

**THE NEW RAMBLER**



JOURNAL OF  
THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

SPRING 1972

# The New Rambler

JOURNAL OF THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

*Editor:* JAMES H. LEICESTER, M.A., BROADMEAD, EYNSFORD ROAD, FARNINGHAM, KENT

---

Serial No. C.XII.

SPRING 1972

---

## CONTENTS

### COMMEMORATIVE ADDRESS

James B. Misenheimer 3

### A MOON OF LITERATURE: VERSE BY LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU

Isobel Grundy 6

### THE ASSOCIATION BOOKS OF JOHNSON, BOSWELL, AND MRS. PIOZZI IN THE BIRTHPLACE MUSEUM

K. K. Yung 23

### THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY IN FANNY BURNEY'S EVELINA

Jill Rubenstein 45

### DR. JOHNSON AND THE TEARS OF HERACLITUS

Raman Selden 51

### "NO ABOLITION OF SLAVERY": BOSWELL AND THE SLAVE TRADE

Ronald E. McFarland 55

### NOTES

22, 64

# **THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON**

---

*President :*

L. F. POWELL, ESQ., D. Litt., F.R.S.L., F.L.A., Oxford

*Vice-Presidents :*

The Venerable E. F. CARPENTER, M.A., B.D., Ph.D.,  
Archdeacon of Westminster.

Professor JAMES L. CLIFFORD, Ph.D., Litt.D., F.R.S.L.

A. G. DOWDESWELL, ESQ., A.I.B.

The Reverend Canon ADAM FOX, D.D.

The Right Honourable LORD HARMSWORTH, M.A.

Professor M. J. C. HODGART, M.A.

IAN JACK, ESQ., M.A., D. Phil.

The Very Reverend W. R. MATTHEWS,  
C.H., K.C.V.O., D.Lit., D.D., S.T.D., F.R.S.L.

Professor FREDERICK A. POTTLE, Ph.D., Litt.D., LL.D.

---

COMMEMORATIVE ADDRESS\*

---

James B. Misenheimer, Jr., Ph.D.  
Professor of English,  
North Texas State University, Denton.

We are gathered today in the Poets' Corner to honour the memory of Dr. Samuel Johnson, a great man, a great author, a great humanist. He was born at Lichfield 262 years ago and buried here on December 20, 1784.

The intellectual force of Johnson's life has been explored and celebrated by scholars the world over, and on this occasion of our annual commemoration, it seems fitting to reflect upon the character of his humanistic attainments as these are evidenced in his life and writings.

We know that Johnson's life was not unmarked by occasional differences with even his closest friends. Indeed, Boswell reports the following difference of opinion between Johnson and Oliver Goldsmith in his account of the year 1783: "Dr. Goldsmith said once to Dr. Johnson, that he wished for some additional members to the LITERARY CLUB, to give it an agreeable variety; for (said he,) there can now be nothing new among us; we have travelled over one another's minds. Johnson seemed a little angry, and said, 'Sir, you have not travelled over my mind, I promise you.'"<sup>1</sup> Johnson could no doubt answer just as appropriately a similar situation in the same way in the twentieth century; for despite the countless and untiring efforts of modern scholars, Johnson's mind has still not been "travelled over." It remains a vast repository of manly wisdom and provocative thought. It is a mind of encyclopaedic scope and capacity which, in its strange power, continues to radiate the potential achievement of man and the inspiration of man's talents. As a result, Johnson's ideas are the subject of perpetual inquiry and attraction.

One aspect of Johnson's thought which can profitably stand a more lengthy and detailed treatment than it has previously received is his theory of literature. Johnson's theory is very real, though it is true that Johnson was sceptical about the validity of literary

\* Address delivered at the Annual Commemoration Service in Westminster Abbey on Saturday, 18 December, 1971, conducted by the Dean of Westminster, Dr. Abbott.

definition and speculative thinking. An explicit statement of his literary theory invariably stresses the significance of literature in its relation to man. Among the various phrasings which modern scholars have given his theory are literature as "a means to a knowledge of life"; literature as "a form of knowledge, valuable for its illustration and illumination of human nature"; and literature as "a reflection of men and manners and morals." Each of these capsule expressions of Johnson's theory posits his conviction of the human function of literary art.

An analysis of Johnson's literary theory must include a brief consideration of his best known characteristics. Such characteristics are his strong common sense; his passionate love of truth; his comprehensive knowledge of human nature; his genuine concern for human life; his classical education; and his tendency toward didacticism. More integral to the analysis, however, is Johnson's humanism in relation to his view of literary art. More than one scholar has noted that Johnson's view of the moral function of literature sprang from his sincere and intense religious beliefs.

Johnson's relationship with his God was a highly personal relationship which strongly influenced his thinking on practically all matters. His humanism is equally personal. It is basically the belief that man's most important business is to live in such a way as to perfect those gifts which God has bestowed upon him. It voices its concern, throughout Johnson's writings, for man's moral success and for his potential achievement, his self-realization as an individual. Johnson staunchly believed that literature is a force which can be used and which should be used for man's distinct advantage. He saw it as a force capable of redirecting human conduct so that man can realize the zenith of his powers, which come from God. He was convinced that literary art should have as its ultimate goal the moral edification and enlightenment of man. In a late letter to Mrs. Thrale (February 9, 1784), Johnson offered the following prayer, which reveals his hope for the positive influence of his own literary production: "Grant, O Lord, that all who shall read my pages, may become more obedient to thy laws; and when the wretched writer shall appear before thee, extend thy mercy to him, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen."<sup>2</sup> Johnson hoped that all literary art would lead men to an obedience

of their Maker.

Johnson did not impose upon others principles for which he had no respect or standards which no man, including himself, could hope to attain. He had faith that literary art should be strong, noble, and honourable among men. This faith he made known to his contemporaries. In the face of this belief, however, he was keenly aware of his own weaknesses as a man. He knew that no man practices so well as he writes. He once remarked to Mrs. Thrale: "I have through my whole progress of authorship honestly endeavoured to teach the right, though I have not been sufficiently diligent to practise it, and have offered mankind my opinion as a rule, but never professed my behaviour as an example."<sup>3</sup> If he was somehow unable to profit directly at times from the universal truths which he recognized in literature and in life itself, he at least kept alive the hope for his own reformation. His hope for himself was closely akin to that which he held for all men everywhere.

In the name of the Johnson Society of London, I lay this wreath to the memory of Dr. Samuel Johnson.

1. James Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev. and enl. by Lawrence F. Powell (Oxford, 1934-50), IV, 183.
2. Letters of Dr. Samuel Johnson, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford, 1892), II, 378.
3. Letters, II, 234-235.

At the Meeting of The Johnson Society of London held on the afternoon of 18th December, Dr. Misenheimer spoke on "Samuel Johnson's Christian Humanism and the Function of Literature". His paper will be published in the Autumn issue of The New Rambler.

## A MOON OF LITERATURE:

VERSE BY LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU\*

Isobel Grundy, M.A.

My title comes from a remark of Dr. Johnson's. Johnson believed that there was something worthwhile in every book of poetry; he compared modern poets to moons of literature, shining with reflected light.<sup>1</sup> His simile applies particularly well to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Her prose letters, which Johnson read with great enjoyment, are highly idiosyncratic and original; in her verse, on the other hand, though the point of view remains distinctively Lady Mary's, the voices are the voices of others. A poem called "Hymn to the Moon" will serve as example. It is subtitled "Written in July in an Arbour":

Thou silver Deity of secret night,  
 Direct my footsteps through the woodland shade,  
 Thou conscious witness of unknown delight,  
 The Lovers' Guardian, and the Muse's aid.

By thy pale beams I solitary rove,  
 To thee my tender grief confide,  
 Serenely sweet you gild the silent grove,  
 My friend, my goddess and my guide.

Even thee, fair Queen, from thy amazing height  
 The charms of young Endimion drew,  
 Veiled with the mantle of concealing night,  
 With all thy greatness, and thy coldness too.<sup>2</sup>

Lady Mary uses traditional poetic diction, words selected largely for their generalised associations and for their sound. The liquids and sibilants of "Serenely sweet you gild the silent grove" lull the reader with a smoothness after which the last stanza comes as a shock. The moon, which has been acting as a planet, suddenly begins to act as a goddess; the words amazing and charms carry their root meanings of enchantment.

\* A paper read to the Johnson Society of London, on 20th February, 1971. Chairman: E. M. Bonner, Esq.



The summer which produced this poem was most probably that in which Lady Mary, already middle-aged and with a grown-up son and daughter, fell ridiculously and painfully in love with a young Italian writer. It is typical of her verse to conceal the personal allusion - if it is a personal allusion - under a reference to the classical story of the moon's love for a young mortal.

The eighteenth century was not a great age of lyric poetry, but Lady Mary wrote some fine lyrics. As in the "Hymn to the Moon", she likes to use images which will break on the reader with a shock of surprise, but which still have a logical as well as an imaginative fitness. Here is a stanza which she called "Impromptu to a Young Lady Singing":

Sing gentle maid, reform my breast,  
And soften all my care,  
Thus I can be some moments blest  
And easy in despair,  
The power of Orpheus lives in you,  
The raging passions of my soul subdue  
And tame the lions, and the tigers there.

These mental lions and tigers might almost suggest a poet like Blake, if they were not all part of the comparison with Orpheus, who charmed wild beasts with his singing.

Lady Mary's titles often convey information about the composition of her verse. A good many record that they were written extempore. This may help to excuse their frequent lack of polish; it also distinguishes her personal poems from those with some form of dramatic setting, in which she writes from the point of view of someone else - someone either real or imaginary. We can see the sources of both kinds of poetry in her adolescence.

As a girl Lady Mary ended a survey of different occupations with "poetry my dear, my darling choice". She lived a lonely life in her father's mansion, Thoresby, on the edge of Sherwood Forest. Her mother was dead, her father (according to her own account) a rakish man of the world who "did not think himself obliged to be very attentive to his children's education", her governess was ignorant and superstitious.<sup>5</sup> She seems to have had no adult help with her poems; this may have contributed towards making her careless and uncritical. One poem indeed suggests that she met with



adult disapproval:

'Twas folly made me fondly write  
 (For what have I to do with love and wit?)  
 I own I trespassed wickedly in rhyme  
 But oh, my punishment exceeds my crime,  
 My follies though on parchment writ  
 I soon might burn and then forget,  
 But if I now both burn and blot  
 (By me) they cannot be forgot.

She did blot some pages and tear out others from her two juvenile albums of verse, but plenty remains. She entitled her first album, "Poems, novels, letters, songs etc, dedicated to the fair hands of the beauteous Hermensilda by her most obedient Strephon". Later on, deciding to admit her sex, she added a Preface: "I question not but here is very many faults, but if any reasonable person considers 3 things they would forgive them: 1) I am a woman, 2) without any advantage of education, 3) all these was writ at the age of 14". For her second book she changed her nom de plume from Strephon to Clarinda. She seems to have considered giving this album a Latin title-page, but after writing "Clarindae" she changed her mind and altered it to "The Entire Works of Clarinda". "London", she added, as on a real published title-page. This shows that her early verse was dramatic, playing with assumed identities. It also suggests that her aristocratic and ladylike horror of publishing was a later development, if not indeed a polite fiction.

From the beginning she was heavily influenced by the classics, writing imitations of Ovid, Horace and Virgil. She also followed the artificial late seventeenth-century manner. She not only compares beauties to flowers, but also the other way round. In a poem about roses she says,

It makes the glory of the gay bouquet  
 Where choicest flowers are in assembly met -

the word assembly signifying a particular type of social gathering in far-off exciting London.

Despite imitation and dramatisation, her own ideas keep breaking through. She writes a series of poems about the joys of country retirement, in which Strephon prefers

this small country seat  
 To all the honours of the great,  
 What he does now despise and hate.  
 Smiling I heard him vow  
 That he was never blest till now,  
 Here in this poor retreat.

Several more of her characters swear to see "Th'inconstant town" or "the dangerous town" no more. But when her closest friend became Maid of Honour to Queen Anne she changed her tune and abandoned borrowed light for her own:

While here I stay condemned to desert fields,  
 Denied the pleasures that dear London yields....

Among the most interesting of her juvenile works is a huge verse-and-prose romance, "The Adventurer", modelled on Aphra Behn's Voyage to the Isle of Love. The Adventurer is our friend Strephon, who wanders among delightfully artificial allegorical landscapes suggestive of a painting by Watteau or Fragonard - where "Budding roses strew the perfumed ground" - and offers his heart in the temple of the God of Love in obedience to the summons:

Come all ye Lovers, hither fly,  
 Leave behind you sighs and care,  
 Come hither all ye young and fair,  
 This is Love's Altar, come offer your prayer,  
 Come all ye blooming youthful maids,  
 Gay as the infant spring,  
 Bring no books nor bring no beads,  
 But your heart be sure ye bring,  
 Your hearts must be the offering.

But the isle of Love has another department, a wood called "Coquetrish". In describing it Lady Mary adopts a different and would-be realistic tradition:

The prude is handed by the gay debauche,  
 And duchess there gallops in hackney coach.

Obviously this is how the young Lady Mary imagines London life - almost like Daisy Ashford's imagined Crystal Palace in The Young Visitors.

Lady Mary's girlhood verse introduces us to one of

her life-long interests, which it would be anachronistic to call feminism and even more anachronistic to call women's lib. She early ran up against the limitations of being female, when she had to "steal the Latin language" because no-one would teach it to her. Her early verse includes several epistles in imitation of Ovid's Heroides, in which famous ladies reproach their unfaithful lovers or husbands, who are of course also famous figures: Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, and Ovid himself. They lament male inconstancy in conventional terms:

But oh, what triumph is it to deceive  
A credulous maid all easy to believe?

A fourth epistle strikes a less usual note. Here the lover is off to war, leaving his lady full of unfeminine ambition:

Why has the cruel power confined  
To this weak clay my warlike mind?  
I would with courage follow you,  
Fight by your side, and fame alike pursue...  
And when near you I saw the flying dart  
I would with pride receive it in my heart,  
And to Elyzium Bowers with joy remove,  
Pleased that I died to save my love.

This heroine sees through the formal poetic love-language (what Lady Mary later called "all the senseless lies/Of burning darts from killing eyes"), though the rhetoric she adopts is just as stilted. She concludes with an ironical pun:

But what my soul would do, my fate denies,  
And I can kill with nothing but my eyes.

As an adult Lady Mary sometimes revisited the romance pastoral world of her early poems, but more often she re-made it into an ironical comment on that real world which her adolescent verse barely touched on. She reflected the interest of her contemporaries in mock-epic and mock-pastoral - largely, no doubt, on account of her friendship in the years 1715 and 1716 with Pope and Gay, who were both engaged in this kind of writing. With them Lady Mary produced her town eclogues: a poem for each day of the week, satirising court society by writing about it in the manner of the ancient pastoralists. As the shepherds competed in song, she has

two beaux competing in amatory conquest, and two ladies contending over the relative pains of love and cards, with full apparatus of wagers and parallel speeches, and a reference to the dual-sexed Tiresias settling a similar dispute between men and women. In "Tuesday" a formal invocation leads in to a detailed picture of the activities of fashionable London at 6 p.m. - and even unfashionable London:

St. James's bell had tolled some wretches in  
As tattered riding hoods alone could sin.  
The happier sinners now their charms recruit  
And to their manteaus their complexions suit.

Finally her attention focusses on the rivals:

No well-dressed youth in coffee-house remained  
But pensive Patch, who on the window leaned,  
And Silliander, that alert and gay,  
First picked his teeth....

Again and again Lady Mary uses a detail like "picked his teeth" to make her elegant characters suddenly appear comic. Here is Smilinda describing a passionate moment:

What more than marble must the breast compose  
That listens coldly to my Sharper's vows?  
Then, when he trembles, when his blushes rise,  
When awful love seems melting in his eyes!  
With eager beats, his Mechlin cravat moves....

Even at "such a moment" it is important to Smilinda that her lover has the right kind of cravat. Similarly it increases the bitterness of Lydia's jealousy to think she has helped her rival to the best brand-names: "And by my interest Cosins made her stays". Lady Mary makes great play with stays, as well as snuff, fans, patches and other aids to flirtation. Indeed Patch and Silliander seem almost more interested in clothes than in the women inside them. The conquests they boast are those of public recognition rather than private love, right up to the match point:

What colour does in Celia's stockings shine?  
Reveal that secret and the prize is thine.

What are her garters? Tell me if you can,  
I'll freely own thee for the happy man.

Perhaps, indeed, this helps to explain Lady Mary's surprisingly tolerant attitude towards them. They are after all among those anti-knight-errants whose triumphs over ladies she detested - but their victories are only victories on points, and they do not appear likely to break anybody's heart.

Most of Lady Mary's eclogues amusingly blend the topical and the classical, lending the fashionable world some of the aura of romance. In "Wednesday" she separates the two elements, once more arranging a surprise for her reader. The body of this poem is couched in high-flown rhetoric. Dancinda reproaches her lover, who shows signs of wishing to progress from platonic to physical love:

Oh Love! A god indeed to womankind!  
 (Whose arrows burn me, and whose fetters bind)  
 Avenge thy altars, vindicate thy fame,  
 And blast these traitors who profane thy name,  
 Who by pretending to thy sacred fire,  
 Raise cursed trophies to impure desire!

This poem, alone among the eclogues, does not open with any description of its characters' appearance. This is reserved until the end of Dancinda's tirade:

She paused, and fixed her eyes upon her fan;  
 He took a pinch of snuff, and thus began....

The couplet flashes a warning signal to the reader - the couple are dressed not like a shepherd and shepherdess but like readers of the Spectator; it introduces a closely-observed bathetic ending:

Madam, if Love - but he could say no more  
 For Mademoiselle came rapping to the door.  
 The dangerous moments no adieus afford,  
 Begone, she cries, I'm sure I hear my Lord!  
 The Lover starts from his unfinished loves,  
 To snatch his hat, and seek his scattered gloves,  
 The sighing dame to meet her dear prepares;  
 While Strephon cursing slips down the back stairs.

One can only say, how unlike the home life of the Arcadians!

But Lady Mary retained her interest in the serious love-debate as well as the exposé of contemporary morals.





















































































































