

# THE NEW RAMBLER



JOURNAL OF  
THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

1999-2000

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OF  
LONDON

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**THE NEW RAMBLER**  
**Journal of the Johnson Society of London**

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Serial No E III

ISSN 0028-6540

1999-2000

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## FROM THE EDITOR

THE SOCIETY is pleased to announce that Stella Pigrome has accepted appointment as a Vice-President. She has given great service to the Society over almost thirty years of membership, including fifteen years as Secretary. We are delighted to be able to show our appreciation in this way.

David Parker, who served for twelve years as Editor of the *New Rambler*, also accepted appointment as a Vice-President. It is with great sadness that we record that David died a few months later. He was known to members around the world, corresponded with many, and often entertained at his home in Oxford or his Club in London. On a personal note, he gave great encouragement to me when I succeeded him as Editor. An appreciation of his life appears in this issue.

We also record the deaths of Gerald Smeeton and Professor Helen Louise McGuffie, both for many years members of the Society. Professor McGuffie had addressed the Society on one occasion. Her work on *Samuel Johnson in the British Press* is well-known.

The 1998-1999 issue of the *New Rambler* contained a paper on Johnson's house at 17, Gough Square, by the Curator, Natasha McEnroe. Apart from the historical interest of the building, in recent years it has been the venue for a varied and interesting programme of events; one thinks of Karin Fernald's one-woman show on Fanny Burney, Peter Martin's lecture on Boswell, a rare performance of Beckett's *Human Wishes*, and several enjoyable Christmas evenings. The House is in need of substantial restoration work, and we draw readers' attention to the appeal which appears in this issue, and urge them to support this important and worthy cause.

Many members will have enjoyed the series of events in October on the theme of Johnson, Dickens and London, organised by the Curator, together with the Curator of Dickens House Museum. Our congratulations go to the Curator for arranging a notably successful debate on the subject 'Charles Dickens or Samuel Johnson: Who is the London Man of the Millennium?' Dame Beryl Bainbridge and Dr Graham Nicholls spoke for Johnson, and Professor Michael Slater and Thelma Grove for Dickens. The discussion, ably chaired by Frank Delaney, was wide-ranging and entertaining, and there were numerous contributions from the floor. Honour was satisfied for both sides by the closeness of the vote: Dickens was victorious by 36 to 35, neither side resorting to the Courts.

A significant item of Johnsonian news appears at the end of the Reviews section. In recent years, the nature of Johnson's political beliefs has been hotly contested. The Liberty Fund reissue in paperback of the Yale edition of Johnson's *Political Writings*, edited by the late Donald Greene, is therefore timely, and particularly welcome at such a modest price. On the same topic, members will recall Professor J. A. Downie's paper on Johnson's politics, delivered to the Society in 1998. The paper has now been published, in Volume 11 of *The Age of Johnson*.

The Society offers its congratulations to our Vice-Chairman, Dr Nicholas Cambridge, who is this year's President of the History of Medicine section of the Royal Society of Medicine. Of particular interest to Johnsonians is a half-day seminar he has organised, under the title 'The Age of Johnson'. Details are set out on page 37.

A line was omitted from the appreciation of the life of John Comyn which appeared in the last issue; in addition to the matters noted there, it should have paid tribute to his role in seeing the Society through the Golden Jubilee Dinner in 1978 and the Johnson Bicentenary celebrations in 1984, for which he organised the souvenirs.

MICHAEL BUNDOCK



9th October 1999

## SLAVERY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Peter Street

Chairman: Richard Thrale

*Peter Street graduated in history from Oxford. Since 1975 he has been a history tutor in adult education, principally for Birkbeck College, University of London. He has also taught in the adult education departments of the Universities of Cambridge and Surrey, and is a tutor-counsellor with the Open University. This summary of his paper has been prepared from the Secretary's minutes.*

**M**R STREET SAID that the subject of slavery in eighteenth-century London might, in general, be familiar, but particular aspects might still come as something of a surprise. Whilst everyone will know of Johnson's servant Francis Barber, it may not be so well known that when he first went to Johnson, he was effectively on loan and it appears he was still of slave status. So one could say that Johnson had a slave in his household, albeit one who, in due course, was to be granted his freedom and, of course, was to remain a lifelong friend and chief legatee. Johnson's interest in slavery and his treatment of Barber stand out as significant; of particular interest is his famous toast to a rather startled group of Oxford academics, 'Here's to the next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies.' The fervour of that appeal was quite a shock to respectable society; Johnson's outlook on the subject was a minority one.

So far as London itself is concerned, the city had a population of about half a million at the turn of the century, possibly six or seven hundred thousand by the middle of the century, and over a million when the first census was taken in 1801. In contrast, the number of slaves in the capital is said to be around ten to fifteen thousand. There are various estimates on this subject; Shyllon in *Black Slaves in Britain* estimates that there was probably a maximum of ten thousand slaves in London about the end of the century.

Ten thousand in a population of one million is a small percentage, but as a number it is nevertheless quite significant – not a mere handful. London was a cosmopolitan centre and the slaves were a small percentage, but they were there, a feature right in the heart of the country. London was a much smaller community then, and the slaves were a visible part of London life in the eighteenth century.

It should also be noted that alongside the black slave community there was, of course, the free black community, which should not be overlooked – Francis Barber was effectively a member of that community. This was a large group, but even so it has only really been in the last few decades that attention has come to be paid to this topic.

London in the eighteenth century was used to slavery. It is said that the first shipment of black slaves arrived in London in 1555. From that starting point there was a growth in the slave presence in this country during the reign of Queen Elizabeth (particularly associated with John Hawkins) and by the end of Elizabeth's reign, the presence of black slaves was certainly noticeable to Her Majesty herself, because in about 1596 and in 1601, Elizabeth tried, unsuccessfully to order the expulsion of, in her words, 'Great numbers of negars and blackamoors which are crept into this realm'. So their presence had certainly come to the Queen's attention by the end of the sixteenth century.

Certainly, into the middle of the seventeenth century – by about the 1650s – there had developed the triangular trade between English ports (mainly London, Bristol and Liverpool), through to West Africa and the West Indies, by which English products were traded for African slaves, who were themselves exchanged for American tobacco and West Indies sugar. Coincidentally, of course, these were products that themselves had been produced by slaves and those products would then come to the English market.

So the trade was under way and the importance of London for slavery is clear in the late seventeenth century and into the early eighteenth century. The growth of slaving activity was significantly enhanced by the ancient privilege of trading with slaves in the Spanish empire and the ports of Bristol and London played their part. The Royal Africa Company, based in London, had its prime interest in slaving and had a monopoly in this situation until the late seventeenth century. It is estimated that during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century the Royal Africa Company had been involved to the extent of about forty or fifty thousand slaves.

As the eighteenth century progressed, London lost its dominance in slaving, but the activity was still very important; dealing in slaves and the products of slave labour remained one of the chief sources of wealth for London's mercantile elite. The credit with which West Indies planters bought their slaves came from London banking houses and Barclay's, Beere and Barings and the Bank of England were particularly active in the trade.

In addition, the Bank of England directors, Governors and deputy Governors had slaves and sugar interests. So, together with the London-based plantation owners and the West Indies merchants, there was quite a powerful group in London involved as advocates for the slave trade and in protecting slave owner interests. This is an important point when it comes to considering the persistence of slavery in eighteenth-century society in this country, especially in London: West Indian merchants and others constituted a formidable force in London and national politics. Coincident with the growth of black slave presence in London was the first case (actually in the Elizabethan era), where it was pronounced that the air of England could not support slavery. There was a sense in which (it was said) slavery was anathema to English society. That had been said in the sixteenth century, but the phrase came up often in the eighteenth century. But there was also an argument that slavery was compatible with English property rights.

So the slave trading interest was powerful and was active in defending the ownership of slaves in England during the eighteenth century. Their function in London society was quite limited. They were often here as a result of planters from the West Indies returning to England having got used to slaves, and bringing some back with them. They acted, it might be said, as a kind of mark of status. Others also involved in overseas communities with slaves, like Government officials, the military, naval officers and medical staff, having experienced a slave-owning society, would bring a few back with them.

So far as the use of those slaves was concerned, there were two distinct aspects; on the one hand one can see them as a kind of badge of identity, as status symbols, and on the other hand as domestic drudges, as a working part of the household. Both of those categories featured in London society.

The idea of a badge of status was particularly associated with young black slaves, children from as young as five or six through to about thirteen or fourteen. Both boys and girls (though particularly boys) would be a feature in the richer households and treated, in effect, as a kind of pet, their humanity, their equivalence, their identity as part of the same human race, being effectively denied in their treatment. One of the lasting impressions so far as Johnson and Francis Barber were concerned is that they would kneel and pray together; here was an equality before God. In other households with slave status there was a denial of that humanity. Children would be dressed in very colourful clothing and bedecked in jewels, or certainly adornments that would sparkle, to present a visible physical contrast between their natural blackness and what they were wearing. In effect they became fashionable additions to the households of aristocrats and high class prostitutes. After the age of about fourteen or fifteen they lost this kind of significance and there were real issues as to what should happen to them. On the one hand, they might make the decision themselves and run away. On the other hand, certainly so far as male servants were concerned, they might be retained as part of the domestic household, as servants. Their function might be serving meals, but they might also be for a particular use as running footmen. The coaches of wealthy owners would have footmen at the back, which made them stand out. On a journey the running footman would get down from the coach whilst it was still moving and would overtake the coach and pay any

turnpike fees, so that the barrier across the road could be moved, and the coach's journey would be uninterrupted. He would then jump back on – it was quite a physically demanding post.

So there was the well-dressed slave. Then there was the domestic drudge – the employment of black slaves for household duties in a real working sense, as opposed to a decorative feature of life upstairs. This was particularly associated with the employment of black female slaves. Their work was clearly in the downstairs community, working as hard as their fellow servants, but without pay.

It is no surprise to note that for many who, having reached adulthood, were faced with continued work without pay, there was a sense of a prison sentence. They would try to run away; the newspapers are full of details regarding both the purchase of slaves and slaves running away. This example is from the late seventeenth century:

Runaway from Captain John Ardle, a tawny moor of about twenty years of age, bowlegged and with a light-coloured coat, a white waistcoat and a pair of chamois breeches. Whoever gives notice in at the aforesaid Captain's house at Rotherhithe wall, or at Mr Lloyd's cottage house, Tower Street, shall have twenty shillings reward and their charges.

and another one:

Run from shipboard, a negro named Will, aged about twenty-two in a grey suit and speaks English well. Whoever secures him and gives notice to Mr Lloyd at his cottage house shall have a guinea reward.

The apprehending of runaway slaves, then, was lucrative. This raises the question how a runaway slave could be identified, and here we have another feature of the way they were treated, because they would sometimes have ownership marks burnt into their flesh; in short, they were branded. If this were the case, then it would be made clear in the advertisement. Also slaves would have a collar and padlock, often with the owner's identification, for example a coat of arms. That the collar was considered as essential for a black slave as for a dog is clear from the *London Advertiser* for 1756, in which Matthew Dyer, working goldsmith, at the Crown, in Duck Lane, Horton Street, Westminster, intimates to the public that he makes silver padlocks, collars, etcetera, for blacks or dogs. In the *Daily Journal*, 28th September 1728, is an advertisement for a runaway black boy, who had the legend 'My lady Broomfield's black in Lincoln's Inn Fields' engraved on a collar round his neck.

It has to be said that sometimes runaway blacks were offered shelter and sympathy on the part of the community they were entering. Owners might warn against such actions, however. There is an example on 15th November 1746 – one Captain Eton, announcing the escape of his black servant called Mingo, added ominously 'all persons are hereby forbidden to entertain this said black, at their peril' and Ezekiel Nash late in September 1757 threatened to prosecute anyone secreting his absconded black servant.

The threat to those who care for the runaway blacks raises the issue of whether they were necessarily slaves. The situation was confused. Sir John Fielding, the brother of Henry Fielding and (like Henry) a magistrate and a very significant figure in later eighteenth-century society, said, 'Magistrates are frequently applied to to cause such blacks as run away to be apprehended. Justices have nothing to do with blacks, but when they offend against the law, by commission of fraud, felony or breach of the peace.'

In effect, secreting runaway blacks was 'trespass to goods' – it was a civil, not a criminal, wrong. So far as the status of black slaves was concerned, the law itself was something of a puzzle because two late seventeenth-century cases had justified-slavery on the grounds that an African was a heathen. Was there an implication then, that if the African ceased to be a heathen, he would cease to be a slave?

The most famous judgement involving the status of slaves in the eighteenth century was known as the 'Somerset' case, decided by Lord Chief Justice Mansfield. During the course of the trial he noted that

Englishmen took infinite pains to prevent their slaves being made Christians, because that caused this kind of claim to freedom. However, a case in 1729 made it clear that baptism did not secure freedom. John Fielding, dealing with a black who came up before him, charged with partaking in the Gordon riots in 1780, made some general comments about the position of slaves in eighteenth-century society, and protested about the practice of bringing them to this country:

The immense confusion that has arose in the families of merchants and other gentlemen who have estates in the West Indies from the great numbers of Negro slaves they have brought into this Kingdom ... deserves the most serious attention. Many of these gentlemen have either at a vast expense caused some of their blacks to be instructed in the necessary qualifications of a domestic servant, or else purchased them after they have been instructed; they then bring them to England as cheap servants, having no right to wages; they no sooner arrive here than they put themselves on a footing with other servants, become intoxicated with liberty, grow refractory, and either by persuasion of others, or by their own inclinations, begin to expect wages according to their own opinion of their merits; and as there are already a great number of black men and women who have made themselves so troublesome and dangerous to the families who brought them over as to get themselves discharged, these enter into society and make it their business to corrupt and dissatisfy the mind of every black servant that comes to England; first, by getting them christened or married, which, they inform them, makes them free ... Though it has been decided otherwise by the judges. However it so far answers their purpose that it gets the mob on their side, and makes it not only difficult, but dangerous ... to recover possession of them, when once they are spirited away; and indeed, it is the less evil of the two to let them go about their business, for there is great reason to fear that those blacks who have been sent back to the Plantations ... have been the occasion of those ... recent insurrections. It is a species of inhumanity to the blacks themselves, to bring them to a free country.

This is the context of Johnson's comment.

In those comments by Fielding we see something of the impact of London society upon the blacks who were brought into this country, the resentment against doing the same work (but certainly not getting the same treatment), the discontent, the runaway. What is particularly interesting and significant is that the runaway black is a hero to the mob; there is a sense in which the white working class and the black slave had a common identity.

The white working class enthusiasm for the black might well be based on a shared challenge to property rights; it might not be a wider sense of sympathy. It is clearly a way in which the runaway slave can look to other members of the working class community in London for some sympathy and support, but it does not seem to be a response to racial discrimination or racism. (A straight colour bar does exist in employment; in 1731, the City government forbade blacks from taking the oath of apprenticeship – they were not to be trained in skills.) Nonetheless, the runaway slave could look to support from within the London host community, and the support they could look for would be amongst free blacks and, to a certain extent, amongst the white community.

Francis Barber used to have meetings with other blacks in London in Johnson's home. What those meetings were about is not known, but there is a sense of community and support. When blacks were caught, and faced criminal cases and perhaps punishment, then there are instances of members of that community coming to their help. It is well known that prison conditions were appalling in the eighteenth century and the need for outside help was critical in order to have something of a reasonable life, especially where a supply of food was concerned. So support for any black member was very precious, and is certainly evident.

As noted, the status of slavery in England was uncertain. There was an initial challenge in Elizabeth's reign, and there were certainly cases in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was to come to a head in London in Johnson's time with the *Somerset* case in 1771 and 1772. James Somerset was brought from Virginia. He was the property of one Stewart, and worked as a slave for the Stewarts in London for a couple of years. He then ran away, and was eventually captured and put on board ship. Whilst there, before the ship sailed, a writ of *habeas corpus* was sought and the ship did not set sail. The Captain, Noel, had to present Somerset to the court, where he came before Lord Chief Justice Mansfield and that was to raise the whole issue as to what property rights the owner of a slave had in England.

It is a long and still much disputed and debated case, but Mansfield uttered a famous phrase: 'as soon as any slave sets his foot upon English territory he becomes free' and that was interpreted by some in the eighteenth century, and by some historians since as, in effect, Mansfield abolishing slavery. In context that is not so; what he made clear was that his ruling was to deny any master's right to compel a slave to go into a foreign country. As far as the ownership of slaves or the use of slaves in England was concerned (as subsequent cases make clear), that was not in doubt. After the *Somerset* case, blacks were still hunted and kidnapped in London streets, and were still sold in newspaper advertisements, and this was to continue into the nineteenth century.

The campaign of Wilberforce, the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834 are well-known. It is only then that we see the end of slavery in London.

20th November 1999

**JOHN HOOLE:  
TRANSLATOR, PLAYWRIGHT AND EAST INDIA COMPANY AUDITOR  
Kenneth Kemp**

Chairman: Robert Bartlett

*Kenneth Kemp has worked in bookselling and publishing for more than forty years. He was a director of Gollancz, and in 1984, in partnership with his wife, he established the Sportsman's Press. He is a direct descendant of John Hoole.*

IN 1761, an East India Company clerk and translator, later to be described in the *European Magazine* as 'modest and unassuming, a gentleman who long commanded the respect of his friends', of middle height and extremely short-sighted, was introduced by John Hawkesworth, then a director of the East India Company, to Dr Johnson. John Hoole told Dr Johnson that he had been born in Moorfields and had received part of his early instruction in Grub Street: 'Sir', said Johnson, smiling, 'you have been regularly educated'. Having asked who was his instructor and Hoole having answered: 'My uncle, Sir, who was a tailor,' Johnson, recollecting himself, said 'Sir, I knew him; we called him the *metaphysical tailor*. He was of a club in Old-Street with me and George Psalmanazar and some others: but pray, Sir, was he a good tailor?' Mr Hoole having answered that he believed he was too mathematical and used to draw squares and triangles on his shop-board, so that he did not excel in the cut of a coat: 'I am sorry for it', said Johnson, 'for I would have every man to be master of his own business'. In a pleasant reference to himself and Mr Hoole, as brother authors (Hoole had published a piece entitled *The Death of Mrs Woffington* in 1760), he said 'let you and I, Sir, go together and eat a beef-steak in Grub-Street'. Thus Boswell describes the beginning of a friendship that lasted till Johnson's death.

Born in 1727, Hoole was the son of a watchmaker who was also a talented inventor of mechanical serpents and other diversions used by John Rich, the manager of the Covent Garden Theatre, to entertain the audiences during the intervals of plays. According to family records, he was also an accomplished musician who played with Handel in his Oratorios which were performed at the Covent Garden Theatre.

Because of his poor sight, Hoole did not follow his father into watchmaking but joined the East India Company London Office, when he was seventeen years old. He went on to become Auditor of all the company's Indian accounts. The British Library has a copy of *The State of East Indian Affairs* drawn up by Hoole in 1772. At a cost of five shillings, which must have been quite a lot in those days, it is not exactly a page turner, but it does show that the East India Company then employed an army of 10,430 Europeans and 50,905 Sepoys. The company was considerably in debt in spite of receiving £400,000 from the Nabob Mahomed Ally Cawn (*sic*) towards its expenses in a war with Hyder Ally. Hoole later gave evidence on behalf of Warren Hastings at the bar of the House of Commons, something that made him so nervous that he had to take some time away from the office. He worked for the East India Company for forty-two years and unusually combined a successful career, in perhaps the most prestigious trading company in London, with a distinguished literary career.

As a young man he had taught himself Italian (he was also fluent in French) and through his studies became interested in translating Tasso and Ariosto into English. His translation of Tasso's *Jesusalem Delivered* for which Johnson wrote a dedication to the Queen, was published in two volumes in 1763 and remained in print until 1819 having gone through eight editions. His translation of *Orlando Furioso*, first published in 1773, also remained in print for many years after his death. He wrote three plays of which



the first, *Cyrus*, was reasonably successful. By the third, *Cleonice*, he was, however, reduced to packing the theatre with East India Company staff, a fact noted by one of the broad-sheets of the time.

Once the friendship was established, Johnson did everything he could to advance Hoole's literary reputation. Besides writing a dedication for *Jerusalem Delivered*, he corrected one of Hoole's plays and lost no opportunity to recommend Hoole's work to his friends and acquaintances. He often dined with Hoole and his wife, Susannah, who was known as the 'handsome Quaker' and some of these occasions are recorded by Boswell who probably found Hoole too upright for his raffish taste.

It is recorded of Hoole that he broke his kneecap three times. The first time he fell down a flight of steps in Clerkenwell. His poor sight and the uneven state of London's streets probably contributed to these falls. Each time he was taken to the East India Company in a boot-chair to permit the legs to be kept in a straight position while travelling. On each occasion, when he recovered, he walked better and was walking quite comfortably by the end of his life.

His circle of friends included not only the executives of the East India Company, who were very proud of his literary fame – so much so that Charles Lamb, who worked for the company in the early nineteenth century, referred to Hoole rather tartly as 'the great boast and ornament of the East India Company' – but also many in the literary and artistic world. Frances Reynolds, herself an artist of only modest talent, lodged with the Hoolees for some months, during which time she painted a portrait of Hoole. The least favoured sister of Sir Joshua, she spent much of her life trying to impress her famous brother but never quite succeeded. George Dance did a drawing of him; Angelica Kaufmann engraved a frontispiece for Hoole's *Orlando Furioso*.

Hoole lived most of his adult life in Clement's Inn and later at 55 Great Queen Street. He had one son, Samuel, who was born in a carriage in Long Acre. He became a Church of England parson and was the curate of Abinger Church in Surrey for some years. His son ministered to Dr Johnson during his last illness. Hoole kept a diary of Johnson's last illness, which was for many years in our family. It came up for auction some thirty years ago and I was able to look at it before the sale but I was unfortunately not financially well heeled enough at that time to buy it.

Here are some extracts from this diary, which were later published in the *European Magazine*:<sup>1</sup>

Saturday, 20th November 1784

This evening, about eight o'clock, I paid a visit to my dear friend Dr Johnson, whom I found very ill and in great dejection of spirits ... He conjured me to read and meditate upon the Bible and not to throw it aside for a play or novel. He said he had himself lived in great negligence of religion and worship for forty years.

Sunday, 28th November 1784

Went to Dr Johnson's about two o'clock: met Mrs Hoole coming from thence, as he was asleep: took her back with me ... Dr Johnson hearing that Mrs Hoole was in the next room, desired to see her. He received her with great affection, took her by the hand.

Monday, 29th November 1784

Called with my son about eleven ... Dr Johnson said: 'You must not now stay ... I will get Mr [Samuel] Hoole to come next Wednesday and read the litany to me, and do you and Mrs Hoole come with him.' ... In the evening about eight, called again and just saw him ... I met Sir Joshua Reynolds going away.

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in G. Birkbeck Hill (ed.), *Johnsonian Miscellanies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), Vol II, pp. 145-160. The manuscript is now in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. A new edition was published in 1972, O. M. Brack Jr (ed.), *Hoole's Death of Johnson* (Iowa City: Windhover Press, 1972).

Monday, 6th December 1784

Called in the evening; found Mr Cruickshank, the surgeon with him; he said he had been that day quarrelling with all his physicians; he appeared in tolerable spirits.

Monday 13th December 1784

While Mrs Gardiner and I were there, before the rest came, he took a little warm milk in a cup ... appeared to be mostly in a calm sleep or dozing. I left him in this state, and never more saw him alive. In the evening I supped with Mrs Hoole and my son at Mr Braithwaite's, and at night my servant brought me word that my dearest friend died that evening about seven o'clock: and next morning I went to the house where I met Mr Seward; we went together into the chamber, and there saw the most awful sight of Dr Johnson laid out in his bed, without life!

Hoole retired from the East India Company in 1786 and lived with his wife and son in Abinger, Surrey, for some years. He died in 1803 when on a visit to Dorking and is buried in St Martin's Churchyard, Dorking. My maternal grandmother was a direct descendant.

What are we to make today of Hoole's literary output? As a translator he undoubtedly performed a considerable service to the Italian classics, but his translations were done in the style of Pope according to Macaulay. He wrote a short biography of John Scott, the Quaker poet. His plays, one has to say, were unsuccessful. He was clearly a very nice man and he was supremely fortunate in the time in which he lived and in his friendship with Johnson. He was a man who succeeded by his dedication to the work in hand. At a time of brilliant dilettanti he was a bit of swot but it was probably his ability to apply himself which appealed to Johnson most.

11th December 1999

**JOHNSON AND UNBELIEF**  
Richard Harries

Chairman: Richard Thrale

*Right Reverend Richard Harries is the Bishop of Oxford. He is the author of numerous books, and a frequent broadcaster on radio and television. He has a particular interest in the relationship between literature and religion.*

**I**N JOHNSON'S TIME unbelief was focussed in three famous figures, Edward Gibbon, Voltaire and David Hume. Johnson disapproved of all three but it was Hume in particular who got under his skin and it is in relation to Hume's views that we know most about Johnson's attitude to unbelief. It is therefore with Johnson and Hume, arguably the greatest philosopher that these isles have produced, that I will be dealing.

Johnson lived from 1709 to 1784, Hume from 1711 to 1776, so their lives overlapped for sixty-five years. Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature* was published in 1739 and 1740 but made no impact. In 1748 however he published what was known after 1758 as *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. This contained his famous chapter ten on miracles, which he had written but not published earlier. Hume wrote his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* in 1751 but they did not appear until after his death.

Hume's own attitude to religion has been the subject of much discussion. All his arguments seek systematically and strongly to disprove the truth of religion. But towards the end of his chapter on miracles he says 'Our most holy religion is founded on faith not on reason' and he ends the essay with the words:

Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: and whoever is moved by faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.<sup>1</sup>

I do not think we can read this as an assertion of Hume's own faith. It is there partly to shield him from attack and partly as an irony subverting the faith of those who believe. Certainly Hume had the reputation of 'The great infidel' as Johnson refers to him. When in 1752 Hume took over as Keeper of the Advocates Library in Edinburgh he claimed that 'The violent crime of deism, atheism, and scepticism was raised against me.'<sup>2</sup> At that time Johnson was forty-one, Hume two years younger, both men we might say were at the height of their powers. Johnson certainly met Hume twice, once in 1762 when he snubbed him. Boswell records about Johnson 'He holds Mr Hume in abhorrence and left a company one night upon his coming in.' The other time was in 1763 when they were both dinner guests of the Royal chaplains at St James. It has also been speculated that Johnson might have been a guest of Hume at one other point.<sup>3</sup> Boswell however knew Hume better and admired him greatly, even though he shared Johnson's rather than Hume's religious outlook and looked to Johnson to strengthen his own faith. From what Boswell records of Hume's attitude to Johnson, he seemed to enjoy a little playful mockery. It was from Hume,

<sup>1</sup> *Hume on Religion*, selected and introduced by Richard Wollheim (Collins, 1963), p. 226 (cited as Wollheim).

<sup>2</sup> E. C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Nelson, 1954), pp. 249-252.

<sup>3</sup> Mossner, pp. 586, 394 and 586.

who got it from David Garrick, that Boswell learnt why Johnson gave up mixing with theatre folk: 'I'll come no more behind your scenes, David; for the silk stockings and white bosoms of your actresses excite my amorous propensities.'<sup>4</sup> Boswell did not always understand how much some things could mean to Johnson:

I mentioned to him how common it was in the world to tell absurd stories of him, and to ascribe to him very strange sayings. JOHNSON. 'What do they make me say, Sir?' BOSWELL. 'Why, Sir, as an instance very strange indeed, (laughing heartily as I spoke,) David Hume told me, you said you would stand before a battery of canon to restore the Convocation to its full powers' – little did I apprehend that he had actually said this: but I was soon convinced of my error; for, with a determined look, he thundered out, 'And would I not, Sir? Shall the Presbyterian Kirk of Scotland have its General Assembly, and the Church of England be denied its convocation?' He was walking up and down the room, while I told him the anecdote; but when he uttered this explosion of high church zeal, he had come close to my chair, and his eye flashed with indignation.<sup>5</sup>

The eighteenth century was of course a period of intense debate about the rationality of religion and morality. Many streams of Deism flourished, differing in emphasise but all working on the assumption that reason could be used to prove some things and not others. According to Mrs Thrale, Johnson became conscious of these arguments even when young:

At the age of ten years his mind was disturbed by scruples of infidelity, which preyed upon his spirits, and made him very uneasy ... he searched, however, diligently but fruitlessly, for evidences of the truth of revelation; and at length recollecting a book he had once seen in his father's shop, intitled, *De Veritate Religionis, etc* he began to think himself highly culpable for neglecting such a means of information, and took himself severely to task for this sin, adding many acts of voluntary, and to others unknown, penance. The first opportunity which offered (of course) he seized the book with avidity; but on examination, not finding himself scholar enough to peruse its contents, set his heart at rest; and, not thinking to enquire whether there were any English books written on the subject, followed his usual amusements, and considered his conscience as lightened of a crime. He redoubled his diligence to learn the language that contained the information he most wished for; but from the pain which guilt had given him, he now began to deduce the soul's immortality, which was the point that belief first stopped at; and from that moment resolving to be a Christian, became one of the most zealous and pious ones our nation ever produced.<sup>6</sup>

Later in life Johnson told Boswell 'Everything which Hume has advanced against Christianity had passed through my mind long before he wrote.'<sup>7</sup> We do not know precisely when Johnson did such critical thinking but from the evidence of Mrs Thrale, it could very well have been in his early teens. Johnson saw himself as a rational person, one of a sceptical cast of mind (though not with the anti-religious overtones that that word had in the eighteenth century), who desired only to believe as the evidence permitted. Boswell gives a number of examples of this. As is well known, Johnson was

<sup>4</sup> Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (Everyman, Dent, 1960), Vol I, p. 117 (cited as *Life I* or *II*).

<sup>5</sup> *Life I*, p. 288.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Sherbo (ed.), *Mrs Piozzi's Anecdotes* (Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> *Life I*, p. 275.

sympathetic to Roman Catholicism and could well understand why people became Catholics: 'I would be a papist if I could. I have fear enough; but an obstinate rationality prevents me.'<sup>8</sup>

A good example of what we may call Johnson's balanced rationalism is contained in a letter of advice he wrote to Frederick Barnard, the librarian to George III and IV. Barnard, going abroad to buy old books, was warned that he would be going into a world divided between bigotry and atheism. Johnson counsels 'Let not the contempt of superstition precipitate you into infidelity, nor the horror of infidelity ensnare you in superstition.'<sup>9</sup> It was, we might say, a very eighteenth-century attitude, though it was in fact one which was giving way: a rational religion, avoiding superstition on the one hand and well grounded enough to combat unbelief on the other.

Once Boswell and Johnson were walking in the country and they were told of a remarkable natural curiosity. This leads Boswell to remark on 'Doctor Johnson's unwillingness to believe extraordinary things'. He said to Johnson 'Sir, you come near Hume's argument against miracle, "that it is more probable witnesses should lie, or be mistaken, than that they should happen."<sup>10</sup> This sceptical cast of mind was combined with a strong, some would argue, desperate desire to believe. It is this which provides much of the tension and interest in Johnson's religious views.

We have no record of Johnson's reaction to Hume's writing on providence and immortality. We do however have his brief but considered views on Hume's rejection of miracles.

Hume set out a number of telling examples showing that however apparently well documented they could not be believed on rational grounds. The nub of the argument is:

That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish ... When anyone tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.<sup>11</sup>

According to Hume then we could never rationally believe in a miracle. It would always be more likely that a person deceived or was deceived. It is common human experience that they are. We could never find an example where it was a greater miracle that their testimony was false than what they purported to believe was true.

Johnson discussed this argument with Boswell in 1763:

Why, Sir, the great difficulty of proving miracles should make us very cautious in believing them. But let us consider; although God has made nature to operate by certain fixed laws, yet it is not unreasonable to think that he may suspend those laws in order to establish a system highly advantageous to mankind. Now the Christian religion is a most beneficial system, as it gives us light and certainty where we were before in darkness and doubt. The miracles which prove it are attested by men who had no interest in deceiving us; but who, on the contrary, were told that they should suffer persecution, and did actually lay down their lives in confirmation of the truth of the facts which they asserted. Indeed, for some centuries the heathens did not pretend to deny

<sup>8</sup> *Life* II, p. 519.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Redford (ed.), *The Letters of Samuel Johnson* (Oxford University Press, 1992), Vol I, p. 314.

<sup>10</sup> *Life* II, p. 137.

<sup>11</sup> Wollheim, pp. 211-2.

the miracles; but said they were performed by the aid of evil spirits. This is a circumstance of great weight. Then, Sir, when we take the proofs derived from prophecies which have been so exactly fulfilled, we have most satisfactory evidence. Supposing a miracle possible, as to which, in my opinion, there can be no doubt, we have as strong evidence for the miracles in support of Christianity, as the nature of the thing admits.<sup>12</sup>

The first part of this argument has been criticised as being very weak.<sup>13</sup> But it is not a philosophical argument so much as a theological perspective. Extraordinary events, whether miraculous or not, have to be interpreted and for them to have any religious meaning they have to be set within a theological perspective which at least allows for them. Johnson's first part of the argument should be seen as no more than that. If God is God he could perform miracles if there was point in so doing. The point in so doing is to establish the truth of the Christian religion, which is of unique benefit to humanity. This is not an argument for the truth of miracles but a setting in which they must be assessed.

The central part of Johnson's argument does however directly address Hume's argument. Despite what Hume said, Johnson is prepared to accept the testimony of the first Christians because they had no interest in deceiving others, on the contrary they knew they would suffer persecution for what they believed and many of them were in fact martyred for their beliefs. Furthermore the heathens didn't deny the miracles but simply said that they were performed with the aid of evil spirits.

It is true that Johnson does not directly refute Hume's argument that no testimony, however sincere, however well attested, could ever on rational grounds be regarded as a miracle. But then Hume assumes that all testimony is, from a logical point of view, equally worthless and he does not bring a theological perspective into play. The point can be made by a modern writer:

Ought we to say that no alleged fact of gospel history should be accepted, unless it would pass the rules of probability which secular history would employ? Surely not. The methods of sifting evidence, or of reconstructing continuous event, which secular history employs are just as proper in the field of gospel history. But what of the criteria of probability? Secular history gathers its criteria from a flat-rate survey of humdrum humanity. But the man of discernment knows that whatever he is dealing with in Christ, it is not this. For anything we are to believe, there must, of course, be respectable evidence. But respectable evidence (in history) is seldom compulsive. We have still to decide whether the evidence suffices to prove such a thing as that. There is much evidence for Christ's resurrection; but to judge from the general level of history and, indeed, of biology, would any evidence suffice to prove that the dead should rise? Ah, says the Christian, but to reduce the life, death and – yes – the resurrection of Jesus to the common level is to beg the case. If Jesus is what we see in him, then he was personally one with the sole bestower of immortality; as John says in the person of Jesus, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.' To make up your mind whether the evidence for his resurrection suffices, is just one part, but only one part, of making up your mind about the whole matter ... History must allow for differences of level. On the dead level of human probability, it was not likely that Shakespeare should write his sublimest works. But he was Shakespeare and he wrote them.<sup>14</sup>

Johnson makes the same point in rather different terms when, as already quoted, Boswell had said that his sceptical approach bought him 'Near Hume's argument against miracles'. Johnson had replied:

<sup>12</sup> *Life* I, pp. 275-6.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Pierce Jr., *The Religious Life of Samuel Johnson* (Athlone, 1983), p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), pp. 81-2.



Why, Sir, Hume, taking the proposition simply, is right. But the Christian revelation is not proved by the miracles alone, but as connected with the prophecies, and with the doctrines and confirmation of which the miracles were wrought.<sup>15</sup>

Although the argument from prophecy no longer convinces us today, the point is a wider one than that. It is about the theological framework within which miracles might, or might not, have a place and make some sense.

In his argument against Hume Johnson was not being original. He was in fact summarising fairly basic Christian apologetic, as for example had been put forward by James Foster in a 1731 defence of Christianity. This brings out a fundamental fact about Johnson's approach to religion and unbelief. He consciously stood within a broad tradition of Christian apologetics. Some recent writing on Johnson's religion has stressed its inner-agonised character. There was certainly that dimension. Nevertheless Nicholas Hudson is right in asserting that

Judging from most of Johnson's public pronouncements, he seems to have gleaned considerable confidence from the knowledge that he was carrying on the convictions and arguments of a venerable tradition of Christian orthodoxy. Deeply suspicious of individual claims to originality he often followed the approved position with almost verbatim fidelity.<sup>16</sup>

Johnson once told Boswell that the powerful intellects who had believed formed a tradition which was itself a source of confidence:

As to the Christian religion, Sir, besides the strong evidence which we have for it, there is a balance in its favour from the number of great men who have been convinced of its truth, after a serious consideration of the question. Grotius was an acute man, a lawyer, a man accustomed to examine evidence, and he was convinced. Grotius was not a recluse, but a man of the world, who certainly had no bias on the side of religion. Sir Isaac Newton set out as an infidel, and came to be a very firm believer.<sup>17</sup>

So, as Hudson remarks Johnson is one with eighteenth century orthodoxy in placing 'Far greater trust in the confidence of the tradition than in the brilliance of individuals'.<sup>18</sup>

Johnson was an eighteenth century man and, in accordance with the values of that age, liked to think of himself as a rational being, carefully weighing the evidence. Above all he wanted his faith to be based on a sure foundation of reality. Nevertheless, he knew that evidence had to be selected, interpreted and weighed. He knew that rational minds could consider the same evidence and come to different conclusions. He believed therefore that we need divine grace in order that we may consider the evidence free of sinful assumptions and prejudices. This view was not original to Johnson. In 1719 an Anglican divine, Henry Stebbing published a work on the Holy Spirit containing the words:

This assistance of the spirit is necessary to prepare men's hearts, and to put them into a fit temper and disposition to embrace the gospel, when proposed to them with sufficient evidence.

This conviction is clearly expressed in Johnson's 'Prayer on the study of religion' which runs:

<sup>15</sup> *Life* II, p. 137.

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Hudson, *Samuel Johnson and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Life* I, p. 281; see also p. 246.

<sup>18</sup> Hudson, p. 17.

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, without whose light search is vain, invigorate my studies and direct my enquiries, that I may, by due diligence and right discernment establish myself and others in thy holy faith.<sup>19</sup>

This leads on to another point, fundamental to Johnson's outlook but more problematic for us, that belief is a moral matter. The scientist in assessing the evidence seeks to be true to the facts. If he does that the conclusions he comes to have no particular moral import. The law of gravity is neither morally good nor morally bad. It claims to be a way of interpreting the evidence that corresponds to reality. But for Johnson the conclusion about whether there was or was not a God and whether Christ is or is not the Son of God, is a moral matter. If people fail to see the truth then it is because they are wilfully blind and deliberately recalcitrant. This is why when he was an adolescent, as the earlier quotation indicated, he saw it as a moral matter to search out a book that could overcome his doubts and support his faith.

Once when Boswell and Johnson were on the tour of the Hebrides they came across a Scottish gentleman who had been influenced by Voltaire and Hume. Boswell remarked that 'Infidelity in a highland gentleman appeared to me peculiarly offensive. I was sorry for him, as he had otherwise a good character. I told Dr Johnson that he had studied himself into infidelity.' To which Johnson replied 'Then he must study himself out of it again. That is the way. Drinking largely will sober him again.'<sup>20</sup> In other words, it is a moral matter which books we read, what we study, what we immerse ourselves in. For behind the reasonings of the mind is a heart and will. That will can desire to believe or can wilfully turn against the light. Johnson is at one with St Augustine, Freud and post-modernism in distrusting rationality considered in isolation from other factors. And it was this that lead him to be so critical of Hume. Johnson once remarked to Boswell 'No honest man could be a Deist; for no man could be so after a fair examination of the proofs of Christianity.' When Boswell mentioned the name of Hume Johnson replied that Hume had once admitted to a clergyman 'That he had never read the New Testament with attention'.<sup>21</sup> On another occasion in discussion with Johnson on whether a person could be good without fixed principles grounded in religious belief Johnson erupted:

Hume, and other sceptical innovators, are vain men, and will gratify themselves at any expense. Truth will not afford sufficient food to their vanity; so they have betaken themselves to error. Truth, Sir, is a cow which will yield such people no more milk, and so they are gone to milk the bull. If I could have allowed myself to gratify my vanity at the expense of truth, what fame might I have acquired. Everything which Hume has advanced against Christianity has passed through my mind long before he wrote.<sup>22</sup>

Without mentioning Hume this was a theme which Johnson pursued in his sermons and articles in *The Rambler*. Sermon 20 for example is based upon the text 'Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last of days scoffers, walking after their own lusts'.<sup>23</sup>

In his diary right at the end of his life Johnson wrote a list of the eleven causes of scepticism, number eight of which is 'Study not for truth but vanity' and number nine 'Sensuality and a vicious life'.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Hudson, pp. 25, 27.

<sup>20</sup> R. W. Chapman (ed.), *Johnson and Boswell, Journey to the Western Isles and a Tour of the Hebrides* (Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 177; see also *Life I*, p. 615.

<sup>21</sup> *Life I*, p. 315.

<sup>22</sup> *Life I*, p. 275.

<sup>23</sup> Jean H. Hagstrum and James Gray (eds.), *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Vol XIV, Sermons* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), Sermon 20. p. 215. The text is II Peter, 3: 3.

<sup>24</sup> E. L. McAdam Jr. with Donald and Mary Hyde (eds.), *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Vol I, Diaries, Prayers, and Annals* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 14.

Furthermore, he realised with all the insight of a modern psychotherapist or any great novelist that before we deceive others we are likely to have deceived ourselves:

There is yet another danger in this practice: men who cannot deceive others, are very often successful in deceiving themselves; they weave their sophistry till their own reason is entangled, and repeat their positions until they are credited by themselves; by often contending they grow sincere in the cause, and by long wishing for demonstrative arguments they at last bring themselves to fancy that they have found them.<sup>25</sup>

It is not surprising therefore that Boswell and Johnson agreed that Hume's and Adam Smith's heads needed knocking together. As Boswell writes 'Would it not be worth your while to crush these noxious weeds in the moral garden?'<sup>26</sup> Atheism is a weed and the garden of belief is a moral garden.

This leads on to another aspect of Johnson's approach to religious belief that we find particularly unpalatable. Because Hume and those like him were, he thought, in error, not just intellectually mistaken but morally perverted, Johnson refused to accord them respect:

Treating your adversary with respect, is giving him an advantage to which he is not entitled. The greatest part of men cannot judge of reasoning, and are impressed by character; so that, if you allow your adversary a respectable character, they will think, that though you differ from him, you may be in the wrong. Sir, treating your adversary with respect, is striking soft in a battle. And as to Hume, – a man who has so much conceit as to tell all mankind that they have been bubbled for ages, and he is the wise man who sees better than they, – a man who has so little scrupulosity as to venture to oppose those principles that have been thought necessary to human happiness, – is he to be surprised if another man comes and laughs at him?<sup>27</sup>

Johnson then said other hurtful things which Boswell found too much and suppressed 'Violence is, in my opinion, not suitable to the Christian cause.'

Looking at Johnson now, after more than two centuries what we see above all is a person with a tremendous will to believe. The reason is well known. Though capable of great enjoyment Johnson did not see much happiness in human life. Every period of happiness was likely to be undermined or destroyed. Disappointment lurked around every corner. It would be superficial to attribute this outlook simply to Johnson's depressive nature, though he was a depressive. He studies human nature and history. He had thought long and hard about life and he mixed widely, including keeping a nest of indigents in his house. He knew that life was hard and that though he himself had achieved worldly success, misery stalked most human beings. The only way such a life could be seen as a blessing was by viewing it as a testing ground for eternal happiness. Belief in God and in particular belief in everlasting life, was fundamental to Johnson's ability to view this life in a positive and courageous way.

Hume was clearly of a very different temperament, as equable as Johnson was tormented. Boswell knew them both well and though he looked to Johnson to support his own religious belief he could not help liking and admiring Hume. He told Hume 'How much better are you than your books' and went on to say that Hume 'was cheerful, obliging, and instructive; he was charitable to the poor; and many an agreeable hour have I passed with him.'

<sup>25</sup> W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (eds.), *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Vol III, The Rambler* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), Number 31, p. 173.

<sup>26</sup> *Life II*, p. 87.

<sup>27</sup> *Journey*, p. 177; see also *Life I*, p. 615.

Dr Adam Smith had said about Hume 'On the whole, I have always considered him, both in his lifetime and since his death, as approaching nearly to the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man as perhaps the nature of human frailty will permit.'<sup>28</sup>

The contrast between Johnson and Hume is at its most stark in their attitude towards death. Johnson was terrified of death. Hume, apparently, was at ease about it. Johnson simply couldn't believe this. Boswell had told Johnson that the thought of annihilation gave Hume no pain and Johnson replied 'It was not so, Sir. He had a vanity in being thought easy. It is more probable that he should assume an appearance of ease, than so very improbable a thing should be, as a man not afraid of going ... into an unknown state, and not being uneasy as leaving all he knew.'<sup>29</sup>

On one thing Hume and Johnson seemed to agree, they were both Tories. But there was a fundamental difference in their ideological basis for this political stance and it annoyed Johnson intently that Hume should claim the same political persuasion as himself. Twice he refers to Hume as 'A Tory by chance'.<sup>30</sup> He goes on to say that his views are 'Not upon a principle of duty; for he has no principle. If he is anything, he is a Hobbist.' The background to this judgement is that, according to Jonathan Clark, Johnson belonged to a school of thought, at any rate in his earlier life, that favoured a Latin culture, supported the Stuart dynasty and was sympathetic to the Non-Jurors. In short, he believed in the divine right of kings and under the monarch, an ordered hierarchy including Bishops and the divine authority of the Christian religion. So a Jacobite was neither an atheist nor a Deist, which could not be said of a Whig, for Whiggism was the negation of all principle. 'Perhaps it was because David Hume lacked this grounding in English political theology'<sup>31</sup> that Johnson accused him of being a Tory only by chance.

David Hume was born and brought up in Berwickshire and retained a Scottish accent to the end of his life. He belonged to a well-connected though not well-off family. He had to live frugally and save hard in order to achieve the financial independence that made a life of reflection and writing possible. His family were of course Presbyterian Church of Scotland and they had the dominant pew in the local church, though there is no evidence that the family ever produced a member of the clergy. Hume's father died when he was young and he was brought up by his mother, who was religious and Hume says that he himself was 'Religious when he was young'. Like Johnson he read *The Whole Duty of Man* and took it so seriously that he abstracted a list of vices at the end of it and tested his own character against them. It was probably in his late teens when he began seriously to think about religion and in doing so lost his faith. In 1751 he wrote to a friend:

Tis not long ago that I burned an old manuscript book, wrote before I was 20; which contained, page after page, the gradual progress of my thoughts on that head. It began with an anxious search after arguments, to confirm the common opinion: doubts stole in, dissipated, returned, were again dissipated, returned again; and it was a perpetual struggle of a restless imagination against inclination, perhaps against reason.<sup>32</sup>

He could see the attractions of religious belief. He once wrote to Lord Charlemont on the immortality of the soul 'Why truth, man, it is so pretty and so comfortable a theory, that I wish I could be convinced of its truth – but I can na help doubting.'<sup>33</sup> It was reason that led him to disbelieve and although he wrote once that 'He never had entertained any belief in religion since he began to read Locke and

<sup>28</sup> *Journey*, pp. 177-8.

<sup>29</sup> *Life* II, p. 113-4; see also *Life* I, pp. 377-8.

<sup>30</sup> *Journey*, p. 342; see also *Life* II, p. 450.

<sup>31</sup> J. C. D. Clark, *Samuel Johnson: Literature, Religion and English Cultural Politics from the Restoration to Romanticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 140.

<sup>32</sup> Mossner, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> Mossner, p. 545.

Clarke<sup>34</sup> it is clear from the earlier letter quoted that the debate in his mind went on over a significant period.

Richard Wollheim is right in locating Hume's agnosticism in his 'Pervasive concern with the proper limits of human understanding'.<sup>35</sup> His concern was with the true scope of knowledge and he believed that religious claims went beyond what reason could properly know. For this reason he felt as uncomfortable with the dogmatic atheism of the French philosophes as he did with strident religious claims. When a woman introduced herself to Hume with the words 'We Deists ought to know each other' he replied 'Madam, I am no Deist. I do not style myself so, neither do I desire to be known by that appellation.'<sup>36</sup> He disliked being categorised and this, together with the dialogue form of some of his major religious writing, means that his own beliefs are always somewhat elusive.

There is however another less noticed feature of Hume's turning away from Christianity. Until comparatively recently most people in our society assumed that the good and the Christian were synonymous. But Hume turned away from the moral ideal of Christianity to a different one. He once observed to Francis Hutcheson 'I desire to take my catalogue of virtues from Cicero's offices, not from *Whole Duty of Man*.' For he was smitten with the 'Beautiful representations of virtue and philosophy' that he found in Cicero Seneca and Plutarch and 'Undertook the improvement of my temper and will, along with my reason and understanding. I was continually fortifying myself with reflections against death, and poverty, and shame, and pain, and all the other calamities of life.'<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, Johnson was doing precisely the same but on a Christian basis. Hume was doing it on the basis of Roman, particularly Stoic attitudes. It is not therefore surprising that in the light of later hostility to his views he should state that 'The church is my aversion.'<sup>38</sup> He opposed what he thought of as the superstition of Christianity and every other religion. When he was dying and the prurient Boswell came to visit him to find out more about his religious beliefs and whether he really was as unafraid of death as he had indicated Boswell records:

He then said flatly that the morality of every religion was bad, and, I really thought, was not jocular when he said 'That when he heard a man was religious, he concluded he was a rascal, though he had known some instances of very good men being religious.'<sup>39</sup>

I now turn to Hume's character. It was an accusation of Boswell and Johnson that Hume had never really been tested. If he had, they implied, he would have a very different attitude to life and especially a different attitude to death. But it is not true to say that Hume was never tested. All his life his views got him into trouble and resulted in him being turned down for positions he could reasonably have been expected to obtain, professorships for example. At many points in his life there was a public outcry against him. Moreover, as he was the first to acknowledge, most of his publications fell stillborn from the press. It was only later in his life that he achieved renown. But this opposition and lack of success, though it distressed Hume, did not knock him down. For he was as he says in *My Own Life* 'Naturally of a cheerful and sanguine temper'.<sup>40</sup> He made a point of never replying to criticism on the grounds of 'Not being very irritable in my temper'<sup>41</sup> though this does not perhaps indicate the whole truth. For after a long period of study as a young man Hume clearly underwent some kind of psychosomatic breakdown. He

<sup>34</sup> Mossner, p. 51.

<sup>35</sup> Wollheim, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Mossner, p. 395.

<sup>37</sup> Mossner, pp. 64-65.

<sup>38</sup> Mossner, p. 53.

<sup>39</sup> Mossner, pp. 597-8.

<sup>40</sup> Wollheim, p. 272.

<sup>41</sup> Mossner, p. 225.

wrote a long letter detailing his symptoms to Dr Arbuthnot who diagnosed 'The disease of the learned'.<sup>42</sup> It may be that Hume had faced realistically not only the ills of human existence but a melancholy within himself and having come to terms with it, affirmed the sanguine side of his nature and put a cheerful front on life. Certainly that is how he came across to those who knew him. For he was an extraordinarily liked and loved human being. Everyone says so. A woman in Edinburgh who did not want to meet 'The atheist' did in fact find herself in his company and discovering that it was 'The very atheist' said 'You may bring him here as much as you please, for he is the most innocent, agreeable, facetious man I ever met with.'<sup>43</sup> Although Hume was attacked by religious extremists many of his closest friends were liberal minded clergy, particularly younger ones. And it is interesting that when his history was first published, and received almost universal hostility from a variety of totally conflicting viewpoints, the Archbishop of Canterbury sent him ten pounds and invited him to be his guest at Lambeth.

Boswell said to his fiancée 'Were it not for his infidel writings everybody would love him. He is a plain, obliging, kindhearted man.' This paradox of the virtuous infidel worried Boswell. When in 1775 he heard a sermon on death he wrote 'A strange thought struck me that I would apply to David Hume, telling him that at present I was happy in having a pious faith, but in case of its failing me by some unexpected revolution in my mind, it would be humane in him to furnish me with reflections by which I man of sense and feeling could support his spirit as an infidel. I was really serious in this thought. I wonder what David can suggest.'

Finally Boswell came to the conclusion, more familiar to us, but a revelation to him that 'belief or want of belief is not absolutely connected with practice'.<sup>44</sup> Jesus, we note, said much the same thing.

Putting together Hume's lack of formal religious belief and his much admired character we highlight a particular feature that links the two – his intellectual honesty, objectivity and judicious weighing of the evidence. As already mentioned his history aroused a clamour from all sides because it failed to reinforce the prejudices of either Whigs or Tories or at least was objective enough to irritate both enormously. One of what I suppose we must call the loves of his life, the Comtesse de Boufflers wrote a profuse letter in praise of what she termed his 'Divine impartiality'.<sup>45</sup> This is well indicated in the final sentence of *My Own Life*. There Hume wrote:

I cannot say there is no vanity in making this funeral oration of myself, but I hope it is not a misplaced one; and this is a matter of fact which is easily cleared and ascertained.<sup>46</sup>

There is first here an attempt at self-knowledge, an acknowledgement that there is likely to be some vanity in his account of himself and his writings. Secondly, however, there is no false humility. He hopes that if there is vanity 'It is not a misplaced one', that the works he has written are indeed of lasting worth. Finally, ever judicious, he leaves it to others to judge, simply on the basis of the facts. 'This is a matter of fact which is easily cleared and ascertained.'

When we consider and contrast Johnson and Hume we come up in the end against the mystery of faith, why it is that some people believe and others do not. Johnson, like many of his contemporaries, thought that belief and unbelief was above all a moral matter. It was wicked to disbelieve. We in the twentieth century tend to think it a psychological matter, Johnson had a desperate need to believe, Hume apparently did not. In the end we are not of course in a position to judge the relative strengths of the temperaments, nor the extent to which these two great minds genuinely followed the truth as they

<sup>42</sup> Mossner, p. 88.

<sup>43</sup> Mossner, p. 245.

<sup>44</sup> Mossner, pp. 587-8.

<sup>45</sup> Mossner, pp. 426, 474.

<sup>46</sup> Wollheim, p. 279.



discerned it and how far they were lead astray by other considerations. Boswell is ambivalent about Dr Adam Smith's estimate of Hume as a nearly perfectly wise and virtuous man. He noted that Hume had been blessed with good health, good spirits, good friends and increasing fortune, as well as 'A perpetual feast of fame'. He did not have to undergo any severe trials to prove the perfection of his virtue, nor did he every experience any great adversity.<sup>47</sup> But that is a judgement I have already questioned.

The fact is we simply do not know the extent to which Johnson and Hume followed the light within them, that light which is at once intellectual, spiritual and moral. But we are inclined to accord to both of them a deep respect.

<sup>47</sup> *Journey*, p. 178.

8th January 2000

**THE STREATHAM JOHNSON KNEW**  
John Cresswell

Chairman: Michael Bundock

*John Cresswell, a retired scientific illustrator, is a member of the Society. He lived in Streatham for forty years, and is a former Secretary of the Streatham Society; his interest in local history led him to Samuel Johnson. His paper was illustrated with numerous prints and photographs.*

THE STORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP between Samuel Johnson and Henry and Hester Thrale is well known, but it may be worth giving a brief resumé to put this paper in context. Henry Thrale (1728-1781) was a successful Southwark brewer. In 1763 he married Hester Salusbury, of a family now experiencing reduced circumstances. To escape the smelly Bankside brewery, the couple would – especially during the summer months – retreat to a country house in Streatham, then a small Surrey village. Henry was master of the household and took charge of its running and the kitchen. Hester's place was in the drawing room, bedchamber and nursery.

Hester had a lively mind and some literary pretensions. For the most part she found her husband's cronies an uninspiring bunch. She was, however, fond of Arthur Murphy, the Irish playwright. Together they contrived to entice Samuel Johnson to dinner. The first occasion, on 9th January 1765, did not register greatly with Johnson. His diary entry did not even get the name correctly: 'At Mr Trails.' He did become quite a regular visitor until a bout of illness kept him away. Anxious for his well-being, the Thrales whisked him away from his Johnson's Court home to be nursed back to health at Streatham. This summer of 1766 was the start of a deep friendship which only collapsed after the death of Henry. Johnson was supportive, witty, tiresome, avuncular in turn. His presence at the house attracted a lively stream of guests, drawn from the most famous literati of the period. They have become known as the Streatham circle. For Johnson, Streatham was to become his home, where he spent his happiest although least productive years.

We must assume Johnson's relationship with Hester was always proper, but when she married the children's Italian singing master, Gabriele Piozzi, he was devastated. As executor of Henry's will he fulfilled his obligations and soon after left Streatham forever.

After a tour of Italy and Wales, the newly-weds returned to Streatham Park for five years between 1790-95, before Hester decided to claim her Welsh birthright. Later, with two husbands and admirer dead, she sought to cut all ties with Streatham and the contents of the house were sold in 1816. Some lands acquired by Henry still remained with the children. When daughter Sophie died in 1824, some of this land was utilised to build almshouses in memory of Henry.

In the eighteenth century Streatham was a small village in Surrey. It lay some six miles south of London in virtually open countryside. The Parish was quite extensive but held only about 2000 inhabitants. In 1790 the number of houses was 265, mostly concentrated in three foci: Upper Tooting, Balham and Streatham proper. The area around the Parish Church of St Leonard was the oldest nucleus, dating back to Saxon times. However, the area was becoming popular with wealthy City gentry seeking country retreats.

By these times the feudal system was beginning to break up with this incoming wealth, but it still has relevance to our story. Streatham was unusual in medieval times in being under the control of three manors: Tooting Bec, Streatham South (or Vauxhall) and Leigham's Court.

In 1695 the heiress of the Lord of the Manor of Tooting Bec married into the Russell family, and soon

young Wriothlesley became the second Duke of Bedford on the death of his grandfather. It was from the supply of porter to subsequent Dukes that Ralph Thrale (1698-1758) was able to acquire some 89 acres of land within the Manor. From the churchwarden accounts, Ralph was one of 111 ratepayers in 1738 with a house assessed at £77.

Originally the land held a farm called 'Moorfields'. Ralph either modified the existing building or constructed a new villa. It was to be known henceforward as 'Streatham Park' or 'Streatham Place'. (The former name still exists.) When Ralph's son and heir, Henry, married Hester in 1763, the villa was to be their country retreat.

The place was quite accessible by road from the brewery. The road through Streatham was laid out by the Romans and was one of the major routes out of London. It still is – as the A23 trunk road. The road map of Ogilby of 1675 shows the route from London Bridge through open countryside. Not wholly idyllic, however, since on one occasion Henry was robbed on his way home. For this the villain was hanged on Kennington Common.

However, there was an alternative route to Streatham Park. This was via the old Stane Street through Clapham. Both routes were equally long from the brewery, but this latter route avoided the steep hill at Brixton Causey. The only clue that this way was favoured comes in Fanny Burney's *Diary* when Johnson tearfully pointed to the house from their coach as it passed, saying 'That is lost to me for ever.'

Practically every book on Johnson will contain a picture of the modest villa in which the Thrales lived. Whilst we have a photo of it just prior to its demolition in 1863, nothing was recorded or salvaged, except to note wig pegs in Johnson's room. Interestingly, there exists a catalogue of the sale of contents in 1816. During Piozzi's brief stay in the 1790s, Gabriele spent much time renovating the place, but we may assume the catalogue reflected much of earlier character of the house that Johnson called home.

The rooms either side of the entrance hall were bedrooms. They faced north and did not get the sun. The left wing had two more bedrooms, one of which was Dr Johnson's. The contents of this room – when sold – consisted of a four-poster bed, a wash table with two drawers and blue and white ewer, a mahogany-framed looking glass, a commode, a four-drawer bureau, five chairs and a large easy chair, a mahogany bidet and a wardrobe. It was cool and airy in summer, and warm in winter. He could retire there for a sleep in the afternoon until woken by the dinner bell rung in the hall. Thrale's valet would help him dress decently and supply a newly frizzled wig.

Next door to the bedroom was the famous library. Thrale fitted this up, requiring a rational, readable well-chosen collection. He already had a few books but felt the need to cater for the more sophisticated readers who were now frequenting his home. He gave Johnson £100 to buy the books he thought necessary. The library obviously contained works by Johnson, including the *Dictionary*, *Shakespeare* and the *Lives of the Poets* and bound copies of *The Rambler* and *The Idler*. It had works by the various other members of the Streatham Circle – Fanny and Charles Burney, Reynolds and Giuseppe Baretti.

All the classics were represented: Tacitus, Ovid, Homer, Virgil, Horace and Cicero – of course, in the original Latin and Greek. There were also works in French and Italian. English writers were present – Milton, Ben Jonson, Fielding, Fletcher and Gibbon, also religious works, but more interestingly Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Young's *Experimental Agriculture*, Boyle's *Chemical Experiments* and Grew's *Discourse of the Universe*, but only one volume on brewing; one can see Johnson supplying for his own curiosity. About a thousand volumes are listed in the catalogue.

However, the greatest claim to fame for the library was above the bookshelves. Sir Joshua Reynolds was commissioned to supply fourteen portraits of the Streatham Circle to hang round the walls. Henry himself hung over the door leading to the study; and Hester with their first child, affectionately called 'Queeney' by Johnson, over the fireplace. The others were Lord Sandys and Lord Westcote – two early friends of Thrale – with portraits of Johnson, Murphy, Edmund Burke, David Garrick, Oliver Goldsmith, Baretti, Sir Robert Chambers, Charles Burney, and Reynolds himself. Hester wrote a series of poems about each portrait, from which we can glean their order but not necessarily their position.

The library was also the breakfast room at Streatham – perhaps around the octagonal table made out of the root of an oak, inlaid and banded on a stout pillar and claws. The room also held four easy chairs and a couch, an elegant writing table and a grand pianoforte. Cecilia Thrale made a charming drawing of a soiree in Streatham Library, now in the John Rylands collection.

Several of the Streatham Circle were tutors to the children. Charles Burney taught music – perhaps at this piano. He also introduced Gabriele Piozzi to teach singing, whilst Barette taught Italian. Barette worked every day except Sunday in the library: one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon. His methods crystallised in his *Easy Phraseology, for the use of young ladies*, which may yield further insights into the Streatham Park landscape.

Also on the ground floor was a servants' hall, the housekeeper's room, the butler's pantry and the laundry.

The second floor of the house had the bow-windowed room which faced west – probably the master bedroom – with a 5ft four-poster bed, a dressing table, a commode with four drawers, a washing table, a night table, a swinging glass, six black japanned chairs and an antiques cabinet. The sale catalogue referred to this last as 'very curious'. It had an upper part containing eleven drawers and a cupboard enclosed by folding doors finely inlaid, and four drawers under. It would not have been in the correct room since it belonged to Queeney, given to her by Johnson to hold the curios – shells, fossils and minerals – he had intended to collect for her on his travels, although twice (in 1772 and 1773) he apologised for not finding much. The cabinet still exists at Bowood House.

This room was connected to a front dressing room. Then came a smaller middle bedchamber and left bedroom, again each with a four-poster bed. On the same floor came the drawing room carpeted with a Brussels carpet measuring 24ft by 18ft, with two couches and twelve chairs.

Next was the dining parlour. It had a mahogany table 15ft long with circular ends and fourteen mahogany chairs, and a 7ft mahogany sideboard. The meals at Streatham were grand. Whilst the literature is full of the fare of wit and wisdom, only occasionally do we glimpse what was on the table. Johnson himself lists a meal of roast leg of lamb with spinach, sirloin of beef, turkey, followed by figs, grapes and peaches. Amongst numerous prints pasted on the walls of the parlour, we learn that one was Hogarth's *Modern Midnight Conversation*. Both rooms had anterooms leading to the hall and staircase.

The upper story of the central block presumably housed servants, children's bedrooms and the nursery. There is a painting by Zoffany of Queeney in a nursery situation with Belle, Mrs Salusbury's detestable spaniel.

The grounds of Streatham Park were extensive. Immediately adjacent to the house was the kitchen and scullery. There was also a dairy and a series of other outhouses, stables and coachhouses. Hester took control over the dairy and the poultry yard as her special projects and looked after chickens, turkeys, geese and peafowl. There is a reference to Johnson swinging on the gate of the courtyard as he read *Mémoires de Fontenelle*.

There were kitchen gardens, a melon yard and greenhouses, a 14ft walled garden with grapevines and an orchard. A couple of mulberry trees still exist in the area. Exotic fruits were usually supplied to the dinner table.

Mrs Piozzi complained about the cost of erecting the 2 mile perimeter paling. At the same time she mentions Gabriele laying the perambulating path, so it is not certain whether this was present in Johnson's time. Certainly guests would wish to stroll in the grounds.

The vast grounds, of course, gave the Thrale children ample space to play. Mrs Thrale used to summon the children home with an ivory whistle like dogs – but a very practical arrangement. Young Harry had climbed every tree around.

Johnson also used the summer house in the grounds. It was here he corrected the proofs of the *Lives of the Poets*, and where, on 9th August 1781, he vowed to spend eight hours a day in 'some serious employment' – so that he may 'yet be useful and be daily better prepared to appear before my creator'. As

a start he intended to study Italian for the next six weeks. This summer house survived for 200 years after this until being burnt down by vandals at Kenwood in 1991.

In 1771 when there was rebuilding at the villa, Johnson asked for some hundred bricks to be put aside so that he could construct a kiln in the kitchen garden to smelt lead and other metals. He started the process – as much for his own curiosity, as those of the children – but when Thrale returned and saw the alarming sight, he forbade any further experiments.

Thrale himself caused a large pond to be built covering nearly 3 acres. Johnson contented himself in being allowed to water the laurels on the island. Other landscape features included a ha-ha. Baretti invited the girls to cross the drawbridge over this and incurred the wrath of Hester, fearing they could have drowned in the pond.

The approach drive to the house was relatively short and had a lodge at the entrance. This survived the demolition of the house and stood at the entrance of the earliest road cut into the new development. Posts in a 1905 postcard view may be part of the original Thrale villa entrance.

Extending along the northern border of the park was a double avenue of trees. The Duke of Bedford had first planted Dutch elms, but when Ralph arrived he matched them tree for tree with English elms. Dutch elms were popular with William III but it became apparent it was not good timber, so Mr Thrale often spoke of his father's good sense. Of course, all the elms succumbed two hundred years later to Dutch elm disease but doomed suckers still sprout along Tooting Bec Road.

The expanse of common land opposite Streatham Park is the common for the Manor of Tooting Bec. In much of the early literature and maps it is called 'Streatham Common' which still causes confusion. But it does make sense of the anecdote when a guest at the house looked out of the window and commented on bird catchers working on a Sunday – a comment which received a terse rebuke from Johnson. The Common is a flat terrace of the ancient Thames and early gravel diggings for road metallurgy produced ponds with which Johnson was no doubt familiar. A hundred years ago it had aged trees but public open spaces no longer allow dangerous trees to stand. There was another avenue of oaks going northwards across the eastern side of the Common to Woodfield House.

What is now Streatham Common was usually called 'Lower Streatham Common' in the eighteenth century. Despite his afflictions, Johnson did enjoy walks and he may have strolled down to the Common.

And he may well have gone with another purpose. Johnson's diary is full of references to his taking cathartics. In 1660 ploughmen discovered the medicinal properties of the spring waters at Streatham Common and for the next hundred years there was a flourishing spa based at the Rookery with three wells providing differing purging qualities. Local legend would wish to have Johnson taking the Streatham waters, but whether it was at the Common or a new establishment opened around 1780 at the end of Wells Lane, we shall never know.

Streatham Common was the common for the Manor of South Streatham. It has retained its shape from earliest times. It slopes from the heights of the plateau gravel capping down to the road. At the foot was a pond, and cattle on their way to Smithfield would water there.

On the opposite side of the road, Johnson would have seen another region of settlement. First there was the Greyhound Inn of some antiquity which used to be frequented by Gipsies from the Norwood Area (Gipsy Hill). Then came two schools. The first was Streatham School, being built just at the end of our period, then came Hambly House Academy.

Immediately to the north of Streatham Common and extending nearly along all its length were the grounds of the Manor House of Tooting Bec. A map shows the 29 acre estate in 1729. The house had a foundation going back several centuries – Queen Elizabeth slept here. The grounds are primarily parkland with a long avenue some half-mile long going up the hill. A solitary oak still survives in a back garden. The house itself was lived in by the Dukes of Bedford but by 1790 it was in some disrepair and sold to the Viscount Deerpark, who later became the seventh Earl of Coventry.

To the north of the estate was the Manor of Leigham's Court. For the most part it was hardly

occupied. In the eighteenth century it was owned by Jane Roberts who married in 1752 George Duke of St Albans. He held it after her death but sold it in 1789 to Lord Thurlow.

The Duke of Bedford acquired some of this land to build a new estate. It was called Bedford House and had in its grounds a large lake, called Ashlake. The earliest date we have for the house is around 1785 and may be outside our brief, except that Henry Thrale bought land immediately to the north of it which suggests Bedford House could have pre-existed.

As we have seen, some properties existed along the eastern flank of the road. It was called Bedford Row and was the start of Streatham's shopping centre, but the earliest services offered would have been service industries. We have no certainty when these places were built, except half-way up the hill was a pub called the 'Five Bells' suggesting an early date.

As 'incomers' to Streatham, the Thrales only rarely deigned to speak to the residents. The Pitches family was suffered, although they too were relatively new to the area, coming in 1756. They lived in a large house called a manor, although incorrectly so. No pictures remain of the house, but the large tower seen in an Edwardian postcard is a water tower serving the estate.

Queeney, on her thirteenth birthday (17th September 1777), chose to spend it with her close friend, Peggy, one of five children of Abraham Pitches (later – 1783 – Sir Abraham), so Hester was obliged to go to the manor. She did not care for Peggy much, and Queeney wrote clandestine letters in code to her. Peggy married well, however – to Viscount Deerhurst, mentioned above.

Lady Pitches was not popular with the locals, either. A small area of open space lay at her gate and she chose to enclose it in 1794. Amongst other uses, it was used as a short cut for coffin-bearers going to the church. A petition was made to the Duke of Bedford who owned the Green to force Lady Pitches to remove the fence.

Just north of the Green was the village smithy, ideally sited at the junction of four major routes. The smithy was in operation there until the nineteen-twenties. Nearby were the village stocks.

On the opposite corner lay St Leonard's Church – the very heart of Streatham, dating way back to the eighth century, if not earlier. The church that Johnson knew was mainly the 1350 rebuild by Sir John Ward – perhaps a thanksgiving for surviving the Black Death. The tower is made of flint, and still exists today. The spire was, for the Thrales, relatively new, because lightning struck the steeple in 1774. Henry is mentioned in the vestry minute books as subscribing for its rebuilding and other alterations to the church. The south wall and east end were rebuilt and a south gallery added. These alterations were completed in 1778. The spire previously held five bells – hence the name of the pub mentioned earlier.

There are no interior views of the church. By chance we do have a partial ground plan occasioned when Henry requested from the Duke of Bedford more pew space for his growing family. The Thrale pew was in the front near the south wall.

Johnson often returned to London for the weekend, so attended St Leonard's infrequently. Unfortunately his diary remained in London, so he recorded very little of his stay at Streatham Park and his extra-mural activities. But he did go to church sometimes, usually complaining that he could not hear the sermon.

He occasionally played a role in some of the services. On the happier occasions it was at a christening. Hester spent most of her married life with Thrale being pregnant. She gave birth to a dozen children, mostly at Streatham, and they were christened at St Leonard's. Johnson was especially pleased when the fourth daughter born in 1769 was named after his 'Tetty' and he was a co-sponsor. The family christening dish still exists at Bowood.

More tragic was the number of times he attended the funerals there. The Thrales had a burial vault inside the church, sited under their pew. The black stone covering slab still exists at St Leonard's but with rebuilding, it has been moved. It is also non-functional because in 1832 the church nave was totally rebuilt and all the coffins were re-deposited in a crypt under the floor. Some half-dozen of the Thrale coffins now lie in this catacomb.



John Aubrey described the monuments in 1718 and Samuel Lysons in 1790, so we can interpolate that there was a mutilated effigy to Sir John Ward on the north side of the old chancel with another monument nearby with a stone porch. During the later rebuilding in the nineteenth century these two elements were combined. There was also the magnificent monument to Sir John Howland, the former Lord of the Manor of Tooting Bec who died in 1686. Also the ostentatious memorial to Sir Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels who died in 1610.

Two monuments were added in Johnson's time – he wrote the inscriptions to them. The first was to Hester's mother, Mrs Salusbury, who died in 1773. At first, Johnson disliked her. It was mutual as both battled for the affections of Hester. Towards the end, as she slowly died of breast cancer, Johnson came to respect her and willingly offered the lines for her epitaph. It was rather too long, but Hester refused to sacrifice a single word. The other death was more a body-blow, when Henry died in 1781. Again Johnson supplied the inscription. These monuments were damaged in a fire in 1975 but happily now restored.

There would have been the fifteenth-century font and the wooden pulpit donated to the church by Sir Matthew Howland. And also the bread dole subscribed by Sir Giles Howland for the supply of ten loaves for the poor set up in the porch.

The entrance to the church in those days was through the south porch. On Sunday 6th October 1782, Johnson walked to the church for his last service there, a walk which necessitated his stopping several times to get his breath. On leaving he kissed this porch – 'Templo valedixi cum osculo.'

During this period the Rector was James Tattersall (1712-1784). He was the second son of Reverend John Tattersall of Chipstead. He became Rector at Streatham in 1755. At the same time he was also Rector at St Paul's, Covent Garden, no doubt a living he preferred, and Streatham may have seen little of him.

James's brother married well, and through his sister-in-law he inherited some four thousand acres of land from three separate manors. This made him a wealthy man and enabled him to build a new rectory at Streatham for himself, his wife and eleven children. It was called 'The Shrubbery'. Fanny Burney visited Tattersall's garden and noted it contained many temples, summer houses and statues, but they all seemed tumbling one upon the other.

The interior of the house, too, was grand with Adam fireplaces. On Tattersall's death the house was sold to Dr Hugh Smith, and it later became a girls' school, being demolished in 1934. 'The Shrubbery' was Tattersall's self-indulgence. Other Rectors, before and after, lived in a rectory just north of the church.

Opposite this stood Russell House. It was the school run by Mrs Ray, which the later Mrs Papendick attended in the 1770s. Hester entrusted the care of Cecilia and Harriet to Mrs Ray in 1783 only to return in haste from Bath on the death of Harriet.

North of 'The Shrubbery' was a posting inn called 'The White Lion'. It was an old foundation going back to 1507. It served other uses, being later the place for the school and the vestry.

Nearly opposite the pub was some land owned by Thrale mentioned earlier. On it, amongst a series of cottages was a school on the corner of Wells Lane. Initially it was run by Dr Thomas and it was here that young Harry started in 1773, but he was not disciplined enough and was sent a couple of years later to Loughborough House School. The school in Streatham was later taken over by a curate at St Leonard's, Dr Reynold Davies. The school was for boys under the age of twelve. When the Piozzis returned to Streatham, Hester's adopted son, John Salusbury Piozzi was sent there, a trial for pupil and master alike.

Henry also owned some six acres on the west side of the road, called Townsend Field, containing some fine ornamental timber. It probably went up as far as the Woodbourne, a small stream that cut under the road and eventually ran into the Falcon Brook and thence into the Thames. It was also probably the same aquifer that fed the village pump.

Just north of Thrale's land is a road called Mt Ephraim Lane. It would be interesting to suppose that Thrale might have named it after the home of the sweet Sophie Streatfield.

Just further north again, is another inn, often called the 'Half Way House' because it was almost exactly half-way between London and Croydon. It was a favourite of the Prince Regent during his frequent trips to Brighton. And it is cited in later literature as being a favourite of Samuel Johnson. A photograph shows it in 1865. It is interesting to note that it supplied Barclay Perkins beer. After the death of Thrale, Johnson arranged the sale of the brewery to the chief engineer there, Perkins with the help of Barclays. Johnson remained the trade mark of the new company. The sale of the brewery made the widowed Mrs Thrale 'rich beyond the dreams of avarice'. She now had independent means to go her independent way. Her desire for a romantic life with Piozzi – a professional musician, a Catholic and a foreigner – was to scandalise her friends. The year after Thrale's death and the sale of the brewery, Johnson took his final leave from his 'home' in Streatham: his diary for 6th October 1782 ends 'Streathamiam quando revisam?' – a cry from the heart, realising all was now lost to him.

The coming of the railway in the mid-nineteenth century saw the great development of Streatham. It is almost symbolic that one of the first lines gouged its way through the centre of Streatham Park. By 1900 the area was a suburb of London, buried under a continuum of building.

We still have a few memorials to the Johnsonian era. We still have almshouses bearing the name Thrale. There is a Dr Johnson Avenue across Tooting Common; there is a Thrale Road, a Johnson Close, a Boswell Close and – being in Lambeth – a Francis Barber Close; despite a disastrous fire in 1975 St Leonard's Church still stands, containing the Thrale wall memorials and featuring the Streatham Coterie in stained glass. And a few years ago the Chairman of the Johnson Society unveiled a plaque on the site of Streatham Park.

12th February 2000

#### JOHNSON AND THE THEATRE Gabriel Woolf

Chairman: Dr Nicholas Cambridge

*Gabriel Woolf is well-known as an actor and broadcaster. In addition to his work in television and film, he has given numerous readings of novels and poetry. He is President of the Alliance of Literary Societies, and was President of the Dickens Fellowship 1997-1999.*

*Mr Woolf gave a lively one-man reading from 'Irene', but concluded that Johnson was better at chemistry and kangaroos than at writing plays; his great contribution to the theatre was his edition of Shakespeare. He also read from G. K. Chesterton's little-known play 'The Judgement of Dr Johnson', in which Johnson and Boswell, on their Highland tour, encounter two Americans, who have come to drum up support for the Revolution. Mr Woolf concluded an entertaining meeting by expressing the hope of having the opportunity to return on another occasion to read from Boswell or from Johnson's prose.*

11th March 2000

**JOHNSON READS FOR THE DICTIONARY**  
**Dr Graham Nicholls**

Chairman: C. Tom Davis

*Dr Nicholls is a Vice-President of the Society, to which he has presented several papers. As the paper delivered on this occasion indicates, he is now a Research Fellow at Birmingham University, prior to which he was Curator of the Johnson Birthplace Museum in Lichfield for twenty-six years.*

WHEN I ARRANGED a date for this talk with the Secretary I had no idea that it would prove to be such a momentous weekend in my Johnsonian life. Yesterday I ceased, after twenty-six years, being Curator of the Johnson Birthplace Museum; on Monday I begin a new career as Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham. Today I am in a curious limbo, a no-man's-land between posts and so it seems to me to be not unfitting that I should be speaking to a Johnson Society on a topic so central to Johnson, a topic which I started to consider in my last years at the Birthplace and which I am about to pursue more methodically at Birmingham. As your Chairman pointed out I shall be editing an edition of the *Dictionary* and I will certainly be touching on what this might involve. But I also wish to take this opportunity to review what we know of Johnson's research on the *Dictionary* and what this might have to tell us about the finished work.

Until recently, Johnson's *Dictionary* was his most famous book, but also his least explored. It is not difficult to see why. It is, as every schoolboy could tell you, a very big book. The statistics still astonish us, even when we start refining them down by talking about short cuts Johnson may have used, mistakes, secondary sources, and so on: the 43,000 headwords in the first edition, augmented in the fourth revised edition, and the 113,000 quotations, with a further 3,000 in the fourth. The books will always tell you that Johnson's predecessor, Nathan Bailey's dictionary, contains more headwords (many of them we know have an extremely questionable relationship to the English language), but it is those illustrative quotations, to which we shall constantly return this afternoon, which astonish us, and which have understandably put off scholars who wish to make a full-scale examination of the book. (The *Dictionary* does not form part of the 'complete' Yale edition of Johnson's works.)

Before 1970 any articles on Johnson's *Dictionary* which weren't unthinkingly adulatory or which endlessly churned out the so-called humorous definitions, tend, with some honourable exceptions, to be shortish pieces in *Notes and Queries* and elsewhere which list or identify quotations on themes like scientific subjects or from particular authors. Many of these pieces are very useful (or they are to me in my new work) but they are unsystematic and like any work on Johnson's *Dictionary* they are liable to mistakes and omissions. (How can you be sure that you have discovered all the quotations from Robert Burton, William Law, or whoever?) And most of these earlier pieces either ignore or fail to see the significance of Johnson's revisions in the fourth edition.

Some of you may know or have seen the study by Sledd and Kolb which appeared in 1955, the bicentenary of the first edition.<sup>1</sup> The authors are to be commended for putting the *Dictionary* back into the critical arena, but their largely bibliographical study was hampered by their inability to consult the famous Sneyd-Gimbel slips (at that time in the hands of a private collector). In the late 1960s Eugene Thomas began an examination of the marked books (the thirteen surviving volumes in which Johnson

<sup>1</sup> James H. Sledd and Gwin J. Kolb, *Dr Johnson's Dictionary: Essays in the Biography of a Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

marked the quotations he needed for the first and, in the case of one of the books, the fourth editions). This research also revived interest in the work and assistance that the amanuenses gave Johnson in the preparation of the *Dictionary*. Thomas was also the first person I think to use technology to assist him in coming to terms with the vast acreage of the book.<sup>2</sup> Since Eugene Thomas, three names stand out in *Dictionary* studies, Robert DeMaria, whose *Johnson's Dictionary and the Language of Learning*<sup>3</sup> (with parts of his later *Samuel Johnson and the Life of Reading*<sup>4</sup>) is the first full length study since Sledd and Kolb, Anne McDermott and her CD-ROM edition of the *Dictionary*<sup>5</sup> (of which more later), and Allen Reddick's major study, *The Making of Johnson's Dictionary*, which first appeared in 1990.<sup>6</sup> With this magnificent study, using for the first time an extensive examination of the manuscript materials known as the Sneyd-Gimbel sheets and an interleaved copy of the *Dictionary* in the British Library, we begin to get close to Johnson's working methods on the *Dictionary* and to gain some notion of the continuing research and thinking that Johnson did on the *Dictionary* throughout his life.

There are two reasons why Johnson's *Dictionary* has become in the later part of the twentieth century a subject for study and research, one philosophical, the other practical. With regard to the former, the areas for critical study have widened out from what we might call imaginative literature (the poetry, drama, and novels of the traditional 'A' level and degree level courses) to include what, in simple librarian terms, would be called 'non-fiction': works of historical research, philosophy, histories of literature, legal, medical studies, to mention a few of the more sophisticated categories. The practical reason is the expansion of electronics to aid literary research. As you know, the *Dictionary* itself is available on CD-ROM, and certain texts (some of which are used by Johnson in the *Dictionary*) are available on the Net; there are massive databases which speed up the search for quotations in verse and drama.

The story of how Johnson wrote the *Dictionary*, as a result of the work of Eugene Thomas and Allen Reddick is certainly clearer, though I think there are still murky areas. You probably know now that for several years Johnson used a method for compiling the *Dictionary* (involving the use of paper notebooks) which proved awkward and inflexible for himself and for his printers and that somewhere around 1750 he was obliged to change direction radically to a more fluid system involving slips of paper. There were also numerous disputes between author and publishers over the speed at which Johnson was working, his method of preparing copy for the printer, and, inevitably, money. But amongst all the troubles and problems which beset Johnson and his amanuenses in the Gough Square attic the basic philosophy remained the same: Johnson's *Dictionary*, from its outset right through its major revision for the fourth edition and the later tinkering made right up to his death, was to be based on a reading of the written literature (in the broadest sense) from the mid-sixteenth century (the time of Ascham, Tusser, Sidney, and Spenser) to the middle of the eighteenth century. The books in which Johnson looked for his illustrative quotations are the core of his research and the heart of the *Dictionary*. I would like to speak about them for the rest of my talk this afternoon.

The progress of Johnson's reading life is well known: some of the most familiar incidents in his early life revolve around his love of books: frightening himself when reading *Hamlet* in the family kitchen,

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Eugene Thomas, 'Dr Johnson and his Amanuenses', *Transactions of the Johnson Society* (Lichfield), 1974, pp. 20-30.

<sup>3</sup> Robert DeMaria Jr., *Johnson's Dictionary and the Language of Learning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Robert DeMaria Jr., *Samuel Johnson and the Life of Reading* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language on CD-ROM* (ed., Anne McDermott), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Allen Reddick, *The Making of Johnson's Dictionary 1746-1773* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, rev. ed., 1996).

being bored on Sundays by being required to read the *Whole Duty of Man*, being overwhelmingly moved by the conclusion of *King Lear*, surprising his mother by learning the day's collect from the *Book of Common Prayer* whilst walking up the stairs. And a little later, Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* getting him out of bed earlier than he intended, studying Knolles's *History of the Turks* as a source for a Turkish play which would help him to break into London literary life, finding William Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* so convincing at college that he returns to a life of piety. Slightly closer attention to biographical sources shows us that his father's shop stocked copies of Norris's *Miscellanies*, Burnet's *Sacred History of the Earth* and that probably early in his life Johnson owned copies of Sir Thomas Browne's *Vulgar Errors*, Camden's *Remains Concerning Britain*, Jeremy Collier's *Essays*, Locke's *Essay on Education*, and William Sherlock's *Practical Discourse Concerning Death*. Whilst staying with his cousin, Cornelius 'Parson' Ford, he was certainly encouraged to read (if he hadn't already done so), the works of some of Ford's literary friends, men like Pope, Garth, Addison, Congreve, Edmund Smith, Prior, and we know that a few months later Johnson took with him to Oxford many of these authors, as well as other contemporary works like Ambrose Philips's tragedies and Blackmore's *Creation* and those of the previous generation like Milton, Butler and Dryden's translations of Virgil. (Remember incidentally that, as Johnson's *Dictionary* is an English dictionary, we are obviously restricting ourselves to English authors.)

What is significant about these writers – and we are dealing with just the handful that surface from the patchy accounts of his youth – is that all of them are cited in the *Dictionary*. That is to say many of the books to which Johnson naturally turned for his source material were those which had been a part of his life, in some cases, since he had encountered them in his father's Lichfield bookshop. Indeed if we look down the league table of the most quoted authors – the list begins Shakespeare, Dryden, Milton, Addison, Bacon, the Authorised Version of the Bible, Pope – many of them had been familiar to him for many years. In the case of Shakespeare too, we know that prior to the *Dictionary* Johnson had begun work on an edition of Shakespeare's plays (*Macbeth* certainly, but possibly other plays too) an edition which had been aborted when the publisher was faced with copyright problems. Not only were many of the authors familiar to Johnson; many of them had been accepted already as suitable sources for lexicographical material. There is some evidence to suggest that Alexander Pope in the last year of his life may have passed on to Johnson (either directly or through a publisher) a list of authorities for the *Dictionary*. There were many other authors of course to which Johnson now came for the first time; he told Boswell that he had not read any of Bacon's works until he started work on the *Dictionary*. But through personal reading habits and the traditions (such as they were) of English lexicography, much of Johnson's reading for the *Dictionary* was laid out for him when he signed the contract with the consortium of booksellers in June 1746. It may be significant that although the edition of Shakespeare used by Johnson for the *Dictionary* survives, most of the other major works have disappeared (no marked copies of Milton, Dryden, Bacon, Pope, Addison); perhaps Johnson picked up his own well-thumbed editions of these popular writers acquired many years earlier in his father's shop, old volumes which did not survive the rigours of life in the Gough Square attic.

It is also worth pointing out that at least some of Johnson's old literary friends – *The Whole Duty of Man*, Robert Nelson's *Companion for Festivals and Feasts of the Church of England* – books which Johnson had known since childhood and which were perhaps associated with the narrow piety of his mother – were not used in the first edition of the *Dictionary* but reappear in the fourth revised edition on which he was working thirty years later in his early sixties. To these we should add William Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (a book for ever associated with his undergraduate days). It creeps into the first edition with a couple of citations, but it's quoted two hundred times in the fourth. Indeed the use of particular authors in the revised *Dictionary* has become a source of controversy amongst Johnson scholars (how should we regard the High Church, non-juring theological writers which Johnson includes in the revised *Dictionary*? Do they represent a newly-inspired belief in conservatism? As an alternative

theory we might also consider perhaps that some of them are re-emerged authors remembered from Johnson's youth.

Now clearly Johnson read for the *Dictionary* in a different spirit to how he read poetry with 'Parson' Ford in Worcestershire. Certainly he went through William Law's famous book with a different intention to the occasion at Oxford when Law proved an 'overmatch' for him. He was for instance reading for the *Dictionary* very quickly. I shall give you some more figures in a moment, but Johnson read a lot of authors and a lot of books. Nine years may seem a long time for work on the book, but as I mentioned earlier, several years were, at least partially wasted, in an inefficient method of transcribing material for the printer, he was obliged to engage in administrative battles with the publishers, see that the amanuenses were selected and properly paid, there were other writing projects, including the *Rambler* essays written alongside *Dictionary* work, as well as making provision 'for the day that was passing over me', as he memorably expresses it in the Preface. As I have begun the editing process on the *Dictionary* it has not been lost upon me that many of the editor's problems echo those of the author. I can appreciate the defensive spirit in which Johnson talks about the cavalier way in which he has sometimes been obliged to treat quotations. Speed reading John Donne, juggling concordances and texts, reading other great verse by racing down the rhyming words on a page, as I have sometimes done, I appreciate that these are not perhaps treating major literature with the high seriousness I was taught at college by disciples of F. R. Leavis.

We know too that Johnson took short cuts. Some excitement was created in the Johnson world some years ago when it was pointed out that for his quotations from Richardson's *Clarissa* Johnson had used a collection of aphorisms from the novel appended to a later edition of the novel. Other short cuts are discovered from time to time. I mentioned that Johnson's *terminus a quo* for authors was the period of Ascham, Tusser, and Sidney. But there are earlier writers like Gower, Chaucer, and thirteenth century chroniclers like Robert of Gloucester, Roger of Hoveden. The chroniclers I feel almost certain will turn up in a secondary source, perhaps in the work of an early eighteenth-century antiquarian. Chaucer is interesting. He is quoted fourteen times in the first edition of the *Dictionary* and two of the quotations (under QUAIN and WELKIN) can be found in footnotes to John Gay's *Shepherd's Week*, a poem written in a deliberately rustic, 'old-fashioned' style. The others may yet turn up elsewhere. This use of a secondary source happens not infrequently, especially when one comes across a single quotation from an author. Thus under REED (as in advice) there are a few lines from Thomas Sternhold's metrical version of the first psalm. The same lines occur in a footnote to Pope's *Dunciad*, which is presumably where Johnson came across them. The same thing happens for instance to illustrate the unusual usage of PERIWIG as a verb where Johnson quotes from Joshua Sylvester's verse account of the seven days of creation translated from the French. I am willing to accept that Johnson who, according to Adam Smith, 'knew more books than any man alive', may have known Sylvester's poem; I find it more likely that he found the lines in the Dedication to Dryden's play, *The Spanish Friar*, a heavily quoted piece of Dryden's prose. There are other examples of the use of secondary sources, and they represent an interesting part of Johnson's methodology, but they still only represent a tiny proportion of the 116,000 quotations in the first and fourth editions. There are not as far as I am aware any short cuts for the works of Shakespeare, Dryden, Addison, and Bacon, which together represent just over a third of all the quotations in both editions. Johnson read through these writers quickly but methodically. Also extensively. In the case of some other heavily quoted writers such as Sir Thomas Browne Johnson restricts himself to a few, sometimes only one book. Occasionally just a few pages of one book. But for instance in the case of Shakespeare, there are quotations from all the plays (though not the non-dramatic poetry), and within Bacon's works Johnson ranges widely amongst the more familiar *Essays* and the *Life of Henry VII*, but also in the less well-known scientific and political tracts. In the case of poets such as Waller or Swift, Johnson quotes lines from most of their extensive verse canons.



But though these major authors make up the bulk of Johnson's reading, one is still drawn back to the authors with only one or two quotes. Why for instance under LEAD does he quote from a speech of Thomas Herring, Archbishop of York, printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* during preparations to repel the Jacobite Rising?

Yorkshire takes the *lead* of the other countries,

Is there perhaps an in-joke here which we are missing?

Sometimes we are almost obliged to make biographical speculations. In the fourth edition Johnson adds one quotation from the Earl of Chesterfield. Under RIDICULER, we find 'The *ridiculer* shall make himself ridiculous', a quotation from a speech that Chesterfield had made as a young man in the House of Lords in opposition to the new Bill introducing stage censorship by the Lord Chamberlain. The only other significant opposition to this government censorship was Samuel Johnson in his ironic pamphlet *A Compleat Defence of the Licensers of the Stage*. Chesterfield was terminally ill at the time Johnson was revising the *Dictionary* in the early 1770s. Did Johnson's thoughts return to his early days in London when both he and Chesterfield were unwittingly united in their opposition to censorship?

I have mentioned the handful of pre-sixteenth-century authors in the *Dictionary*. At the other end of the time-scale, Johnson explains that he had originally intended not to include contemporary writers but had been forced to modify his position 'when some performance of uncommon excellence excited my veneration, when my memory supplied me from late books with an example that was wanting, or when my heart, in the tenderness of friendship, solicited admission for a favourite name'. These words I suspect have led some critics and general readers to underestimate the number of contemporary writers who appear in the first edition of the *Dictionary*. My estimate is that there are about 55 quoted who were alive when Johnson began work. Several of these are the compilers of reference books (Philip Miller, for instance, the author of the widely-used *Florist's Dictionary* lived on until 1771), several of them are only quoted once or twice, but taken together they make a considerable group. And two of them, Isaac Watts and James Thomson (both of whom died in 1748, a couple of years after work began) are amongst the more widely-quoted authors in the *Dictionary*. Writers mentioned for the sake of friendship would presumably have included the handful of female authors in the *Dictionary*, Elizabeth Carter, Hester Mulso, (fellow contributors to the *Rambler*), and especially Charlotte Lennox, whose novel, *The Female Quixote* and her important work of Shakespearean scholarship, *Shakespeare Illustrated*, appeared during the composition of the *Dictionary*. Samuel Richardson – the second most quoted contemporary writer – appears because of his friendship with Johnson but also as a tribute to what was a favourite book, *Clarissa*. As an example of inclusion purely for friendship there are a couple of lines from a poem of Henry Hervey Aston's ('If you call a dog Hervey, I shall love him'), albeit it appears anonymously as 'Dodsley's Collection' – where Hervey Aston's poem first appeared. And if we are talking about contemporary figures let us not forget that Pope, Swift, the dramatist Thomas Southerne, had died one or two years before the inception of the *Dictionary*. When Johnson came to revise the book he had further loosened up his rules about contemporaries. In the fourth edition we have quotations from *Amelia*, Johnson's favourite Fielding novel, Thomas Gray (*Elegy in a County Churchyard*), and friends such as Goldsmith, (his poem, *The Traveller*), Reynolds, (the fourth of his *Discourses*), and Arthur Murphy's play, *The Grecian Daughter*. And remember too that of all his contemporaries, the most quoted of all is Samuel Johnson, though when looking for material to cut in the revised edition, he selflessly puts himself forward as one of the chief sacrifices.

I would like to say a little about the Johnson *Dictionary* Project at Birmingham University. The first stage of this is already complete with the CD-ROM of the *Dictionary*. This contains a transcription of the first and fourth editions and facsimile reproductions of the same. That is it. Thus if you ask the CD-ROM to search for, say, quotations from *Hamlet*, it will let you know how many times the word 'Hamlet'

appears as a book title. But, as anyone who has looked at the *Dictionary* will know, there are many (probably a majority) of quotations in the *Dictionary* which will not say, 'Shakespeare, *Hamlet*' – they may not even say 'Shakespeare', but some variant such as 'Shakes.', 'Shak.' or even once or twice 'S'. Thus the reader who wishes to look at Johnson's use of that particular play has to trawl through the text looking at all the unascrbed Shakespeare quotations. I chose the example from the most famous play of the most famous author. There are many other writers whose identity is not even clear and there are many authors who wrote many books – some of them very long books. A major task for the editor of the *Dictionary* will be to identify authors, works, and give precise references in a modern edition (where such a thing exists).

As a step on the way to a complete edition and as a useful reference tool in itself a bibliography is in preparation listing all the authors and works quoted by Johnson in the *Dictionary*. At present this contains about 511 authors and anonymous works and just over 2000 works (the latter figure is rather fluid depending on what you call a separate work). The former figure will probably not change very much, the number of individual works will increase considerably as, for instance, all the individual sermons of Tillotson are identified. Some of these individual works are very short poems, some of them are monumental books like Hooker's *Of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Following on from this major process of discovering the books and authors, the *Dictionary* project will then seek out the particular editions which Johnson used. This is a more difficult task but an important one. We know that Johnson maintained a creative control over his book in the selection of materials, but also in his editing, cutting down of his quotations. When we know what edition Johnson used we can assess the changes he made to the text. In the *Preface* Johnson explains that he originally intended his quotations to be longer:

I was desirous that every quotation should be useful to some other end than the illustration of a word; I therefore extracted from philosophers principles of science; from historians remarkable facts; from chemists complete processes; from divines striking exhortations; and from poets beautiful descriptions. Such is design, while it is yet at a distance from execution.

But reality rears its head (plus a few letters from the publishers) and he realises that this scheme would make a vast, unwieldy book. Johnson was obliged to

reduce my transcripts very often to clusters of words in which scarcely any meaning is retained: thus to the weariness of copying, I was condemned to add the vexation of expunging ... The examples, thus mutilated, are no longer to be considered as conveying the sentiments or doctrine of their authors; the word for the sake of which they are inserted, with all its appendant clauses, has been carefully preserved; but it may sometimes happen, by hasty detraction, that the general tendency of the sentence may be changed: the divine may desert his tenets, or the philosopher his system.

Johnson may be exaggerating the extent of his editing; there don't seem to be many quotations in the *Dictionary* which give the opposite meaning to what they say in the original text. But there is a problem. The editor has to make a judgment as to how far Johnson has truncated his illustrative quotations. Or should he look further and find those words in that form in some other edition of the work? These may seem the problems of an editor, remote from anyone interested in Samuel Johnson's mind or art, but what Johnson was trying to do with his quotations (assuming he was trying to do anything) is of the greatest importance for an understanding of his intellectual landscape. I touched earlier on the way scholars have argued over whether the authors added in the revised edition make it a more conservative, polemical work. As another example some years ago another writer built up a particular case about Johnson's religious beliefs by looking at his treatment of quotations from William Law's *Serious Call*. In fact it was

later pointed out that Johnson was using a different edition altogether where the words were closer to the way they appeared in the *Dictionary*.

In the first instance the edition will be prepared electronically – it will be accessible on the Web. There are many advantages to this; you can present your work to the world in a continuous state of revision, you can present a lot of complex material in a reader-friendly fashion. (If you want to see unfriendly fashion look at the Yale edition of the manuscript of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, where the editors and publishers have to present various layers of revision to the text. On the printed page you have to use different typographical forms, print sizes, odd symbols, footnotes. On the electronic page you can simply click between this material to different pages, or have them on the screen at the same time.) For as well as the two major editions of the *Dictionary* there is important manuscript material which will need to be incorporated into the electronic edition. These are the Sneyd-Gimbel sheets, the slips of paper taken from the manuscript of the early, false start on the *Dictionary* in the mid-1740s reused in the revision of the early 1770s, the manuscript pages bound into a copy in the British Library which represent a later stage of the revision for the fourth edition, and the annotations in Sir Joshua Reynolds's copy of the fourth edition in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, which form an even later, largely unpublished, set of revisions in the late 1770s. All these materials will be easily accessed in an electronically presented edition.

Having said all this, I still hanker after some kind of hard copy edition in a printed form. Perhaps it will be possible to produce, say, the Bibliography in a printed form, with another edition alongside it on the Web which can be revised as needed.

One of the problems in editing a 'non-fiction' work is that there is a temptation to write an alternative version of the book. I know that the Yale editors of the *Lives of the Poets* have had to resist the temptation to write their biographies of Dryden, Prior, or whoever in their footnotes and appendices. It is not difficult to conceive how something similar could be done when editing the *Dictionary*: putting Johnson right on his etymologies, pointing out an earlier usage of a word, helpfully filling in the gaps, giving him the benefit of modern linguistic research. But I am not a lexicographer and have no wish to write an English dictionary. This edition will be an explication of the book which Samuel Johnson began in the mid-1740s, revised in the early 1770s, and continued to look at throughout his life. Today I stand in the foothills of the last major piece of Johnsonian scholarship to be attempted. Perhaps I shall come back to you in five years time to report on whether I reached the summit.

8th April 2000

**TETTY JOHNSON**  
Kate Chisholm

Chairman: Natasha McEnroe

*Kate Chisholm, formerly Assistant Literary Editor of the Sunday Telegraph, is a writer and literary journalist, and is a member of the Society. She is author of 'Fanny Burney: Her Life', published in 1998.*

*Ms Chisholm read a paper on Tetty Johnson, setting out what is known about her, and arguing that her central role in Johnson's life has received insufficient recognition. The paper, which was based on work in progress for Ms Chisholm's forthcoming book on Johnson and women, was followed by questions and lively discussion.*

### THE WREATH-LAYING

THE ANNUAL WREATH-LAYING ceremony took place in Westminster Abbey on 10th December 1999. The wreath was laid by Right Reverend Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford. The Bishop said that it was always moving to be in places associated with Johnson: Lichfield, Gough Square and other streets and churches in London, and to remember his heroic struggles to overcome depression, to survive in a tough world, and, perhaps above all, to continue to believe. It was an honour to lay the wreath on behalf of those to whom, from so many different perspectives, Johnson means so much.

Following the ceremony, the Annual Luncheon of the Society was held at the *Queen Anne* restaurant. Some forty members and guests attended, including several from overseas. It was pleasant to note amongst those attending two Boswells and a Thrale.

### IN MEMORIAM

#### David Parker

DAVID PARKER, Editor of the *New Rambler* from 1985 to 1997, died suddenly, at his home in Oxford, on 24th August 2000, a few days short of his 76th birthday. He was born in Hornsea in the East Riding, and educated at Beverley Grammar School and New College, Oxford. During the war he served in the Foreign Office in Egypt, and subsequently joined the Bank of Bahrain. His career with that Bank (and later the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank) was interrupted by a return to New College, where he carried out research on Algarotti, for which he was awarded an MLitt. He returned to this interest much later; a few days before he died, he completed the entry on Algarotti for the new edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

David joined the Society in 1980, and served it loyally, regularly attending meetings. He frequently took the Chair, often having first entertained the speaker to lunch at his Club. He addressed the Society in 1981 on 'Francesco Algarotti and England', and in 1986 delivered the allocution at the wreath-laying (*New Rambler*, 1986-87, 21). In February 2000, the members showed their appreciation of his contribution to the Society by appointing him a Vice-President. A clubable man, he was also a member of the Johnson Society of Lichfield, the Austen Society and the Tilling Society (for the works of E. F. Benson). Another literary favourite was Barbara Pym.

Through his editorship of the *New Rambler*, he came to know many Johnsonians world-wide, and often entertained those visiting Oxford at his home in Beaumont Buildings, where the books threatened to take over the staircase, and the *New Rambler* did likewise for the basement. His friendships ranged widely, and knew no boundaries of age; many younger scholars valued his encouragement.

A requiem mass was held at the church of St Aloysius, Oxford. The Society was represented by the Editor and a number of other members.

### DR JOHNSON'S HOUSE NEEDS HELP!

**A**FTER THREE HUNDRED YEARS of wear and tear, Dr Johnson's House is in need of restoration. Since 1912, the house has been open as a site of pilgrimage to those who love Johnson. In the summer, tourists visit in their hundreds, and in the winter groups of guided tours pound over the house, putting it under a strain for which it was never intended.

The beams urgently need strengthening, and the floorboards will be conserved or, if modern, replaced with salvaged floorboards of a similar period. Hence, the bare boards can be on display, as they would have been in Johnson's day. We also intend to take the opportunity to update the wiring and alarm system, and also re-paint throughout when the building work has been completed.

Our fund-raising appeal is under way, and has so far raised more than £230,000, with help from English Heritage, the Sainsbury Trust and others. But we are still £150,000 from the target. If you wish to contribute towards the restoration of this lovely old house, please send a donation to Natasha McEnroe, Dr Johnson's House, 17 Gough Square, London, EC4A 3DE. Cheques should be made payable to Dr Johnson's House Trust.

Natasha McEnroe  
Curator  
Dr Johnson's House

### **THE AGE OF JOHNSON**

A seminar organised by the Section of the History of Medicine  
The Royal Society of Medicine

Wednesday 4th April 2001, 2-6pm.

Roy Porter – The image of the doctor in the age of Johnson

Desmond King-Hele – Erasmus Darwin: better poet than doctor?

George Rousseau – Samuel Johnson and attention order/disorder

Carolyn D. Williams – The darker sides of resuscitation: James Boswell,

William Dodd and another Dr Johnson.

Cost: £15.00

For details, please contact Ruth Cloves or Emma Chaffin, Academic Department,  
The Royal Society of Medicine, 1 Wimpole Street, London W1M 8AE  
Tel: 020 7290 2985/3935. E-mail: [history@rsm.ac.uk](mailto:history@rsm.ac.uk)

# WHY READ SAMUEL JOHNSON?

Stephen Miller

*Stephen Miller's essays on literary and cultural questions have appeared in the Times Literary Supplement, Partisan Review, American Scholar, and many other journals. His book, 'Three Deaths and Enlightenment Thought: Johnson, Hume, Marat' is forthcoming from Bucknell University Press. This article first appeared in the Sewanee Review.*

'A classic is something that everyone wants to have read and nobody wants to read.'

Mark Twain

## I

SAMUEL JOHNSON is an anomaly among the classic English writers because opinion about his merit has varied greatly. In his own day – or at least soon after he died – Johnson was praised by Edmund Burke and attacked by Edward Gibbon, both of whom were members of the famous club Johnson usually presided over. In 1792 Burke said in Parliament that 'Dr Johnson's virtues were equal to his transcendent talents'. By contrast, Gibbon says in the *Decline and Fall* that Johnson's writings on Shakespeare reveal 'the workings of a bigotted though vigorous mind, greedy of every pretence to hate and persecute those who dissent from his creed'. Some sixty years later Thomas Macaulay took Gibbon's line. 'The characteristic peculiarity of his [Johnson's] intellect,' he said, 'was the union of great powers with low prejudices.'

Perhaps more damaging to Johnson's reputation is the charge made by many writers that he was a better speaker than writer. In the *Life of Johnson* James Boswell says that Johnson's 'conversation was, perhaps, more admirable than even his writings, however excellent'. Macaulay said that were it not for Boswell's biography Johnson would not loom so large in English literature. 'Boswell's book,' Macaulay says, 'has done for him more than the best of his own books could do.' According to Macaulay, Johnson 'spoke far better than he wrote'.

This view has greatly distorted the common reader's view of Johnson, since far more people have read Boswell's biography than have read Johnson's writings. Donald Greene has said of Boswell's *Life* that 'I can think of no other book that (with Macaulay's help of course) has deterred so many intelligent people from making a firsthand acquaintance with the work of a very great writer and thinker.' If my own informal survey is anything to go by, Greene is right; I know many people who have read – or dipped into – Boswell's *Life* but have not read a word of Johnson.

To be sure, some Johnson scholars argue that it is wrong to make Boswell's *Life* into a whipping boy for the neglect of Johnson. For one thing, roughly one third of the *Life* consists of Johnson's letters and miscellaneous writings. Moreover, they argue that reading the *Life* is likely to whet one's appetite for reading Johnson. Unfortunately, many readers are likely to be turned off by the portrait of Johnson that we get in the *Life* because it resembles the portrait of Johnson painted by his detractors. Boswell's Johnson is a man who does sometimes appear to be driven by strong prejudices, probably because Johnson enjoyed being 'somewhat rough in conversation,' as his friend Burke said. Even Johnson admitted that 'nobody at times, talks more laxly than I do'. In other words, there is a difference between Johnson the writer and Johnson the conversationalist – a difference that even David Hume acknowledged. Hume disliked Johnson, but he acknowledged that Johnson was never personally abusive in his writings, whereas he was 'abusive in Company'.

Since in conversation Johnson often played the part of the blustering arch-Tory – vilifying Whigs on several occasions – it is not surprising that those who think Johnson was a reactionary support their



contention mainly by gleanings from Johnson's conversation. In conversation Johnson made some remarks that hint he may have been somewhat sympathetic to Jacobitism – i.e. a desire for the restoration of the Stuart family to the British crown – but what Johnson thought of Jacobite sympathizers is quite clear from *Idler* 10, which offers portraits of two people whom Johnson calls 'political zealots,' one of whom is a Jacobite. Tom Tempest, the Jacobite, 'is a steady friend to the House of Stuart. He can recount the prodigies that have appeared in the sky, and the calamities that have afflicted the nation every year from the [Glorious] Revolution, and is of opinion, that if the exiled family had continued to reign, there would have neither been worms in our ships nor caterpillars on our trees ... He believes that nothing ill has ever happened for these forty years by chance or error'. In short, Johnson thought a Jacobite was a political crackpot.

Johnson was not a Jacobite, and he did not believe 'altogether in the old,' as Carlyle put it. Johnson's views on most questions were close to those of Adam Smith and David Hume; the only major difference between them was Johnson's strong support for traditional Christianity. Johnson always praised scientific and technological progress. Imlac, Johnson's spokesman in *Rasselas*, says: 'There is no part of history so generally useful as that which relates the progress of the human mind, the gradual improvement of reason, [and] the successive advances of science'. Johnson always ridiculed those who claimed that everything was better in the past. 'Every old man,' he says in *Rambler* 50, 'complains of the growing depravity of the world, of the petulance and insolence of the rising generation. He recounts the decency and regularity of former times, and celebrates the discipline and sobriety of the age in which his youth was passed; a happy age which is now no more to be expected, since confusion has broken in upon the world, and thrown down all the boundaries of civility and reverence.'

Johnson also agreed with Smith and Hume that luxury, which roughly means commercial expansion, was for the most part a good thing. He strongly disagreed with the traditional view that luxury had a negative effect on morality. It was cruel to attack luxury, Johnson argued, because the poor would not be able to improve their standard of living if commercial expansion did not take place:

To entail irreversible poverty upon generation after generation only because the ancestor happened to be poor is in itself cruel, if not unjust, and is wholly contrary to the maxims of a commercial nation, which always suppose and promote a rotation of property, and offer every individual a chance of mending his condition by his diligence.

Johnson thought luxury indirectly promoted morality because it enabled a greater number of people to use their time productively and thereby avoid the destructive passions that idleness breeds. Johnson thought idleness was a profoundly corrupting force. He took very seriously the parable of the talents (Matthew 25: 14-30), where the 'wicked and slothful servant' who has not returned an investment on the talent entrusted to him is ordered 'cast ... into outer darkness.' Throughout his life, Johnson berated himself for his own idleness. He continually wrote prayers invoking God to help him cast off indolence and avoid idleness – saying in one prayer that 'when I survey my past life, I discover nothing but a barren waste of time'. According to Johnson, 'he has lived with little observation either on himself or others, who does not know that to be idle is to be vicious.'

In many essays Johnson suggests that aristocrats are prey to dangerous passions because they have too much time on their hands. *Adventurer* 111 is partly about the desperate search for pleasure that is commonplace among those who have inherited large fortunes. It contains a description of restlessness that sounds very much like a commentary on one of Pascal's aphorisms:

When we observe the lives of those whom an ample inheritance has let loose to their own direction, what do we discover that can excite our envy? ... Many squander their exuberance of fortune in luxury and debauchery, and have no other use of money than to inflame their

passions, and riot in a wider range of licentiousness; others, less criminal indeed, but, surely, not much to be praised, lie down to sleep and rise up to trifle, are employed every morning in finding expedients to rid themselves of the day, chase pleasure through all the places of public resort, fly from London to Bath and from Bath to London, without any other reason for changing place, but that they go in quest of company as idle and as vagrant as themselves.

According to Johnson, 'every man, from the highest to the lowest station, ought to warm his heart and animate his endeavours with the hopes of being useful to the world, by advancing the art which it is his lot to exercise'. Johnson was under no illusion that most people liked to work or that all forms of work were interesting, but he often described commercial activity as a very satisfying passion. 'He whose mind is engaged by the acquisition or improvement of a fortune, not only escapes the insipidity of indifference, and the tediousness of inactivity; but gains enjoyments wholly unknown to those who live lazily on the toil of others'. Moreover, the desire to make money, Johnson suggests, is generally a moderate passion. Lady Pekuah in *Rasselas* calls avarice 'an uniform tractable vice'.

Johnson's celebration of the commercial energy of mid-eighteenth-century London sounds a lot like Walt Whitman's celebration of the commercial energy of mid-nineteenth-century New York. In *Adventurer* 67 Johnson describes how a newcomer to London is surprised 'by the multiplicity of cries that stun him in the streets, and the variety of merchandise and manufactures which the shopkeepers expose on every hand'. Johnson raises the traditional objection to commercial expansion – that it creates unnecessary wants – only to reject this objection. Instead, he praises even the most trifling businesses because they keep people busy.

Johnson never suggests that the expansion of commerce is the antidote to all the problems a society faces, but he has no patience for those who yearn to live in a pre-commercial society. In *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), Johnson says of the Scottish Highlanders: 'They are now acquainted with money, and the possibility of gain will by degrees make them industrious. Such is the effect of the late regulations, that a longer journey than to the Highlands must be taken by him whose curiosity pants for savage virtues and barbarous grandeur.' In speaking of 'savage virtues and barbarous grandeur,' Johnson is ridiculing the notion, which was popular in mid eighteenth century England, that those who live in backward places are more virtuous than those who live in predominantly commercial societies.

Because Johnson thought it was important to promote the expansion of commerce, he criticized laws that hindered commercial expansion – especially laws that put people in prison for debt. In *Idler* 22, he argues that such enforced idleness leads to a waste of human capital. 'The prosperity of a people is proportionate to the number of hands and minds usefully employed ... The confinement, therefore, of any man in the sloth and darkness of a prison, is a loss to the nation, and no gain to the creditor. For of the multitudes who are pining in those cells of misery, a very small part is suspected of any fraudulent act by which they retain what belongs to others.' Johnson understood that imprisonment for debt harshly penalized risk-takers – the kind of people who stimulated commercial expansion.

Although Johnson always defended Britain's established institutions, he often attacked particular laws and policies that he thought were reprehensible. He argued against the law requiring capital punishment for theft: 'To equal [equate] robbery with murder is to reduce murder to robbery, to confound in common minds the gradations of iniquity, and incite the commission of a greater crime to prevent the detection of a less. If only murder were punished with death, very few robbers would stain their hands in blood'. And he questioned both British and French policy in the New World:

It may indeed be alleged, that the Indians have granted large tracts of land both to one and to the other; but these grants can add little to the validity of our titles, till it be experienced how they were obtained; for if they were extorted by violence, or induced by fraud; by threats ... or by

promises of which no performance was ever intended, what are they but new modes of usurpation, but new instances of cruelty and treachery?

## II

It is one thing to make the case that Macaulay and others offer a very distorted view of Johnson's politics; it is another to show that Johnson's writing is of more than historical interest. Johnson's main criterion for judging the worth of a writer is: does the writer have a knowledge of the heart, by which he means the passions that animate man? Johnson pays Joseph Addison the highest compliment by saying that he 'knew the heart of man from the depths of stratagem to the surface of affectation'. Johnson greatly admired Milton for the power of his imagination and the brilliance of his poetry, yet he says that Milton lacked a knowledge of the heart. Milton 'knew human nature in the gross, and had never studied the shades of character, nor ... the perplexity of contending passions'.

Johnson's best writing still holds its power because it reveals a profound understanding of the perplexity of man's contending passions.

The nature of the passions was a subject of continual debate in the eighteenth century. Johnson was not a systematic thinker, but he was a consistent one. Though he is often thought of as a kind of literary John Bull – English to the core – he was a great reader of French literature, and his reflections on the passions were influenced by Pascal and La Rochefoucauld. All three made much of man's restlessness, his unappeasable imagination, and his mysterious heart. Like La Rochefoucauld, Johnson usually argues that it is impossible to disentangle the motives for any particular action. 'There is a kind of mercantile speculation,' Johnson says, 'which ascribes every action to interest, and considers interest as only another name for pecuniary advantage. But the boundless variety of human affections is not to be thus easily circumscribed. Causes and effects, motives and actions, are complicated and diversified without end.'

Like Pascal and La Rochefoucauld, Johnson argued that man was driven by many dark passions. Johnson found himself at odds with the upbeat assumptions of a loose body of eighteenth-century thought that stressed man's innate benevolence. This notion was especially popular with many educated people during what has been called the age of the sentimental revolution – roughly from the 1740s through the 1770s. The champions of benevolence argued that man was naturally good – or at least that some people were 'good-natured' and therefore didn't have to struggle to be moral. Johnson, who praised Oliver Goldsmith's *The Good Natur'd Man* (1767) because it satirized the school of benevolence, strongly disagreed with this sunny view of man. He criticized the Scottish philosopher Lord Kames for maintaining that 'virtue is natural to man, and that if we would but consult our own hearts we should be virtuous. Now after consulting our own hearts ... we find how few of us are virtuous'. According to Johnson, 'man's chief merit consists in resisting the impulses of his nature.'

Though Johnson admitted that 'almost all passions have their good as well as bad effects,' most of his writing is devoted to how the dark passions 'usurp our understanding.' Johnson continually warned about the passion of sloth or idleness, but he reserved his strongest condemnation – as La Rochefoucauld did – for the passion of envy, which he calls a 'genuine evil'. Envy is a purely destructive passion in which people hope to gain 'the satisfaction of poisoning the banquet which they cannot taste'. Johnson implies that envy is more common in relatively open societies, where talented people who rise in the world provoke the envy of those who have not risen. Envy, though, can be found in all societies: 'The empire of envy has no limits ... Envy may always be produced by idleness and pride, and in what place will not they be found?' Envy is far more commonplace than most people realize: 'the frequency of envy makes it so familiar that it escapes our notice.'

If envy is a strong passion, benevolence is a weak passion. Johnson did not deny that many people felt themselves to be benevolent, but he argued that feelings of benevolence come cheaply. 'Almost every man's thoughts, while they are general, are right; and most hearts are pure, while temptation is away. It

is easy to awaken generous sentiments in privacy ... to glow with benevolence where there is nothing to be given.' Johnson thought that too many people basked in their own virtuous feelings; too many equated morality with declarations of strong feeling for the distresses of others. He disliked the 'cant of sensibility,' as he put it. Such 'feeling' people, Johnson implies, confuse feeling benevolent with doing good. 'Many who praise virtue,' he says, 'do no more than praise it.'

As if to puncture the complacency of those who make much of man's natural benevolence, Johnson often used the word 'natural' when describing a negative passion. In the *Life of Waller*, he speaks of 'that natural jealousy which makes every man unwilling to allow much excellence in another'. What is natural insofar as it is widespread is man's ability to flatter himself that he is doing good when he is only praising himself for his good opinions. 'It is natural,' Johnson says, 'to mean well, when only abstracted ideas of virtue are proposed to the mind and no particular passion turns us aside from rectitude'.

Johnson also considered 'natural' to be a hopelessly imprecise term. In *Rasselas* he ridicules the vagueness and imprecision of those who talk about the joys of living a 'natural' life. A philosopher tells Rasselas that 'the way to be happy is to live according to nature, in obedience to that universal and unalterable law with which every heart is originally impressed'. The philosopher goes on in this vein for some time. When he finishes, Rasselas presses him: 'Let me only know what it is to live according to nature.' Once again, the philosopher resorts to high-sounding gibberish: 'To live according to nature, is to act always with due regard to the fitness arising from the relations and qualities of causes and effects; to concur with the great and unchangeable scheme of universal felicity'. Rasselas 'soon found that this was one of the sages whom he should understand less as he heard him longer.'

The worship of the 'natural,' Johnson thought, was insidious insofar as it led many people to think that one's 'natural' disposition or temper was so powerful that reason and the will could do little or nothing to oppose it. Johnson acknowledged that people have different dispositions, but he argued that people should not consider themselves to be enslaved by their disposition. He says of Isaac Watts: 'By his natural temper he was quick of resentment; but, by his established and habitual practice, he was gentle, modest, and inoffensive.'

Johnson attacked the popular eighteenth-century notion of a 'ruling passion,' a notion that both Pope and Hume subscribed to. According to Johnson:

[T]his doctrine is in itself pernicious as well as false; its tendency is to produce the belief of a kind of moral predestination, or overruling principle which cannot be resisted; he that admits it, is prepared to comply with every desire that caprice or opportunity shall excite, and to flatter himself that he submits only to the lawful dominion of Nature, in obeying the resistless authority of his ruling Passion.

The idea of a ruling passion, Johnson suggests, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the notion of a ruling passion undermines the will, so does the notion that one's moods affect one's conduct. It irritated Johnson to hear Boswell make so much of his moods. He wrote Boswell: 'Of the exaltations and depressions of your mind you delight to talk, and I hate to hear. Drive all such fancies from you.'

According to Johnson, the quasi-determinist view of morality advanced by the school of benevolence undermined the effort not only to be moral but to achieve excellence in all walks of life. 'The mental disease of the present generation,' Johnson says, 'is ... a disposition to rely wholly upon unassisted genius and natural sagacity.' Moreover, by making so much of the variety of man's natural traits, the school of benevolence denied man's common nature. Johnson always argued that we all have roughly the same capacity to be moral. 'We are all prompted by the same motives, all deceived by the same fallacies, all animated by hope, obstructed by danger, entangled by desire, and seduced by pleasure.'

Nothing comes easily, Johnson argued, which is why he made so much of the will. Regulating the passions requires continual effort: 'the world will often afford examples of men, who pass months and

years in a continual war with their own convictions, and are daily dragged by habit or betrayed by passion into practices, which they closed and opened their eyes with purposes to avoid'. Yet Johnson didn't exaggerate the difficulty. If it is a mistake to underestimate the effort it takes to lead a moral life, it is also a mistake to overestimate the effort. Johnson had a dark view of human nature, yet he thought moral reform was possible for everyone. 'To imagine that every one who is not completely good is irrecoverably abandoned, is to suppose that all are capable of the same degrees of excellence; it is indeed to exact, from all, that perfection which none ever can attain.'

Though Johnson continually stressed the importance of the will, he also thought reason played an important role in the moral life. 'He therefore that would govern his actions by the laws of virtue, must regulate his thoughts by those of reason'. Faith is a gift of God, but Johnson – like Pascal – thought reason could lead man to be well-disposed toward receiving the gift of faith. Johnson's strategy for achieving moral discipline works in the following way: reason leads us to prayer, prayer leads to faith, and faith strengthens the will in its effort to regulate the passions.

Johnson did not say it was impossible to lead a moral life without religious faith. Rather, he implied that those who lack religious faith are less likely to have the willpower to regulate the passions. In *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, Johnson exhorts the reader to pray for 'a healthful mind' and 'obedient passions'. Religious faith helps to strengthen the will because it turns our mind away from this life to a future life. 'To live religiously,' Johnson says in Sermon 10, 'is to walk, not by sight, but by faith; to act in confidence of things unseen, in hope of future recompence, and in fear of future punishment'. In exhorting people to fear God, Johnson was probably fighting a losing battle with the educated classes, since they were fast losing the sense of 'divine disapprobation.' Most of Johnson's friends believed a benevolent God dispensed only rewards, not punishments.

Johnson, then, made a strong if not systematic case that the new way of thinking about morality, which downplayed the importance of religious belief in fostering morality, would make it more difficult for people to achieve the moral discipline of the mind. Johnson, though, was by no means an uncritical admirer of religion. He always questioned religious beliefs that he thought posed a threat to Britain's constitutional order. Like most eighteenth-century political writers, he worried about religious enthusiasm. Religious enthusiasts were very dangerous people because they often think they are guided by the 'inward light of God' and therefore consider themselves to be above the law. Johnson feared religious enthusiasm because he knew from his reading of seventeenth-century Scottish and English history how destructive a force it could be. 'No malice is so fierce, so cruel and implacable, as that which is excited by religious discord', he says in a sermon.

Religious claims, Johnson argued, need to be examined to see if they pose a threat not only to civil order but also to the order of a particular institution. Johnson was more sympathetic than many Anglicans to the Methodists – approving of their ministry to the poor and of 'their expressing themselves in a plain and familiar manner, which is the only way to do good to the common people' – yet he thought the University of Oxford was right to expel six Methodist students because they would not desist from 'publicly praying and exhorting'. He did not sanction public displays of piety if they disrupted civil society.

### III

One need not agree with Johnson's view that religion plays a major role in achieving moral discipline to appreciate his reflections on the perplexity of contending passions – especially his concern that an increasing number of people were implying that they were not responsible for their conduct. In an age of 'the abuse excuse' and 'the flight from personal culpability' – as two late twentieth-century observers have put it – Johnson's writings are a good tonic for the mind.



But are they a tonic that the common reader is likely to swallow? Johnson is widely considered to be a difficult writer, which is why most people get their Johnson by way of Boswell. To some degree, Johnson's reputation is understandable, since many people know him primarily as the author of *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, which is a difficult poem. He also seems somewhat inaccessible because of his many-sidedness: he was a lexicographer, bibliographer, biographer, journalist, book reviewer, editor, translator, poet, novelist, travel writer, political writer, sermon writer, literary critic – a man of such a remarkable range of interests that in recent years there have been books about Samuel Johnson and science, law, medicine, and the arts.

More important, there is the reputed difficulty of Johnson's prose style, which Macaulay called 'Johnsonese'. Macaulay says that Johnson's writing is not nearly as 'natural' as his conversation: 'When he talked, he clothed his wit and his sense in forcible and natural expressions. As soon as he took his pen in his hand to write for the public, his style became systematically vicious.' Hazlitt said that Johnson's style lacked discrimination, selection, and variety. Even in Johnson's own day, his writing was frequently parodied, and Johnson himself suggested that his style left something to be desired. He told Boswell that if the style of Scottish historian William Robertson 'be faulty, he owes it to me; that is having too many words, and those too big ones'.

Is Johnson's style as cumbersome as many have suggested? Let's take an example that Dwight MacDonald selected for his anthology, *Parodies* – calling it an unconscious self-parody, by which he means one 'in which the author is both characteristic and unintentionally absurd'. Unintentional absurdity is in the eye of the beholder, since this reader finds the paragraph, which recounts how the accidental discovery of glass-making greatly benefited mankind, offers a nice balance between big words and little ones. Johnson, who always praised technological innovation, asks: Who 'would have imagined that in this formless lump [of sand or ashes] lay concealed so many conveniences of life as would in time constitute a great part of the happiness of the world? Yet by some such fortuitous liquefaction was mankind taught to procure a body, at once in a high degree solid and transparent, which might admit the light of the sun and exclude the violence of the wind.' Do we gag on the phrase 'fortuitous liquefaction'? Not at all. It seems a perfect complement to 'formless lump'.

On occasion Johnson can write Johnsonese, but more often than not he provides variety and rhythm in his sentences by alternating Latinate words with those of Anglo-Saxon origin, as in the closing sentence of an essay on sorrow. Arguing about the need to overcome sorrow through activity, he says: 'Sorrow is a kind of rust of the soul, which every new idea contributes in its passage to scour away. It is the putrefaction of stagnant life, and is remedied by exercise and motion.' Rust and scour alternate with putrefaction and stagnant – driving home the point of the essay clearly and elegantly.

The remarks on glass and on sorrow are from the *Rambler*, which is commonly considered to be Johnson's most difficult prose work because its prose is often ornate and its tone is often solemn. But there is more variety in the roughly 200 essays that Johnson wrote for the *Rambler* than many critics have allowed, including a good deal of humor. In *Rambler* 135 Johnson makes fun – as he always does – of those who retreat to the country to experience the joys of nature. He says that they quickly tire of 'listening to Philomel, loitering in the woods, or plucking daisies ... or watching the gentle coruscations of declining day. Some will be discovered at a window by the roadside, rejoicing when a new cloud of dust gathers toward them, as at the approach of a momentary supply of conversation'. Two things should be noted about this passage: Johnson uses a Latinate word – coruscations – the way W.C. Fields often does, to sound intentionally pompous in order to make fun of something, in this case nature worship. Secondly, a less inspired writer would speak of seeing a carriage come into view instead of saying that 'a new cloud of dust gathers toward them'.

Though there are many riches in the *Rambler*, it is probably best to begin a tour of Johnson with his two extended narratives: *Rasselas* and *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. The former, which touches on all the main themes in Johnson's work – the dangers of solitude as well as man's restlessness,



envy, and self-deception – is sometimes moving and often amusing. The latter mixes accurate description with acute reflections about the stages of political and economical development in various parts of Scotland – reflections that anticipate many of the points Adam Smith would make in *The Wealth of Nations*, which appeared a year later.

Many critics consider Johnson's best work to be the *Lives of the Poets*, which he called *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets*. This work, which Johnson wrote in his late 60s and early 70s, is an appropriate conclusion to his career, since he always praised biography, saying in *Rambler* 60 that 'no species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography'. Johnson urged biographers to offer an unvarnished account of their subjects and especially focus on 'domestick privacies, and ... the minute details of daily life'. Reading such biographies, he suggests, can help one achieve moral discipline because they show the passions at work in ordinary life. 'Our passions are ... more strongly moved, in proportion as we can more readily adopt the pains or pleasures proposed to our minds, by recognizing them as once our own, or considering them as naturally incident to our state of life'. Histories rarely are instructive because they center on events that are too removed from ordinary life. 'The general and rapid narratives of history ... afford few lessons applicable to private life'. Strange improbable tales are also uninformative for the same reason. 'Narrations of romantic and impracticable virtue will be read with wonder, but that which is unattainable is recommended in vain; that good may be endeavoured, it must be shewn to be possible.'

Johnson's *Lives*, though, do not so much 'display the minute details of private life' as use a telling incident in a writer's life in order to deliver an aphorism about human conduct. The *Lives* have nothing in common with the biographical blockbusters of the late twentieth century – those loose and baggy monsters that numb the mind with an abundance of trivial detail, where we learn that the writer hated his father (or mother), drank too much, was envious of fellow writers, suffered from depression, and generally led a miserable life. Johnson's *Lives* are short – the longest is roughly 120 pages – and they make no attempt to be authoritative or definitive. They should be read not for information, but for Johnson's reflections about the moral life, especially his sceptical wisdom about the vanities and self-deceptions of authors. As Robert Folkenflik has noted in his excellent *Samuel Johnson, Biographer*, 'we can draw an arsenal of sceptical aphorisms from the *Lives of the Poets*.' Indeed, anthologies of aphorisms always have a large number of Johnson's aphorisms, though they don't make a distinction between those Boswell or others recorded and those to be found in Johnson's writings.

It is impossible to do justice to the richness of Johnson's observations and the shrewdness of his literary judgment in the *Lives of the Poets*, but three examples from the *Life of Pope* show Johnson at his coruscating best. The following sentence begins with an insight into Pope then offers a trenchant aphorism. 'His scorn of the Great is repeated too often to be real; no man thinks much of that which he despises; and as falsehood is always in danger of inconsistency, he makes it his boast at another time that he lives among them.' In the following sentence, Johnson nails down the aphorism with a startling anecdote: 'The man who threatens the world is always ridiculous; for the world can easily go on without him, and in a short time will cease to miss him. I have heard of an idiot, who used to revenge his vexations by lying all night upon the bridge.' In the following two sentences, Johnson punctuates his insight into Pope's character with a telling exaggeration. 'In all his intercourse with mankind, he had great delight in artifice, and endeavoured to attain all his purposes by indirect and unsuspected methods. He hardly drank tea without a stratagem.'

Johnson, then, was a great prose stylist with a profound understanding of the heart of man. No doubt, there are many pleasures to be gained from Johnson's conversation, but there are far more to be gained from his writing. The writer he most closely resembles is George Orwell. Just as Orwell attacked the cant of international socialism, so Johnson poured cold water on all forms of cant – especially the cant of the sentimental revolution.

## SAMUEL JOHNSON AND LINCOLNSHIRE

Barry Baldwin

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SAMUEL JOHNSON himself was a proud son of Lichfield, Staffordshire; he contrived to sneak in a Latin compliment to his native town in his *Dictionary*. There were links with Lincolnshire long before he ever went there. Lichfield Grammar School, which Johnson attended, had been founded by William Smith (c.1460-1514), a Bishop of Lincoln. Another Bishop of the city, the scholarly John Green (c.1706-1779), had been a master at Johnson's school. When Johnson was short-listed for the post of Latin master at Appleby School in Leicestershire in 1738, he was ruled against in favour of the other candidate by the school's Visitor, the Bishop of Lincoln. A fourth such episcopal connection was a happier one. A formative influence on Johnson's literary style was the earlier Bishop of Lincoln Robert Sanderson (1587-1663), described by Boswell as a great writer, a 'giant' of the previous century; Sanderson is frequently mentioned in the greatest work of seventeenth-century biography, John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*. In his will, Johnson described his soul as 'polluted with many sins'. Boswell was concerned that readers might misunderstand this usage, anxiously referring them to a Johnson essay (*Rambler* 41) for a parallel. But Johnson was consciously echoing Sanderson's own 'infinitely polluted with sin' of his soul in his will. Also, just before his death, having read a message from another of his future biographers, Sir John Hawkins, he observed, 'Bishop Sanderson could not have dictated a better letter.' One final ecclesiastical connection was the Reverend Thomas Sympson (1726-1786), Priest Vicar of Lincoln Cathedral and son of Thomas Sympson, Clerk of the Works there. Sympson seems to have spent a good deal of his time in London. Johnson knew him there in 1766, and he was again present in 1778, usefully furnishing Boswell with introductions for the biographer's one-day visit to Lincoln in May 1778. During his short sojourn, in the company of the scholarly Archdeacon and Chancellor (1763-1793) the Reverend John Gordon, and a Captain Broadley of the Lincolnshire Militia, Boswell was pleased to hear that one Bennet Langton (also a captain in the county militia – Johnson would visit him in 1778 at Warley in Essex when he was camped there) was 'highly esteemed in his own county town'.

Bennet Langton (1737-1801) hailed from Langton-by-Spilsby where, two years after Johnson's death, was born Sir John Franklin, ill-fated seeker of Canada's North-West Passage. In Boswell's words, 'Johnson was not the less ready to love Mr Langton for his being of a very ancient family; for I have heard him say, with pleasure, "Langton, Sir, has a grant of free warren from Henry the Second; and Cardinal Stephen Langton, in King John's reign, was of this family."' (Some modern authorities dispute these claims). Their contemporary, Henry Digby Beste, describes Bennet Langton as 'a very tall, meagre, long-visaged man, much resembling a stork standing on one leg near the shore in Raphael's cartoon of the miraculous draught of fishes.' This was not likely to bother the notoriously odd-looking Johnson. Like Johnson, Bennet Langton would be a fine classicist. When, on their Highland jaunt, Boswell and Johnson amused themselves deciding who should profess what in their hypothetical college (an exercise akin to modern fantasy cricket or football), they chose Langton for Greek – his shade is surely pleased by the newly-created Lincoln University. Langton edited Johnson's Latin poetry (the story of this is told in my edition-cum-translation<sup>1</sup>), which is why some of the original manuscripts are now in the Lincolnshire

<sup>1</sup> Barry Baldwin, *The Latin & Greek Poems of Samuel Johnson: Text, Translation and Commentary* (London: Duckworth, 1995).

Archives Office, for example, a prayer composed by the bed-ridden Johnson on New Year's Day 1784, the last year of his life. He also wrote essays entitled *Rusticks*, and contributed a light-hearted article on the scholarly life to Johnson's magazine *The Idler* (no. 67, July 28, 1759).

Bennet Langton came to London in 1752 at the age of fifteen as a kind of literary 'groupie', determined to meet Johnson from admiration of his articles in *The Rambler*. The meeting duly took place, the strange-looking pair hit it off at once, after which Langton proceeded to his studies at Oxford. He first invited Johnson to Lincolnshire in 1755, partly to celebrate the recent publication of his idol's *Dictionary*. On this occasion, Johnson had reluctantly to decline, being held back by the needs of his aged mother: 'when the duty that calls me to Lichfield is discharged, my inclination will carry me to Langton'.

In fact, Johnson did not visit Langton until 1764, when he was fifty-five, recently made a royal pensioner by King George III, a good proof that the monarch was not always mad. On the way, he passed through Lincoln and saw the Cathedral which in one of his letters he compares to that at York. The Langton Hall that Johnson visited was not the original one, but its Elizabethan successor, in turn pulled down some time between 1817 and 1820 to make way for a short-lived Italian villa that duly succumbed to the present mansion completed in 1866. Some think, others deny, that the house visited by Johnson was the original of Locksley Hall.<sup>2</sup> Talking of Tennyson, the reactionary remark of farmer Dobson in his Lincolnshire dialect drama *The Promise of May*, 'I hates boooks an' all, for they puts foalk off the owd waays,' is a grumpy contrast to Langton's proposal to establish a school on his estate despite the opposition of those who feared 'it might have a tendency to make the people less industrious.' Johnson added a moral support to the practical arguments. 'Sir, you must not neglect doing a thing immediately good, from fear of remote evil, from fear of its being abused.' It is good to see a Lincolnshire man on the 'cutting-edge' of pre-Education Acts schooling for the poor. One other Tennysonian footnote. Again in *The Promise of May*, waggoner Dan Smith sings a dialect ditty about driving his horses 'thruf slush and squad/when roads were bad:' was it memories of Lincolnshire conditions that inspired Johnson to give Langton the nickname 'muddy'?

One or two things disappointed Johnson. 'Langton's table is rather coarse, and he has his children too much about him.' One easily sympathises with the second complaint, but did he not find or like the classics of Lincolnshire cuisine? I'm sure he would have salivated over most of the recipes in the recent (1995) *Lincolnshire Cookery Book*. He was certainly upset, largely because of his own passion for fruit, by Langton's lack of an orchard; when Boswell asked the reason, he snapped, 'Why, Sir, from the general negligence of the county.' He also told Boswell that, on her visit to Knightsbridge in London, Langton's mother had contrasted metropolitan bath water favourably with that of her native Lincolnshire where it was 'either too hot or too cold.' When one of Langton's sisters proudly pointed out a cool grotto that would make a nice summer retreat, he twitted her, 'I think it would, Madam, for a toad.' It's easier to sympathise with the way he deflated a snobby woman of the district who justified her social scorn of the neighbours by saying 'I would go to them if it would do them any good.' We've all met people like that! She was floored by his riposte, 'What good, Madam, do you expect to have in your power to do them? It is shewing them respect, and that is doing them good.'

Otherwise, though, Johnson much enjoyed himself, even though he did not come to regret that back in 1757 he had turned down Langton's offer of 'a living of considerable value in Lincolnshire'. He felt himself not cut out for holy orders, nor did he want to leave the metropolitan London life. As he put it, having commended an unspecified Lincolnshire clergyman, 'This man, Sir, fills up the duties of his life well. I approve of him, but could not imitate him.' Something else Johnson approved were the young ladies of Lincolnshire who were 'remarkably well behaved, owing to their mothers' strict discipline and severe correction'. As a long-time exile, I wonder if this can still be true? It didn't always work then, anyway. Speaking of his black servant Frank, he once reminisced to his patron and memorialist Hester

<sup>2</sup> See G. G. Walker, *Historical Notes of the Parish of Partney* (1898), p. 128.

Thrale: 'Frank has carried the empire of Cupid further than most men. When I was in Lincolnshire so many years ago, he attended me thither; and when we returned home together, I found that a female haymaker had followed him to London for love.' I am, incidentally, not the first to wonder how many haymakers, female or other, were visible in a Lincolnshire February.

One urban pleasure of which he was not bereft was books. Langton had a good library. There was also the Gentlemen's Literary Club at the White Hart Inn, Tetford. Johnson was duly introduced to several of the local gentry, though we have no details. He showed more than ordinary respect to his host. When Langton became travel-sick during a coach ride together, Johnson insisted they move to sit on the back in the open air, despite the odd sight this presented to a labourer gawping at them from the fields. Johnson guessed the fellow was thinking, 'If these two madmen should come down, what would become of me?' Johnson had an eye for local colour. He was much taken by the Lincolnshire habit of thatching cottages with reeds, though he checked with a London thatcher (a common breed?) before believing the Lincolnshire claim that they would last seventy years. Langton-by-Spilsby is still graced by the Round House, octagonal in plan with a conical thatched roof. Two years after his visit, when writing to Bennet Langton to console him on the death of his uncle Peregrine, Johnson recalled the pleasures of a summer morning's walk to Partney. Uncle Peregrine, indeed, lived at Partney House, a seventeenth-century foundation whose plaque on its Eastern gable, 'Lord be my keeper; Mercie and Peace be in this place', preserves a village folk memory that this house alone was spared the plague in 1616. Johnson was much impressed by Peregrine's domestic economy, his frugality, insistence on hard work, and refusal to use credit. Here, perhaps, we have moved from thatcher to Thatcher! Peregrine paid twenty-eight pounds rent per annum; in 1990 (I owe this intelligence to a *Sunday Telegraph* article), the asking price of purchase was two hundred thousand.

Quite the most charming of Johnson's Lincolnshire moments, and one of which we have an account by Henry Digby Beste, was when he climbed to the top of a very steep hill behind Langton's house, informed his companions that he 'had not had a roll for a very long time', removed articles of value from his 'lesser pockets', lay down, and rolled all the way down to the bottom.

In 1772, Johnson had to abandon plans for a second visit, but he continued to think of Langton's estate as a 'good Cumae', i.e. an ideal place of rustic retreat, and urged his friend, who sometimes returned home with ill-grace at being torn from London pleasures, to settle down and live there full-time.

No further visits are described. But this is not quite the end of the Johnson-Lincolnshire story. We move to Beiton House, designed by Wren, completed in 1689, standing in 700 acres of parkland, family seat of the Brownlows, nicely described by Walter Marsden as 'austere without and elegant within'.<sup>3</sup> On January 19, 1992, the *Observer* ran a story on the discovery of a cache of family papers that included a hitherto unknown Latin poem by Johnson. Being at the time engaged on my edition of his classical verse, I wrote off at once in some excitement, and was provided with a photocopy and transcript of the manuscript which is now in the Lincolnshire Archives collection. I was able to include the piece as a finale to my edition. The date and circumstances of its composition are unknown, and this is not the place for academic minutiae, but a translation of its title and content makes an agreeable end to this little essay, especially given Lincolnshire's reputation for 'Yellowbellies', on which might it be a sly comment?

#### He Who Is The First To Fear Death Does Not Quickly Perish

May the soldier, when the air hisses with the approaching spear, evade his doom by slipping away with quick-moving body. Thus should you keep your eyes peeled on every side, lest by chance an arrow shot from a bow bring a wound. It is a greater glory to have avoided impending death than rashly to have hastened on the black day.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Marsden, *Lincolnshire* (London, 1977), p. 156.

## REVIEWS

J. D. Fleeman, *A Bibliography of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Treating his published works from the beginnings to 1984*, prepared for publication by James McLaverty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000). Pp xlv & 1972. Two volumes, hardback £280.00.

THESE TWO MAJESTIC VOLUMES are in a very real sense David Fleeman's life's work. At least, despite his immense productivity in other areas, he did work at this project throughout his academic life. They are also a second gift to the scholarly community from Jim McLaverty, who has already helped in the preparation of another publishing landmark, David Foxon's *Alexander Pope and the Book Trade* (1991).

To read prefatory material by David Fleeman is always a delight. His power to generate aphorisms with a sting in their tail is positively Johnsonian: 'a bibliographer is but Autolycus under another cloak'; 'Completeness is the airy vision which tantalizes a compiler'(xi); 'This is hardly a book for Johnson's Common Reader' (xiv). Indeed, he might be thought to apologise too much for the imperfections of the work at hand; but here too he has Johnson as his precedent. As he explains in his preface, bibliography is an art of constant vigilance. A book casually encountered may turn out to be much rarer than its outward appearance might suggest, and meanwhile once sighted it may have contrived to make its escape before its particulars have been fully recorded.

More might have been made of the sleuthing qualifications necessary to the bibliographer. Almost nothing, in the world of books, is as it seems. Every edition of *London* after the first has its number given in inverted commas. The 'second' followed one at London and one at Dublin, and was re-impressed from the type used in the London edition, 'though the type has been moved and respaced by the compositors to ensure payment as if for a complete resetting'. Furthermore the Edinburgh edition (unauthorized) of 1738 has 'London' on its title-page.

But the Autolycus persona is equally in evidence. This book combines something of the attractions of the treasure-chest and the attic. Dr Fleeman is generous in his offerings. Here are two separate Japanese translations of the *Life of Richard Savage*, and here is *The Preceptor* as *Der Lehrmeister*, Leipzig. Here is *Rasselas*, somewhat surprisingly, in a Minerva Press edition. Here is its first edition with coloured illustrations, and here is the Pitman Phonetic Edition.

The proliferation of *Dictionary* editions almost beggars belief. Entire and abridged editions (including those printed at Calcutta and Serampore) occupy 146 pages; but then the 'Miniature Dictionary' occupies another 101 pages, though none of its many incarnations 'has any authoritative relationship with the *Dictionary* proper'. (1:556) Because of Johnson's connection with Mary Masters's *Familiar Letters and Poems on Several Occasions*, 1755, Fleeman provides detail as well on her quite separate *Poems on Several Occasions*, 1733, with which Johnson had nothing to do, as well as detail on reprintings in anthologies. Almost the complete career of Charlotte Lennox is documented here, for the sake of the prefaces, dedications, etc., written for her by Johnson. David Fleeman, however, is commendably sceptical that Johnson wrote the penultimate chapter of *The Female Quixote*.

Dr Fleeman was not only erudite but also humane: this is perhaps the ideology which, he suggests, a bibliography only appears to lack. Erudition and humanity, the keynotes of this work, each contributes something to the pleasure of using it. The introduction opens a number of windows on eighteenth-century practices in printing, use of paper, binding, and so forth. The body of the book (the stout twin bodies: these volumes would be guaranteed to finish off any recalcitrant bookseller) offers collations, corrections of dates, re-assignments of authorship, a wealth of enviably accurate minutiae amounting to a mountain of knowledge.

But also Dr Fleeman has treated his massive accumulation of information not as an over-sized index but as 'the annals of a literary career' (xxi). And what a career it was! This book is almost a cultural



history of the eighteenth century, for Johnson had a finger in every pie. The building of Blackfriars Bridge, the gradual establishment of the art exhibition as a public habit, charity to French prisoners of war, the development of antiquarian scholarship, of shorthand, of trigonometry – all are matters that Johnson wrote about. And what fun to come on this gratuitous comment on Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*: 'These *Sermons* are perhaps the most unrewarding works it has fallen to my lot to read: that Jane Austen was in any way indebted to them passes belief.' (2:1154)

The reader feels herself confided in, as well as instructed and enlightened. This too is Johnsonian. In just such a spirit, *mutatis mutandum*, did Johnson write of the close of *Othello*, 'I am glad that I have ended my revisal of this dreadful scene. It is not to be endured.' Fleeman reminds us, as Johnson himself did, how intensely the reading of books engages the heart as well as the head. That is why we love books, and that is why we love such bookmen.

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Kevin Hart, *Samuel Johnson and the Culture of Property* (Cambridge University Press, 1999). Pp 244. Hardback £35.00.

**I**N *England, England*, Julian Barnes's novel about an imaginary theme-park devoted to England's historical and cultural life improbably based on the Isle of Wight, the figure of Dr Samuel Johnson is played by a fat and neurotic actor with a harrowed look, an uncontrollable swaying motion and an enormous appetite. James Boswell's construction of 'Samuel Johnson' as a public property, a symbol of England in the eighteenth century, forms the subject of Kevin Hart's new study *Samuel Johnson and the Culture of Property*. The public status of Johnson is nowhere better suggested than by Hart's reference to the report in the *London Times* for 17 December 1943 relating how the King and Queen sent a morale-boosting Christmas gift of the Clarendon edition of the *Life of Johnson* to British POWs held in the German camps. It had to be the *Life*, of course, and not the *Works*, as Hart explains. Reading the *Works* would have exposed the captured men to the highly unflattering account of the common soldier, while the 'Churchillian' Johnson of Boswell's *Life* would instead remind the prisoners of the values they had been fighting for. It is often said that compared with the Americans or the French, the public intellectuals of England are few and uninfluential. It may not have been an explicit part of Hart's thesis to do so, but his appeal to the figure of England's 'heritage' Johnson suggests in at least one compensatory sense how the persona of the public intellectual can be interpreted in English terms. At a time when modern literary and intellectual figures are often closely identified with an academic economy, and receive their sustenance from it, Hart provides the portrait of a Johnson whose uncloistered position is firmly centred on the national stage.

The distinctive strength of this study is Hart's ability to contemplate Johnson afresh from a point that is at once extremely intimate and inward, at the psychological level, yet more than normally external and remote, with the detachment of aesthetic distance. We are taken into the consciousness of a massive and enduring cultural icon in his personal and historical context. Hart invites us to appreciate the textuality of all that Johnson was, is and means, Man and Writer together. We encounter Johnson in the memorialized form reminiscent of Johnson's treatment of his subjects in his *Lives of the Poets*. By this approach, Hart successfully historicizes and subverts the futile disputes of pro- and anti-Boswellian Johnsonian factions opened up by an earlier generation of Johnson scholars, and breaks new ground. The corresponding weakness of this study, for me part and parcel of this strength, is its vogueish acquiescence in an over-ambitious model of post-disciplinarianism. Hart seems to conflate the principles of literary, historical and cultural study without sufficient marking of their distinctive logical claims, relative priority or



dependence. In this the volume extends to Johnson what might be called the spreading 'culturalization' of eighteenth-century studies. The work reflects the influence upon literary scholarship of social-historical objectives and norms.

There is no ignoring the impressive range and complex weave of the literary, historical and biographical material synthesized by Hart's own culturalization however. As well as writing about Johnson, Hart offers an extended commentary on the eighteenth-century world of commercial exchange, the coinage, forgery, the copyright laws and the Ossian Affair, topics that will interest many readers and scholars committed to 'Eighteenth-Century Studies' in the *au courant* sense. Reference to Johnsonian literary criticism, to *Rasselas* and the *Dictionary* occurs from time to time, although only a few texts by Johnson are actually examined in any literary depth (mainly the *Journey to the Western Isles* and a half-chapter, towards the end of the book, on 'The Death of Dr Richard Levet'). Although he does not figure in the title, the study has almost as much to offer the student of Boswell. Hart does not mention their work at any point, but his treatment supplements the perspectives of such scholars of the Boswell-Johnson complex as Greg Clingham (whose 1992 book on Boswell's *The Life of Johnson* also examines the 'appropriation' of Johnson by Boswell) and John Radner, who has written on this subject for the annual *The Age of Johnson*.

But it could be argued that the focus of this new book is not, after all, Johnson, or Boswell *per se*, rather a commercialized concept of 'cultural exchange'; and it is to the interlocking meanings of 'commerce', Hart contends, that Boswell has harnessed his Johnsonian hero. The flow of this mutual appropriation moves in two directions. Johnson needs Boswell in order to be 'Samuel Johnson', while Boswell 'claims creative space at his mentor's expense' (36). His work is not so much the *Life of Samuel Johnson* as *My Life with Samuel Johnson* (37-38). To a certain degree, Johnson and Boswell supply throughout the study the human and literary focal points for the work of the cultural historian. Yet interest in the 'commerce' of eighteenth-century literary culture developed in this book by analyzing relations between them does not, in practice, mean that the exposition need be informed by a model of the economy that a professional economist would endorse, and with its isolated reference to Adam Smith on page 4, the study cannot be seen as contributing largely to the history of eighteenth-century economic thought. Instead the plays on 'commerce' and 'exchange' rely upon an extended linguistic trope or metaphorical turn, a kind of 'quibble' or deconstructionist pun in which the identity of text and context are subject to constant reversals. Hart shows that Johnson was interested in the question of intellectual property in all his dealings with the literary and cultural world, and yet was himself a 'property'; he both created 'monuments' to literary achievement by his labours and was himself a 'monument', concretely in the case of the statues erected in his honour and figuratively in the works he has left behind him – and so on. This intriguing metaphor of economy and monumentality is explained in chapter 1 and has one advantage: it permits a much more easy-going movement by the commentator between literary text and the multifarious contexts outside literature which gather at the nexus of individual literary and critical lives. These then become the anchor-points for forays into the surrounding 'culture'. But when it is developed over the length of a book such ingenuity of approach can also be pushed beyond the point where text and context are suggestively blurred, its 'fatal Cleopatra' being the dissolution of the distinctiveness of the literary object which justifies the special attention to Johnson. In this light, Hart's book appears to lack the intensive contemplation of single works of art as art in their own right, on intrinsic and not ulterior grounds. Something of the richness of an eighteenth-century 'culture' in another sense is inevitably relinquished by it, and the priority that Johnson himself accorded to 'nature' or 'general nature' rather than 'culture' (or as he called it 'the manners') is inevitably under-valued.

That said, one cannot deny that there is a welcome sense of proportion and restraint about many perspectives of this book. Thus in the chapter devoted to 'Subordination and exchange', Hart valuably points out how the recent controversy over Johnson's being or not being a Jacobite, 'obscures the issue'. He draws attention to Johnson's resistance to Boswell's support for slavery, his attack on the inhumanity

of Soame Jenyns's *Free Enquiry* and his coolness about Pope's hierarchical scheme in the *Essay on Man*. No one could say that such items of Johnsonian evidence are exactly obscure. (The surprising thing is that by now anyone could be surprised by them). But the point itself is well made and worth making, and the evidence adduced is far richer and more imaginatively suggestive of the way Johnson's political sympathies are embedded in his writings than the mass of circumstantial detail assembled by J.C.D. Clark. And if its effect seems to be to immerse Johnson deeper into the orthodoxies of a post-disciplinary terrain, dissolving his literary into his cultural value, art into cultural capital, the approach that Hart has chosen hinges on a canny assessment of the present orientation of eighteenth-century studies: it is a feature of this book that will secure his study many admirers. Within the conventions of its scholarly method, this is a well-written, knowledgeable, intelligent and articulate book on Johnson's cultural relations.

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David F. Venturo, *Johnson the Poet: The Poetic Career of Samuel Johnson* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 1999). Pp 335. Hardback £38.00.

IN THE LAST FEW DECADES Johnson scholarship has certainly 'opened up' in new ways: we have had renewed exploration of his spiritual vision and relation to the nonjuring tradition, controversial work on his politics including lively, if not finally compelling, speculation on Jacobitism and fresh awareness of the depth of his legal knowledge. Work on the *Dictionary*, the essays, biographies and criticism continues. Yet until now a specific lack, one of which I personally first became aware as long ago as the bicentenary commemorations of 1984, has been evident: that of a serious, book-length analysis of the poetry. David F. Venturo's *Johnson the Poet: the Poetic Career of Samuel Johnson* would be welcome if it competently surveyed that field. Fortunately, it does much more.

The first thing to note about Venturo's study is that it is written in a scholarly yet accessible style. Clearly the critic has taken seriously Johnson's own concern that the intelligent lay-reader should not be put off by esoteric cross-references and flourished allusions: he aims for clarity and appeals to the reader's general life-experience in a way that evidences his faith in Johnson's relevance today. Yet this does not mean that the study lacks learning. Venturo has made himself a highly-competent Latinist, has researched Johnson's sources thoroughly and has a comprehensive grasp of modern Johnson criticism. This points to the work's second Johnsonian virtue: if Venturo thinks someone else has already said something well, then he acknowledges their insight and builds on it.

This is not to say that *Johnson the Poet* seeks consensus at all costs. In fact early on the critic sets himself in opposition to over-modernization of Johnson and is very carefully concerned to set him in his time. We are made to share the oppositional politics of the young Johnson in the 1730s and 1740s as well as to appreciate the increasing stress on originality which marks out this seeming 'last Augustan' as very much a man of the later rather than the earlier eighteenth century. But translating such a historical perspective into a study of the poetry is not easy, given the occasional and spasmodic nature of Johnson's poetic production. This structural problem is intelligently resolved by focusing the chapters partly on major works and partly on different 'kinds'. In the former we can see Johnson crystallizing his vision at a particular stage of his career and in the latter writing verse which is appropriate to particular social occasions.

The studies of *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* matter most because these poems, the latter in particular, have sustained Johnson's reputation through extraordinary vicissitudes of poetic taste since they were written: doubtless in a few years it will be easy to see where undergraduates have thumbed

library copies of Ventura's book to consult these chapters. *London* is seen historically, as the critic draws perceptively on recent criticism and historiography which has reassessed and taken more seriously the anti-Walpolean opposition of the time, but the poem is also explored generically. A contrast is drawn with Pope's contemporary imitations as Johnson is seen to strain against the analogy-based conventions of the imitation form and to write a much more political poem than Juvenal's original satire. The tension with imitation is seen more clearly in the more universalistic satire of *The Vanity of Human Wishes* where Johnson's triumph is to transform Juvenal's Stoic critique of society into a Christian one. The fitness of the poem's ending and the positive nature of its outcome are well-explored:

With these celestial Wisdom calms the Mind,  
And makes the Happiness she does not find.

Venturo himself is not afraid of the straightforward but hard-won generalization as when he comments on this conclusion that 'Johnson fully acknowledges the unhappiness that pervades human life, but he also asserts that it is within the power of human beings either to exacerbate or alleviate it'.

A detailed discussion of *Irene* sets it explicitly in the context of religio-political heroic tragedy in the reign of George II and shows the nature of Johnson's critique of ambition and apostasy. But any temptation to re-evaluate the work for the sake of re-evaluation is resisted: Ventura concurs with the common judgement – probably Johnson's too – of the play's undramatic nature but explores more fully than others have done the reasons for the failure, speaking memorably of the way in which 'Johnson the moralist keeps intruding with an un-Keatsian "positive capability"'. This chapter is an excellent example of a critic showing the deep authorial significance of a particular work of a great writer, without ever forgetting that on the whole the work in question has neither pleased many nor pleased long.

It is to be hoped that any more cursory readers will look at some of the survey chapters where excellent insights appear into some of Johnson's finest short works. As has been noted, Ventura has a good classical background and both his explication of the Latin poems and his helpful provision of prose translations of all of them are extremely useful. A more visited subject, that of epitaphs and elegies, is cogently summarized with thoughtful commentary on Johnson's most widely-admired shorter poem 'On the Death of Dr Robert Levet', and an interesting case is made for the coherence of Johnson's often charitably-aimed theatre prologues. Most thought-provoking, though, is the chapter on Johnson's society verse. If he could on occasion appear as the great arbiter of literature or act the role of pugnacious debater, Johnson was also a cultivated gentleman who wrote with ease, never happier than when in stimulating and cultivated mixed company, as capable of turning the lightest compliments as of extemporizing mock-ballads that, range from the intended bathos of 'I put my hat upon my head' to the hearty reductio of 'Come, my lad, and drink some beer'.

The book ends with a separate epilogue on one poem, the translation of Horace's Ode 4.7, written a very short while before Johnson's death. Delicately but idiomatically, Johnson both expresses and distances his own mortality:

Who knows if Jove who counts our Score  
Will toss us in a morning more?

Anyone who has written poetry is led in retrospect to wonder at the sheer fluency and rhythmic ease of Johnson's poetry: not the least of Ventura's virtues is his ability to link awareness of that gift to Johnson's sparing use of it. It does not seem implausible to suggest that Johnson's conscience about the full use of one's talents led him to concentrate on other literary tasks which he found more stressful and difficult rather than on poetry where he could achieve rhetorical force and metaphoric compression with extraordinary speed.

After these two hundred pages of lucid and empathetic commentary there follow over a hundred pages of translations, notes, bibliography and index. It is a tribute to Venturo's mature judgement and professional scholarship that the book will be equally appreciated by those readers who stop with a rounded view of Johnson the poet at page 207 and those are impelled onwards to page 335 by the harmless avocation of detailed exegesis. Johnson, I feel, would certainly have come to praise Venturo's scholarship but he would have stayed to applaud his judgement.

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Ian McIntyre, *Garrick* (London: Penguin Books, 1999). Pp xi & 678. Paperback £12.99.

FROM THE MOMENT OF HIS TRIUMPHANT DEBUT as Richard III at Goodman's Fields, Whitechapel, in October, 1741, to the sad occasion of his death on 20 January 1779, David Garrick excited audiences and writers everywhere. In an amazingly short time he had become the greatest actor-manager in the history of British theatre, and his multifarious talents commanded interest and respect across the Channel and the Atlantic as well as in London. Not surprisingly, then, he has been the subject of many biographies and detailed professional studies, and he continues to occupy a place of highest esteem in the eyes of theatre historians throughout the English-speaking world.

The first two major biographies of Garrick appeared shortly after his death. Interestingly enough, they were both by authors who had borne grudges against him for one reason or another: the Welshman, Tom Davies, minor actor and bookseller, the notorious introducer of Boswell to Johnson on 16 May 1763, and the Irishman, Arthur Murphy, playwright and constant pest as far as Garrick was concerned. To their credit, both managed to be reasonably objective and even at times magnanimous in their appraisals, and they have provided a solid foundation for subsequent biographies, including the one under review. It is a matter of regret that Samuel Johnson, who had known David Garrick all his life, from their school days in Lichfield, through the period at Edial Mount when Garrick was his prize pupil, to their years in London where he closely witnessed the development of his meteoric rise to fame, was not favoured by Mrs Garrick to produce what might have been the best biography of all. Nor did Garrick himself attempt an autobiography. Fortunately, a very large number of his letters have been preserved and carefully edited, and two fragmentary journal-diaries of his visits to France in 1751 and France, Germany, and Italy in 1763 are also extant. For letters addressed to Garrick, alas, we must continue to rely on James Boaden's chaotic edition of *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick with the Most Celebrated Persons of his Time* (London, 1831). Scholars who have struggled with those two quarto volumes will have a lively sympathy for biographers such as Ian McIntyre.

Interest in Garrick tended to fall off until the end of the nineteenth century, when lives by Percy Fitzgerald (1868) and Joseph Knight (1893) appeared. Twentieth-century studies included Mrs Clement Parsons' still valuable *Garrick and his Circle* (1906), Frank Hedgcock's *David Garrick and his French Friends* (1911), Margaret Barton's *Garrick* (1948), and Carola Oman's *David Garrick* (1958), the last-named being, in my view, the best up to that time. There was even a novel-cum-biography, *Enter David Garrick*, by Anna Bird Stewart (1951), on which the less said the better.

In 1979, the two-hundredth anniversary of the actor's death, two important events occurred: the publication of the massive study by George Winchester Stone and George M. Kahrl, *David Garrick: a Critical Biography*, and the mounting of the British Library's exhibition of Garrickiana from 30 November to May 11, accompanied by an excellent monograph, *David Garrick 1717-1779, a Brief Account*, by Helen R. Smith. In addition to biographical studies and analyses, latter-day scholars, mainly American, have produced such encyclopaedic works as the eleven-volume *The London Stage, 1660-1800*

(1960-68), and the sixteen-volume *Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800* (1973-93).

With all those and many more prior publications available to him, Ian McIntyre was faced with a monumental task: to recognize and assimilate all that was already in the public domain, and then to add his own findings. Was there anything new or different to be revealed or said about David Garrick after 220 years? The answer, frankly, must be 'not a great deal,' but what the author has accomplished is a superb synthesis of his major information sources, together with the results of a few independent diggings in places like the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C. and the theatre research section of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. His study is enhanced, moreover, by many references to contemporary events, particularly wars and political upheavals, and to the social and intellectual history of the six decades of Garrick's life. What might have become merely a repetitious cataloguing of day-to-day theatre happenings – performances, innovations, scenic changes, and squabbles (of which there were many) is greatly lightened by the author's sense of humour and gift of phrase. For example, he describes one would-be actor who badgered Garrick repeatedly for a part as 'heavily carapaced with self-conceit'. Garrick was usually quite capable of doing his own version of Noel Coward's 'Don't put your daughter on the stage Mrs Worthington', and we are given an amusing instance of this when the Duchess of Portland pressed Garrick to find employment for a young protégé of hers, a Mr Collins. Here was the actor's response: 'If your Grace will permit me to speak my Mind, I think he has the most unpromising Aspect for an Actor I ever saw – a small pair of unmeaning Eyes stuck in a round unthinking Face are not the most desirable requisites for a Hero, or a fine Gentleman.'

From the blurb on the colourful cover of this volume (designed by Antonio Colaco and featuring a fine reproduction of the celebrated Gainsborough portrait of Garrick) one gathers that the author worked for some years as a Controller of both Radio 3 and Radio 4, in close co-operation with the BBC's Radio Drama Department, thus getting to know the ways of theatre folk – ways that have probably changed little since Garrick's time, but, one hopes, with fewer mutual hostilities, back-bitings and recriminations.

These days, to be sure, there is no task quite as demanding as that of the eighteenth-century theatre actor-manager, who was expected to perform, direct, design, promote, advertise, schedule, and keep an eye on all his charges as well as finances. Apart from hiring and firing, his most difficult job was to keep his prima donnas (of both sexes) happy. In all of these departments Garrick excelled over his rivals at Covent Garden, the only other large legitimate theatre in London, but the prodigious effort took its toll, and he died of exhaustion as much as anything, though the medical finding appears to have been uremia or kidney failure.

Ian McIntyre takes us through every phase of the actor's existence, starting with his Huguenot ancestry, his birth on 19 February 1717 at the Angel Inn, Hereford, and ending with his elaborate funeral procession and burial in Westminster Abbey at the foot of Scheemakers' memorial to Shakespeare. In an Epilogue the author describes the aftermath, the huge vacuum created by Garrick's passing, and the prolonged mourning by his widow, the former Violette (Eva Maria Veigel), the talented danseuse from Austria who had been his boon companion and advisor for thirty years.

At the conclusion of the Epilogue we find Robert Cruikshank's austere depiction of Mrs Garrick at the age of 97, dressed in black from head to foot and carrying an enormous black muff. Her rather fierce facial expression indicates some of the feistiness that marked her personality. Almost to the end she kept her special box at Drury Lane and insisted on all the rights and privileges that went with it. In her view, the only actor who came close to the standard of her 'dear Davy' was Edmund Kean, most notably in the role of Richard III, but she made it clear that he had his shortcomings. When he appeared as Abel Drugger in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* she wrote, 'Dear Sir, You cannot act Abel Drugger. – Yours, M. Garrick.' 'Madam,' was the reply, 'I know it. Yours, E. Kean.' In 1822, close to her hundredth birthday, Eva Maria was laid to rest beside her husband in Poet's Corner.



Though we rarely think of Garrick as a poet, we should remember that he composed hundreds of prologues and epilogues, several songs including the patriotic 'Heart of Oak', and even, on one occasion (missed, by the way, by the normally vigilant author), a poem to Thomas Gray to cheer him up after a bout of depression. The Garricks were welcome guests at Stoke Poges. Few of Garrick's own plays have found their way into today's repertory, however. Most are light comedies or afterpieces, such as *Miss in her Teens*, *A Peep Behind the Curtain*, and *The Lying Valet*. Many are adaptations from the French, Garrick's inherited language, in which he pretended not to have much facility (keeping in mind the waves of anti-French sentiment in England, curiously contrasted to the waves of anglomania in France). The fact that he knew all the leading French actors and actresses of the time and kept in touch with several of them to the end of his life is, I believe, quite significant.

One play of Garrick's that has survived into the new millennium is *The Clandestine Marriage*, which he wrote in collaboration with George Colman. Ranking it with the comedies of Goldsmith and Sheridan, Ian McIntyre describes it as 'a mildly sanitized version of a Restoration comedy of manners, all but untouched by the sentimentalism of the day – laughter, not tears, was the object of the exercise.' (p. 376) For unexplained reasons, Garrick declined the part of the mercenary but amorous and eventually good-natured Lord Ogleby, much to George Colman's annoyance. The play, nonetheless, was a great success. Translated into several languages, it became the basis of Cimarosa's opera, *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, with a lively libretto by Giovanni Bertati. The play became something of a hit in the United States, where George Washington graced it with his presence in 1789.

What kind of a man was David Garrick, aside from Garrick the actor-manager, the Shakespearian *in excelsis* (an admirable Hamlet, a marvellous Richard III, an unconvincing Romeo, and a poorish Othello, and a somewhat controversial reviser of the major plays), book and manuscript collector, art connoisseur, and cultivator of the great and the mighty, often maligned as a bit of a snob and a tuft-hunter? In stature five foot four, inclined to pudginess as he grew older, possessed of one of the most malleable faces in theatre history and a pair of hypnotically piercing dark eyes, he impressed everyone with his rare gift of mimicry, his effervescent wit, and his love of high jinks. Mrs Thrale, who rated her friends on a scale from zero to twenty under the headings of Religion, Morality, Scholarship, General Knowledge, Person and Voice, Manner, Wit, Humour, and Good Humour, gave Garrick high marks in most of these categories, but only ten for Religion, three for Scholarship, and zero for Good Humour, which she defined as 'the good humour necessary to conversation'. This verdict would tend to support the view that the actor was always acting rather than giving and taking. Ian McIntyre, incidentally, is quite mistaken in saying that Johnson's name does not appear on Mrs Thrale's list, as he, too, was awarded a zero, not only for Good Humour, but also for Person and Voice and Manner! Not unexpectedly, he was given the highest rating for Religion, Morality, and General Knowledge.

The quality that Johnson shared most abundantly with Garrick was his love of company and his propensity for grabbing the limelight. His relations with the actor were strained at times, and he delayed Garrick's membership in the Club for some nine years, fearing that 'he might disturb us with his buffoonery'. Yet he was quick to defend him against criticism from others, and his famous obituary tribute, published in his *Life of Edmund Smith*, was surely heartfelt: 'I am disappointed by that stroke of death, which has eclipsed the gaiety of nations, and impoverished the publick stock of harmless pleasure.' That sentence should put to rest the oft-repeated notion that Johnson's animadversions on actors and acting showed a deep-seated dislike for the theatre. Strangely, I did not find it quoted in Ian McIntyre's book.

Within the forty cleverly-titled chapters of this biography we meet all the bigwigs of the time, including lords and ladies, prime ministers and princes, leading players and the cream of the literati and their counterparts in the world of art. Over all of them towers, for all his small stature, the unrivalled monarch of Drury Lane, King David. Nowhere is his kingly power more in evidence than when he had to face adversity, often in the form of serious illness, but most of all when confronted with professional



challenges such as the frightful weather conditions during his carefully planned Stratford Jubilee in 1769. Out of the mud-bespattered ordeals of that occasion Garrick managed to turn disaster into triumph by staging the pageant, with some alterations and additions, as an afterpiece at Drury Lane where it played to packed houses for a record run of ninety-one nights, completely offsetting the huge financial losses that arose from the Stratford debacle. In the chapter describing the event, with the title 'Rain Stops Play', the author seems to me to be at his sparkling best in his narration of all the circumstances surrounding the doomed venture.

Ian McIntyre's *Garrick* is not a book to be read at one sitting. Its nearly 700 pages packed with detail are accompanied by a vast array of footnotes and endnotes, and one is reminded of Johnson's dictum that a plethora of such notes can cause the mind to become refrigerated. The print in the paperback edition appears to be six-point Clarendon, clear but challengingly small. The compensations, however, clearly outrank the deficiencies, and there are over fifty illustrations, half of them well-chosen plates, to help the reader's eyes to recover and the mind to thaw out.

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#### ALSO RECEIVED

The following have also been received and may be reviewed in a future issue of the *New Rambler*:

Claire Harman, *Fanny Burney: a Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 2000) Pp xxviii & 430. Hardback £19.99.

Samuel Johnson, *Political Writings* (ed. Donald Greene), *Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Volume X* (1977, reprint, Liberty Fund, 2000). Pp xlv & 482. Paperback £7.00/\$12.00. Available in Europe from Turpin Distribution Services Ltd, Blackhorse Road, Letchworth, Herts, SG6 1HN, UK. Tel: 01462 672555. Fax: 01462 480947. Available in the USA from Liberty Fund Inc., 8335 Allison Pointe Trail, Suite 300, Indianapolis, IN 46260-1641, USA or via the web site <http://www.libertyfund.org>.

Ronald Paulson, *The Life of Henry Fielding* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) Pp xiii & 400. Hardback £40.00.

Liza Picard, *Dr Johnson's London: Life in London 1740-1770* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000). Pp xi & 362. Hardback £20.00.

Adam Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000). Pp xv & 241. Hardback £26.50/\$42.50.

Adam Sisman, *Boswell's Presumptuous Task* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000). Pp xx & 416. Hardback £17.99.

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