissociation of Becky from the moral tradition of the great Dr. Johnson.

As a professed disciple of Fielding, Thackeray could hardly agree with the theories of fiction promulgated by Dr. Johnson in his famous essay in The Rambler on March 30, 1750. In this essay Dr. Johnson asserts that

in narratives where historical veracity has no place, I cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue; of virtue not angelical, nor above probability, for what we cannot credit, we shall never imitate... Vice, for vice is necessary to be shown, should always disgust; nor should the graces of gaiety, or the dignity of courage, be so united with it, as to reconcile it to the mind.<sup>6</sup>

Many writers, he goes on to say, so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal characters that they are both equally conspicuous. As we accompany these characters through their adventures, we are led by degrees to interest ourselves in their favor and we lose abhorrence of their faults.<sup>7</sup> He concludes:

It is of the utmost importance to mankind, that positions of this tendency should be laid open and confuted; for while men consider good and evil as springing from the same root, they will spare the one for the sake of the other, and in judging, if not of others at least for themselves, will be apt to estimate their virtues by their vices.<sup>8</sup>

Johnson's dicta became the prevailing guidelines for criticism in England for half a century, strongly influencing the essay-critics and reviewers, and such prominent writers as Henry Mackenzie.<sup>9</sup> For Johnson, the novel was so recent and so superfluous a literary genre that he was willing to give it over entirely to the use of moral tuition.<sup>10</sup> Johnson's stand, of course, was a reaction against Fielding's concept of art and an endorsement of Richardson's beliefs.<sup>11</sup> Johnson and Richardson had their way with many other critics of the novel, and Fielding's reputation as a novelist was darkened by charges of "lowness," "immorality," and "indecenty."<sup>12</sup> Fielding, however, had his advocates, and by the turn of the century his theories had begun to prevail, though Dr. Johnson's views still lingered.

In view of this situation, Becky's treatment of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary may well be quite significant, for as Thackeray says in the "Introduction" to Pendennis: "Since the author of Tom Jones was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a man."<sup>13</sup> Symbolically, then, Becky breaks from the conventional, moral world of Chiswick Mall to engage in the world of Vanity Fair. This world does not make clear moral distinctions, and by its emphasis on false values it encourages hypocrisy. But, in his well-known review of Fielding in 1840 Thackeray contends that "it is good to pretend the virtue of chastity even though we do not possess it," for the restraint that hypocrisy lays on a man in some instances profits him.<sup>14</sup> Fielding, he says, was trying to show life as it is by juxtaposing good with evil. He boldly asserts: "Vice is never to be mistaken for virtue in Fielding's honest downright books; it goes by its name and invariably gets its punishment."<sup>15</sup> Like Fielding, Thackeray claims his right to present mixed characters.

Throughout Vanity Fair Thackeray continues his assault on Dr. Johnson's theories of fiction. Early in the novel he asserts that "if this is a novel without a hero, at least let us lay claim to a heroine [Becky]."<sup>16</sup> Rather than depicting her as a clear-cut example of vice, as advocated by Dr. Johnson, he remains conspicuously nebulous in defining her character. "Was Rebecca guilty or not," he asks repeatedly. Thackeray implies guilt by referring to her "corrupt heart," her "lies," "schemes," "selfishness," and "wiles." In chapter LXIV he even calls attention to the "monster's hideous tail" under the waves where one can "see it writhing and twirling, diabolically



hideous and slimy, flapping amongst bones, or curling around corpses..."<sup>17</sup> He does not, however, specifically condemn her, and even in the great "discovery-scene" in chapter LIII she declares her innocence. This ambiguity continues to the end of the novel. When Dobbin last visits Jos Sedley, his now invalid brother-in-law vows that "she is as innocent as a child, as spotless as your own wife."<sup>18</sup> He later declares, however, that Dobbin must keep his visit a secret from Mrs. Crawley, for "she'd - she'd kill me if she knew it."<sup>19</sup> Shortly thereafter Jos dies under mysterious circumstances, but no one can prove Becky guilty of murdering him.

Vanity Fair thus commences with Becky's defiant act of tossing Dr. Johnson's Dictionary into the garden of Miss Pinkerton's school, and it ends ambiguously with the heroine possibly guilty of murder. Contrary to Dr. Johnson's dictates, virtue and vice are mixed in the novel, and true to his apprehensions this mixing frequently obfuscates moral distinctions. That Thackeray felt certain moral affinities with Dr. Johnson may account for the blunted attempts to depict Becky's vices, but the novel closes on a note of moral uncertainty. Amelia's self-centeredness comes to light, but Becky's vices are never convincingly found out. Thus, in Vanity Fair Thackeray aligns himself with the school of Fielding, and, symbolically at least, he throws over the Richardson-Johnson school of morally centered fiction.

#### Documentation

1. If Becky had tossed away any other book - the Bible, for example - this incident would still remain a graphic if humorous example of character revelation, but it would lose its poignancy as a symbolic statement of purpose for the novel.
2. W. M. Thackeray, Vanity Fair (New York, 1958), p.2.
3. Ibid. 4. Ibid., p.7.
5. Ibid.
6. Johnson, Samuel, The Works of, a New Edition in Twelve Volumes with an Essay on his Life and Genius, by Arthur M. Murphy (London, MDCCXLVI), IV, p.26.
7. Ibid., p.24. 8. Ibid., p.25.
9. Robert D. Mayo, The English Novel in the Magazines: 1740-1815 (Evanston, 1962), pp.108, 140, 146.
10. Ibid., p.152.
11. In The English Humorists [The Works of W. M. Thackeray (New York, 1904), XXIII] Thackeray declares: "Richardson's

sickening antipathy for Henry Fielding is quite as natural as the other's laughter and contempt at the sentimentalist. I have not learned that these likings and dislikings have ceased in the present day... The kind and wise old Johnson would not set down with him" [pp.199-200]. In a letter to Abraham Hayward on February 1, 1850, Thackeray says: "Why, Doctor Johnson would certainly have blackballed Fielding, whom he pronounced 'a dull fellow...'"

[The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray, ed. by Gordon N. Ray, II (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945), p.13]. In a note Professor Ray indicates that Thackeray apparently alluded to the following passage from Boswell's Life of Johnson (ed. George Birkbeck Hill and L. F. Powell, 6 vols., Oxford, 1934-40, II, 173-74): "Fielding being mentioned, Johnson exclaimed, 'he was a blockhead'; and upon expressing my astonishment at so strange an assertion, he said, 'What I mean by his being a blockhead is, that he was a barren rascal.'" Thackeray also points out that Johnson and Richardson were good friends.

12. Mayo, p.152.
13. W. M. Thackeray, "Preface" to Pendennis (London, 1965), p.XVI.
14. Thackeray, Works, XXV, 233. Ralph Rader ["Thackeray's Injustice to Fielding," JEGP, LVI (April, 1957), 203-212] claims that between the review of Fielding in 1840 and the Humorists in 1851 Thackeray had changed his attitude on virtue and vice in Fielding's work (pp.208-209). This change, however, does not seem to manifest itself in any appreciable manner in Vanity Fair.
15. Thackeray, Works, p.239.
16. Thackeray, Vanity Fair, p.278.
17. Ibid., p.615.
18. Ibid., p.666.
19. Ibid.

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Readers will remember Dr. James B. Misenheimer's essay, "Dr. Johnson on Prose Fiction", published in the January 1968 issue of The New Rambler. We were pleased to receive the above article by Dr. Leslie M. Thompson as a sequel to Dr. Misenheimer's study.

Samuel Johnson: Essays from the Rambler, Adventurer, and Idler, edited with an Introduction by W. J. Bate. Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1968. A Yale Paperbound 35/- (£3.75).

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