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SAMUEL JOHNSON AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN SHAKESPEARE

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Johnson's interest in the supernatural elements in Shakespearean drama may seem negligible, or at least of minor and peripheral importance, in any discussion of his approach to Shakespeare. "What Johnson acclaims in Shakespeare", writes F.R. Leavis, "...is a great novelist who writes in dramatic form... To use the time-honoured phrase, he values Shakespeare - and extols him in admirably characteristic terms - for his 'knowledge of the human heart'."¹ A brief glance at the "Preface" to Johnson's edition of Shakespeare's Plays (1765) is sufficient to bring out his preference for the real and the human over the fantastic;² and if further proof were needed that Johnson was largely interested in Shakespeare because of his realistic presentation of human nature, it could be found in the many notes to the plays in the 1765 edition which show Johnson's preoccupation with the psychological implications of this character's speech or that character's reaction to circumstances.³ And there is above all the telling note, as far as the present enquiry is concerned, to Henry VIII, IV.ii:

Enter Katharine Dowager, sick: led between Griffith her gentleman-usher, and Patience her woman. This scene is above any other part of Shakespeare's tragedies, and perhaps above any scene of any other poet, tender and pathetic, without gods, or furies, or poisons, or precipices, without any help of romantic circumstances, without improbable sallies of poetical lamentation, and without any throes of tumultuous misery.⁴

It must be readily conceded that Johnson's most consistent response to Shakespeare is a response to realistic and poignant recreation of human emotions and passions.

In thus emphasising the realism of Shakespearean drama, Johnson is fairly representative of his century. There can be no doubt that the eighteenth century as a whole valued Shakespeare primarily for his realism, his exact and consistent delineation of men and manners.⁵ Most frequently, when an eighteenth-century critic praised his drama, it was for the "warm and genuine representations of human nature"⁶ which he found there.

Yet the eighteenth-century critics, despite their insistence on verisimilitude and their regard for Shakespeare chiefly as a poet of realism, came to accept, and even appreciate, the supernatural elements in Hamlet, Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest. Johnson's critical approach is more often justificatory than spontaneously appreciative: but thanks to Boswell's Life, and his own considerable literary output, it is possible to supplement a consideration of Johnson's approach to Shakespeare's marvellous, in his capacity as formal critic, by an enquiry into the less obvious and more personal attitude of Johnson the man to Shakespeare's supernatural. The adoption of this distinction between Johnson's formal critical attitude on the one hand, and his less conscious response on the other, makes for convenience in the following discussion; but such a distinction, in any case, is not as arbitrary and as artificial as it seems.

Johnson, as a critic, tended to apply the strictest canons of verisimilitude in assessing works of literature; yet he came to accept and justify Shakespeare's use of the supernatural. One may well wonder how that side of Johnson which preferred truth to fiction, and the probable to the marvellous,⁸ could be reconciled to those elements in Shakespearean drama which, as a critic certainly, he would have judged improbable. The answer is that, paradoxically, he accepts these elements because of their realistic representation. "Even where the agency is supernatural", he writes,

the dialogue is level with life...Shakespeare approximates the remote and familiarises the wonderful; the event which he represents will not happen, but if it were possible, the effects would probably be such as he has assigned; and it may be said, that he has not only shown human nature as it acts in real exigences, but as it would⁹ be found in trials to which it cannot be exposed.

The relationship of the supernatural in literature to reality could also be established by what has been termed above¹⁰ the "popular belief" argument. According to this line of critical thought, which was fairly widespread in the eighteenth century,¹¹ the demands of probability are satisfied, if, in the presentation of supernatural characters, the poet reconciles them with what men believe, or, in his own age,

have believed. Johnson, as others had done before him, finds in popular superstitions such as Shakespeare employs an acceptable basis for supernatural "machinery". "It is evident enough", Bennet Langton reports him as saying,

that no-one who writes now can use the Pagan deities and mythology; the only machinery, therefore, seems that of ministering spirits, the ghosts of the departed, witches and fairies.¹²

When he approaches Shakespeare as an editor, Johnson, by a particular and scholarly examination of Shakespeare's use of the superstitions of his day, perceives the appropriateness of his supernatural fictions, and is thus reconciled to them. This attitude is most apparent in Note XXXV (on Macbeth, IV. i) of the 1745 Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth, where he shows, in considerable detail,

with how much judgement Shakespeare has selected all the circumstances of his infernal ceremonies and how exactly he has conformed to common opinions and traditions.¹³

This kind of approach to Shakespeare's supernatural machinery - very much that of the consciously formal critic - is easily traced in Johnson. Less apparent is the personal, more imaginative response of Johnson the man.

We cannot easily believe that a man of Johnson's temperament and imagination should utterly fail to appreciate those supernatural incidents which, however unrealistic, constitute some of Shakespeare's most powerful dramatic effects; he must certainly, we feel, have reacted strongly to what may be called the "tragic" or "serious" supernatural of Hamlet and Macbeth even if the lighter fairy-play of the "romantic" supernatural, as in A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest did not evoke from a mind so frequently sombre a spontaneous appreciation. We have not far to search to find evidence of such a response: "such is the power of the marvellous even over those who despise it", he writes in the 1765 "Preface", "that every man finds his mind more strongly seized by the tragedies of Shakespeare than of any other writer".¹⁴

Before proceeding, it seems relevant to consider whether, in fact, Johnson was one of "those who despise" the

marvellous. He himself furnishes the excuse for such an enquiry. "What I cannot for a moment believe", he writes, "I cannot for a moment behold with interest or anxiety",¹⁵ and again, of Gray's supernatural machinery in "The Bard", he states, "we are affected only as we believe".¹⁶ If we are to show that Johnson was "affected", then we must first show that he believed, or rather, as will appear, tended to belief, in those elements and influences which are the basis of Shakespeare's tragic supernatural.

Boswell insists on Johnson's incredulity and scepticism,¹⁷ but he writes, one feels, defensively, as though he were aware that Johnson's views on the supernatural might well be interpreted otherwise. Johnson's religious nature was fully aware of "the universal mystery of all things";¹⁸ and his Christian belief in the eternal life of the spirit led him quite naturally to consider the possibility of ghostly visitations:

Of apparitions, he observed: "A total disbelief of them is adverse to the opinion of the existence of the soul between death and the last day; the question simply is, whether departed spirits ever have the power of making themselves perceptible to us..."¹⁹

Such a phenomenon as the visitation of a departed spirit was credible, whatever reason might urge: "All argument is against it, but all belief is for it".²⁰ With his "elevated wish for more and more evidence for spirit",²¹ he is "glad to have every evidence of the spiritual world", and is "willing to believe" the vision of Thomas Lord Lyttelton,²² who, according to an account published in 1816, dreamt three days before his death that "he saw a Bird fluttering, and afterwards a Woman appeared in white apparel", and said, 'Prepare to die, you will not exist three days'.²³ Most revealing of all is his prayer on his wife's death:²⁴ "grant that I may enjoy the good effects of her attention and ministration, whether exercised by her appearance, impulses, dreams, or in any other manner agreeable to thy Government". Even in *Rasselas*, where Johnson is speaking with his "public" voice, Imlac adopts at the very least an open mind on the subject: "That the dead are seen no more...I will not undertake to maintain against the concurrent and unvaried testimony of all ages, and of all nations".²⁵

For religious reasons, also, Johnson was prepared to admit the influence of evil spirits upon our minds, and said,

"Nobody who believes the New Testament can deny it".²⁶ As for witches, he "did not affirm anything positively on a subject which it is the fashion of the times to laugh at as a matter of absurd credulity", but he did remark to Boswell, on the side of positive belief, "Sir, you have not only the general report and belief, but you have many voluntary solemn confessions".²⁷ And when the advocate, Mr. Crosbie, argues that "an act of parliament put an end to witchcraft", Johnson replies:

"No, sir; witchcraft had ceased; and therefore an act of parliament was passed to prevent persecution for what was not witchcraft. Why it ceased, we cannot tell, as we cannot tell the reason of many other things."²⁸

Boswell, summarising Johnson's "capital and distinguishing features", admits that he "was prone to superstition", if not to credulity, but qualifies the statement with a typical Boswellian defence of this side of Johnson's character:

Though his imagination might incline him to a belief in the marvellous and the mysterious, his vigorous reason examined the evidence with jealousy.²⁹

Boswell here points to the opposition in Johnson between reason and imagination. Johnson, if not aware of this opposition within himself, was certainly conscious of the general incompatibility of the two faculties. He knew, e.g., that such a superstition as that concerning fairies might infect the imagination of "those that had more advantage in education", even though "their reason set them free from it".³⁰ In this, Johnson recalls William Duff's concluding remark, in An Essay on Original Genius (1767), on the effect on "the wise" of tales of supernatural beings:

how reluctant soever the Judgement may be to yield its assent, the Imagination catches, and retains the impression, whether we will or not.³¹

Johnson's "judgement", as we shall see, is at times unwilling "to yield its assent" to the Shakespearean supernatural; but his imagination vividly "retains the impression", so that, in spite of his rationalist bias, he bears eloquent testimony

to what Elizabeth Montagu referred to as poetry's "arbitrary power over the mind".³²

There is no lack of evidence of a powerful personal response; one may note, however, that Johnson reacted strongly only to Shakespeare's tragic supernatural creations, and that the lighter fairy-machinery left him largely unmoved. This overall response in Johnson may be related primarily to his own temperament; more broadly, however, it may be referred to a general trend of the eighteenth century.

Poetic terror could be very affecting to the eighteenth century sensibility: there were those for whom, as for Joseph Warton, terror was "a stronger sensation than joy".³³ Addison, in *Spectator* 419, had remarked how descriptions of the supernatural "favour those secret Terrors and Apprehensions to which the Mind of Man is naturally subject". Johnson, in keeping with his age, discovers in poetic terror a criterion by which to establish and estimate the validity of supernatural machinery as a literary device; he reveals also a personal sensitivity to the terrible.

There is no great merit, Johnson tells Boswell, in a critic's discriminating one dramatic ghost from another: rather he "must shew how terrour is impressed on the human heart".³⁴ Such terror was, for Johnson, a legitimate end of dramatic and poetic composition. He felt that tragedy "ought to be always awful, though not always magnificent";³⁵ and one of the shortcomings he finds in Addison's *Cato* is that there is in the play "no magical power of raising phantastick terror or wild anxiety".³⁶

Similar criteria could be used in considering epic poetry, that prime exemplar of the "sublime". As J.H. Hagstrum points out,³⁷ Johnson was singularly susceptible to those emotions which the term "sublime" came to include, and of these emotions terror constituted a basic element.³⁸ Johnson is undeniably impressed by *Paradise Lost*, the "characteristick quality" of which is "sublimity"; and by the sublime Milton's peculiar power of "displaying the vast, illuminating the splendid, enforcing the awful, darkening the gloomy, and aggravating the dreadful".³⁹ Supernatural terror, it need hardly be pointed out, belongs to the same nexus of emotion as the vast, the awful, and the dreadful.

Again, in Tasso's epic, *Gerusalemme Liberata*, an implied defect is that, since we know beforehand that the powers of heaven are to prevail over those of hell, "we

follow Rinaldo to the enchanted wood with more curiosity than terror".⁴⁰ Obviously Johnson the critic was quite prepared to accept terror as an integral part of epic poetry, provided it was competently presented, within a convincing frame of reference (such as would be provided by, for instance, the popular traditions which Shakespeare used); and, as we have seen, in the same species of composition Johnson the man was strongly affected by the sublime, of which terror was an inevitable ingredient. His attitude towards "poetic terror" as it functions in drama - and that, we may suppose, includes Shakespearean tragedy - was similar.

When we come to look at Johnson's response to Shakespeare's supernatural in Hamlet and Macbeth, we may expect to find in him a sensitivity to poetic terror, but also some reluctance to admit the power of Shakespeare's supernatural effects over his feelings. Such a dualism in Johnson's character can be readily illustrated from the 1745 Observations on Macbeth. In the first note to the play, the "rational" Johnson treats the question of the supernatural machinery with the condescension of one who has long outgrown the childish beliefs on which that machinery rests. "A poet", he remarks at the opening of the note, "who should now make the whole action of his tragedy depend upon enchantment ... would be banished from the theatre to the nursery, and condemned to write fairy tales instead of tragedies",⁴¹ and the note concludes: "nor can it be doubted that the scenes of enchantment, however they may now be ridiculed were both by (Shakespeare) and his audience thought awful and affecting".⁴²

Yet a response of a totally different and highly imaginative nature is apparent when he writes, of Macbeth's description of night before the murder, that he "that peruses Shakespeare, looks round alarmed, and starts to find himself alone".⁴³ Here is an example of a powerful personal response to that kind of poetic terror which Johnson the critic recognised as one of the proper aims of epic and drama, but which the "reason-anchored" Johnson of the first note is unwilling to admit. Doubtless such a reluctance to admit the power of literature over the imagination may be legitimately interpreted as a defence-mechanism on the part of one who tended to regard any disturbance of reason by imagination as a form of madness.⁴⁴

Despite this unwillingness, Johnson's personal response to Macbeth is sufficiently well documented - thanks largely to the play's connection with Scotland - to corroborate what could be deduced from his note on Macbeth's description of night, viz. that the play did indeed seize strongly on his imagination. When, during their tour of Scotland, Johnson and Boswell went to Fores, "the town to which Macbeth was travelling when he met the weird sisters in his way", their imaginations were, in Johnson's own description, "heated".⁴⁵ According to Boswell, when they drove over the heath where Macbeth met the witches, Dr. Johnson "solemnly repeated" the speech beginning "How far is't called to Fores? What are these, etc.", and "a good deal more of Macbeth".⁴⁶ A few days prior to this incident, they had driven over a "wild moor"; it rained, "and", says Boswell, "the scene was somewhat dreary. Dr. Johnson repeated,⁴⁷ with solemn emphasis, Macbeth's speech on meeting the witches". This association of Macbeth with wild scenery is of some significance if we bear in mind that, for Johnson (as, indeed, for the century as a whole),⁴⁸ wilderness was connected with the sublime⁴⁹ - that sublime which so seized his imagination, and from which he so often recoiled.⁵⁰

With this background of information gleaned from Johnson's remarks in Scotland, it becomes possible, and, indeed, if a balanced picture is to be arrived at, desirable, to give due prominence to those hints as to the play's supernatural power which are found elsewhere in his writings. In the essay on Macbeth's language in Rambler 168, he shows himself aware of "that force which calls new powers into being;"⁵¹ while in the General Observation, which in 1765 he added to the Observations of 1745, he does some justice to his true response to the play when he remarks that it is justly celebrated for the "solemnity" and "grandeur" of its action.⁵² The rational moralist appears, to excuse the improbability in the play, by supposing that "in Shakespeare's time, it was necessary⁵³ to warn credulity against vain and illusive predictions"; but the more imaginative Johnson must have been well aware that the supernatural incidents were sufficiently successful in themselves - in creating that "solemnity" and "grandeur", that poetic terror which he admitted as a legitimate aim for a poet or dramatist - and that no further excuse was necessary.

As for his critical opinion of the Weird Sisters specifically, he was probably approving when he remarked to the company at Allan Ramsay's that these compounds of

"malignity and meanness" were beings of Shakespeare's "own creation":⁵⁴ for Johnson, "invention" and "originality" were among the most important faculties a poet could possess.⁵⁵

Johnson's attitude to the Ghost in Hamlet is less fully, but perhaps more honestly recorded, and bears out what has been pieced together above concerning his attitude to the supernatural in Macbeth. In the Life, he tells Boswell how, as a child, he read the play, and how "the speech of the Ghost ...terrified him when he was alone".⁵⁶ According to Mrs. Piozzi, Johnson, aged nine years, got hold of Hamlet and read it steadily until he came to the Ghost scene; then "he hurried up stairs to the street door that he might see people about him".⁵⁷ This reaction of Johnson the child is relevant to that of Johnson the adult critic, in that, according to Mrs. Piozzi, the older Johnson still tells "the tale "as a testimony to the merits of Shakespeare".⁵⁸ The notes of 1765 contain similar references to the Ghost's effectiveness. The apparition of one dead, he remarks, "has in all ages been considered as the most dreadful operation of supernatural agency";⁵⁹ and in the concluding General Observation he gives further testimony to the merits of Shakespeare when he says that the apparition "chills the blood with horror".⁶⁰ Remembering Johnson's own personal attitude to apparitions, we should have expected him to be most affected by that kind of supernatural machinery.

His one objection to the apparition is based, it appears, on a demand for poetic justice: he feels that the ghost "left the regions of the dead to little purpose", since Hamlet achieves his revenge only at the cost of his own life, and the moral satisfaction derived from Claudius' death is abated by the destruction of the virtuous Ophelia. Otherwise, he praises the appropriateness of Shakespeare's machinery: the ghost, as well as every other personage, "produces the effect intended".⁶¹ Consistently, he evaluates the "solemnity" (which must include the speech and actions of the apparition) by its realism: it is, he notes approvingly, "not strained by poetical violence above the natural sentiments of man".⁶²

In considering Johnson's attitude towards Shakespeare's "tragic" supernatural, we have seen how important was the imaginative man's personal belief in the possible existence of such beings as constituted that supernatural; and the reaction of Johnson the critic, though more readily discernible, was of less importance in Johnson's total response. But when

we come to deal with Johnson's views on the fairy-machinery and enchantment-elements of such plays as A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest, there is, of course, no question of a personal belief on Johnson's part in fairies and magical powers; the discussion will centre, therefore, on whether Johnson as critic was prepared to accept supernatural machinery based on such phenomena, and if so, to what degree.

Johnson's belief in the didactic purpose⁶⁴ of literature in general, and his bias towards realism in comedy⁶⁴ as in other kinds of writing, would seem to provide the greatest obstacle to his fully appreciating the fantasy of Shakespeare's comic supernatural creations. It is true that, in his tale of "The Fountains",⁶⁵ Johnson himself used fairy-machinery, but the overriding preoccupation is with the moral; "the legitimate end of fiction", he stated elsewhere, "is the conveyance of truth".⁶⁶

Such a judgement would suggest that Johnson tended to regard the primary end of literature as instruction rather than delight, and that, consequently, he would be less inclined to advocate poetic use of the supernatural on the grounds of the aesthetic pleasure it afforded.⁶⁷ He also believed, however, that "the author is not wholly useless, who provides innocent amusements";⁶⁸ and, perhaps surprisingly, he thought The Winter's Tale was, "with all its absurdities, very entertaining".⁶⁹ Presumably he would have classified it as another exemplar of that "pleasing captivity" by which works of imagination excel, and which, he adds, "in defiance of criticism, continues Shakespeare the sovereign of the drama".⁹⁶ Moreover, a capacity for invention was, Johnson recognised, one of the most considerable faculties in a poet;⁷¹ consequently it is, according to the "Drury-Lane Prologue", one of Shakespeare's merits, that, having exhausted worlds, he "then imagin'd new".⁷² It was presumably because it was a proof of the faculty of invention that he thought supernatural machinery of the lighter sort, such as Pope employed in "The Rape of the Lock", worthy of serious consideration: he praises highly the sylphs and gnomes who in the mock-epic "act at the toilet and tea-table, what more terrifick and more powerful phantoms perform on the stormy ocean, or the field of battle".⁷³

Johnson, then, accepted and was to some degree capable of appreciating light supernatural machinery such as Shakespeare used. Further, as in the case of the tragedies, he could justify Shakespeare's deviation from strict

verisimilitude in the comedies by relating their supernatural machinery of fairies and magic to popular tradition. In editing The Tempest and A Midsummer Night's Dream, Johnson is as zealous in tracing the superstitions concerning fairies⁷⁴ as he had been in tracing the traditions concerning witchcraft in the 1745 Observations on Macbeth. Once more, as in the case of the ghost in Hamlet and the witches in Macbeth, scholarship of this kind, by discovering a basis for Shakespeare's supernatural creations in common tradition,⁷⁵ rendered them more acceptable to the realist in Johnson. This tradition, he discovered, had its literary as well as its popular aspects. By comparing Shakespeare's fairy-machinery with that of Drayton in his Nymphidia,⁷⁶ Johnson was able to conclude that there was in those days "some system of the fairy empire generally received";⁷⁷ and the fact that Milton had⁷⁸ subsequently made use of these "traditionary opinions",⁷⁹ and Spenser's epic had previously "made them great", gave them that stamp of literary respectability which ratified them all the more. In any case, if we regard both The Tempest and A Midsummer Night's Dream as similar in form to the masque,⁸⁰ and may believe that Johnson could so regard them, then such a justification is rendered unnecessary. In masques, Johnson was not inclined to impose severe limitations on the fancy of a poet who wished to make use of supernatural elements. "A Masque", he writes, "in those parts where supernatural intervention is admitted, must indeed be given up to all the freaks of imagination".⁸¹ Shakespeare, granted such a large scope, still retains, Johnson feels, a proper measure of artistic control: though A Midsummer Night's Dream is "wild and fantastical", yet "all the parts in their various modes are well written, and give the kind of pleasure which the authour designed".⁸² In The Tempest, he has made⁸³ use of that scope to display his "boundless invention".

In the comment on Masques quoted above, Johnson goes on to qualify the scope of the poet by adding that "so far as the action is merely human, it ought to be reasonable"⁸⁴ This critical notion he finds exemplified in The Tempest, where besides "the agency of airy spirits and of an earthly goblin", there are exhibited "princes, courtiers, and sailors, all speaking in their real characters".⁸⁵

On at least two occasions, however, Johnson the critic, adopting severer standards, challenges Shakespeare's handling of his supernatural machinery. Ariel's lays in

The Tempest, he says, "must be allowed to be of no supernatural dignity or elegance, they express nothing great, nor reveal anything above mortal discovery".⁸⁶ A similar blind spot in his critical approach is revealed when he implies the impropriety of combining "the loves of Theseus and Hippolyta ...with the Gothick mythology of fairies".⁸⁷ When we see Johnson thus unresponsive to what in each play constitutes, for modern critics, one of the major enjoyments, we must either conclude, as Boswell did in a different context,⁸⁸ that his "supposed orthodoxy here cramped the vigorous powers of his understanding", or else that that understanding was of its nature incapable of responding to such beauty as these things exemplify.

It is true that Johnson, temporarily allying himself, apparently, with such pre-romantic critics as Richard Hurd and Elizabeth Montagu, described as "beautiful" the speech of Theseus in A Midsummer Night's Dream, V.i.2-22, which contains the "romantic" description of the poet's power of invention; but there is no real evidence of a warm appreciation of the evocative fantasy of the play, or of the "fine frenzy" of Shakespeare's imagination in creating it. Critics like Joseph Warton and Elizabeth Montagu could write enthusiastically of the delight and enchantment of Shakespeare's fairy-supernatural;⁹² and in 1763 the St. James's Chronicle critic, reviewing on November 24th George Colman's stage-version of A Midsummer Night's Dream, remarks that the "Fairy-Part is most transcendently beautiful". Johnson, writing two years later, shows evidence of no such enthusiasm. He is willing to include William Warburton's appreciative note on The Tempest and A Midsummer Night's Dream as "the noblest efforts of that sublime and amazing Imagination, peculiar to Shakespeare",⁹³ but writes no such note himself. He can discuss, with scholarly zeal, Shakespeare's sources for the "System of Enchantment" in The Tempest⁹⁴ but he does not seem to have had any personal appreciation of the supernatural or fantastic elements in that play.

In fact, the most outstanding example of his shortcomings as a critic of the fantastic occurs in his remarks on the character of Caliban. In the General Observation added in 1773, he refers to Caliban merely as "an earthly goblin";⁹⁵ and though he considers the machinery of Pope's "Rape of the Lock" to be a supreme example of invention - that poetical faculty be valued so highly - he is not willing to allow the same praise to Caliban. Men have indeed

"thought and spoken of many things which they do not see",⁹⁶ but Shakespeare's creation does not, according to Johnson, belong to this category. In 1784, towards the end of his life, when Fanny Burney advances Caliban as an example of "invention", adding that "Shakespeare could never have seen such a creature", Johnson replies: "No, but he had seen a man, and knew, therefore, how to vary him to a monster. A man who would draw a monstrous cow, must first know what a cow commonly is; or how can he tell that to give her an ass's head or an elephant's tusk will make her monstrous".⁹⁷ The lack of appreciation in this case stems once more from Johnson's reluctance, which we have already noted in connection with the tragic supernatural, to grant to the imagination any power of transporting the mind from immediate reality. He was well aware that there were "worlds where only imagination can travel" which contain "new modes of existence",⁹⁸ and he could remark that there was "no reason, why imagination should be subject to the same restraint (as science)";⁹⁹ but it was far less disturbing to conceive of imagination as a faculty with its activity restricted to juggling with well-known facts. The characteristic Johnsonian definition of imagination is the one found in Idler 44: "Imagination selects ideas from the treasures of remembrance, and produces novelty only by varied combinations".¹⁰⁰ Caliban, for Johnson, is merely the result of one of these "varied combinations".

For Johnson, then, the imagination could be reduced to a mechanical faculty, the sphere of which was the comprehensible. He also felt that the more mysterious content of imaginative literature ought to be brought forward to the light of common day and the causes of its appeal rationally analysed. A critic who advocates the reduction "under the dominion of science" of "those means of pleasing" in literature which "appeal wholly to the fancy", and which "may well be termed the enchantresses of the soul",¹⁰¹ shows, it is true, a potential awareness of the evocative powers of fantasy, but reveals at the same time an inclination to dispel that fantasy by too strict examination.¹⁰²

From the "irregular combinations of fanciful invention" Johnson was always eager to escape and return to "the stability of truth".¹⁰³ Imagination was delusive; as far as he personally was concerned, it was dangerously so. This he must have felt when confronted with Shakespeare's "serious" supernatural of witches and ghosts - creatures who were, for him, far from being unreal.

In Jane Austen's Persuasion Anne Elliott remarked to the melancholy Captain Benwick that "it was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly, were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly".¹⁰⁴ The similarly melancholy Johnson, one feels, had the strong feelings necessary to estimate truly the tragic supernatural of Shakespeare, but was resolved to "taste it but sparingly", if sanity was to remain unimpaired; consequently the force of that supernatural over the imagination is not fully acknowledged by Johnson the more rationalist critic. He did, however, in some measure reveal his awareness of that supernatural's power; sufficiently to give, almost in spite of himself, "testimony to the merits of Shakespeare" in this regard. Also, this degree of engagement led him to justify the tragic supernatural by noting its realism, and by discovering the popular basis on which it stood; and what Johnson the critic had justified, the critic, striking a compromise with the greater degree of personal involvement on the part of the man, could approve as effective.

The lighter supernatural machinery in Shakespeare is tolerated by Johnson, and not tried by any severe critical standards. Of a more positive response there is little evidence. His distrust of the imagination, which may be related to the disturbing intensity of his feelings towards such examples of "poetic terror" as Shakespeare's ghosts and witches, likewise checks any potential response to the more innocuous comic supernatural. That distrust of the imagination manifests itself in an unwillingness to accept fantasy for fantasy's sake. "We may take Fancy for a companion", he once wrote to Boswell, "but must follow Reason as our guide".¹⁰⁵ In literature, Johnson felt that the criterion ought to be realism; he was only too aware, in life, of the danger involved in losing a sense of the real.

Documentation

1. "Johnson as Critic", in Scrutiny, xii (1944), 198.
2. See, e.g., the passage where he praises Shakespeare's drama as "the mirrour of life" (op.cit., in Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, ed. D. Nichol Smith (Oxford, 1963), pp. 108-9).

3. See, e.g., the note on Hamlet's "Nymph in thy orisons, &c.", in The Plays of William Shakespeare (London, 1765: hereafter referred to as Shakespeare's Plays), viii, 209, n.9; on Richard III's "And therefore since I cannot prove a lover", *ibid.*, v, 230, n.4.
4. Shakespeare's Plays v, 462, n.4. The criticism has all the more force when we recall that later in the scene of the "spirits of peace", which Johnson passes by without comment.
5. David Lovett treats this question with some fullness in "Shakespeare as a Poet of Realism in the Eighteenth Century", E L H, ii (1935), 267-89.
6. Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (London, 1783), ii, 524. See also Pope's "Preface" (1725) to The Works of Shakespeare, in Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, ed. D. Nichol Smith (Oxford, 1963), p.45; Lewis Theobald, ed., The Works of Shakespeare (London, 1733), i, iii ("Preface"); William Warburton, "Preface" (1747) to The Works of Shakespeare, in Nichol Smith, ed. cit., p. 93; Maurice Morgann, "An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff" (1777), in Nichol Smith ed. cit., p.231 n; Thomas Whateley, Remarks on Some of the Characters of Shakespeare (London 1785), p.7.
7. For example, Shakespeare's supernatural could be justified by the application of the "popular belief" argument: this involved extending the definition of verisimilitude so as to include not only what actually existed, but also what was supposed or believed to exist at the period in which the poet was writing. Johnson uses this approach: see below p. 4. For evidence of more positive appreciation of Shakespeare's supernatural, one may turn to those "romantic" critics to whom Mrs. Thrale refers: these, like Elizabeth Montagu and Joseph Warton, preferred to "expatiate on the creative powers and vivid imagination of that matchless poet" (Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson LL.D. (London, 1786), p.249).
8. See, e.g., Sir John Hawkins' "The Life of Dr. Samuel Johnson", in Johnson's Works (1787 edn), I, 217; and Lives of the English Poets, ed. G.B. Hill (Oxford, 1905: hereafter referred to as Lives), iii, 438, where he evinces contempt for the facility with which fiction may be written: "he that forsakes the probable may always find the marvellous".
9. "Preface" (1765), in Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare ed. Nichol Smith (1963), p.108. This line of reasoning had been used before Johnson: for examples, see D. Lovett, "Shakespeare as a Poet of Realism in the Eighteenth Century", E L H, ii (1935), 284-5.

10. Vide supra, p. 3, n.7.
11. For the justification of Shakespeare's supernatural on this basis, see, e.g. Charles Gildon, "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespear", in The Works of Mr. William Shakespear, vii (1710), 264; the anonymous Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet (1736), ed. C.D. Thorpe (Augustan Reprint Society, series iii, no. 3, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1947), p.43; John Upton, Critical Observations on Shakespeare (London, 1746), p.59 n.; Elizabeth Montagu, An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare (London, 1769), pp. 137-8.
12. Boswell's Life of Johnson, G.B. Hill - L.F. Powell edn. (Oxford, 1934-50: hereafter referred to as Life), iv, 17. For further evidence of Johnson's well-known antipathy to the use of classical mythology as supernatural machinery, which is suggested in the quotation above, one may turn to Lives, i, 295; ii, 202, 204, 283.
13. The Works of Samuel Johnson LL.D. (Oxford, 1825), v, 82.
14. Op. cit., in Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, ed. Nichol Smith (1963), p.124.
15. Lives, ii, 16.
16. Ibid., iii, 438.
17. See, e.g. Life, i, 406; ii, 247; iii, 229 ("I never knew any person who upon hearing an extraordinary circumstance told, discovered more of the incredulus odi"); v, 331.
18. See Life, iii, 342.
19. Life, iv, 94
20. Ibid., iii, 230
21. Ibid., ii, 150. It was, perhaps, this wish which prompted Johnson to look into the Cock-Lane Ghost affair of 1762; see The Gentleman's Magazine, xxxii (1762), 43-44, 81, and Life, i, 406-7.
22. Life, iv, 298-9.
23. The Gentleman's Magazine, lxxxvi, pt. ii, 422
24. Quoted by Boswell in Life, i, 235.
25. The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford, 1927: hereafter referred to as Rasselas), Chap. XXX, pp. 141-2. Johnson's attitude towards "second sight" was similar; see Life, ii, 10 (second sight and other mysterious manifestations, says Johnson, "have happened so often, that mankind have agreed to think them not fortuitous"); Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland and Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford, etc., 1924: hereafter referred to as Journey and Tour, p.100; Lives, i, 230-31.

26. Life, iv, 290. See also ibid., v, 45 ("It is not more strange that there should be evil spirits, than evil men.")
27. Ibid., ii, 178-9
28. Ibid., v, 45-46. The act of parliament referred to is that of 9 Geo. II, c.5(1736). - It is interesting to note that John Wesley, who was a contemporary of Johnson's had a similarly open-minded attitude to witchcraft. See his Journal for 22 May 1776 (An Extract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal, from January 1, 1776, to August 8, 1779 (1783), p.15).
29. Life, iv, 426
30. Life, iv, 17. Cf. his remark that the deities of old mythology "were considered (by the ancients) as realities, so far as to be received by the imagination, whatever sober reason might even then determine" (Lives, i, 295).
31. Op. cit., p.140.
32. An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear (London, 1769), p.148.
33. An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope (4th edn., 2 vols., London, 1782), i,13. See also Elizabeth Montagu, An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear (1769), pp.173-4
34. Life, ii, 90.
35. Rambler 140, in Works (1825), iii, 164.
36. Lives i, 177.
37. Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism (Univ. of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1952), p. 146.
38. For an analysis of the way in which terror came to be associated with the sublime in the eighteenth century, see S.H. Monk, The Sublime, a Study of Critical Theories in XVIII - Century England (Revd. edn., Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1960), esp. pp. 51-54, 58-59, 61, 68, 87-91.
39. Lives, i, 177.
40. Ibid., i, 386.
41. Op. cit., in Works (1825), v, 55.
42. Ibid., p. 59. Italics mine.
43. Observations, Note XX, part (1), ibid., p.71.
44. See Rasselas, Chap. XLIII, "The dangerous prevalence of imagination", where Imlac remarks: "All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity" (p.190); and Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle... Prepared for the press by Geoffrey Scott and Frederick A. Pottle (New York, privately printed, 1928-36), XIII, 41: quoted by K.C. Balderston, "Johnson's Vile Melancholy", The Age of Johnson (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press 1949), pp. 12-13.
45. Journey and Tour, p.22.
46. Life, v, 115.
47. Ibid., p.76.

48. For instance, such figures as John Dennis, Addison, and Gray found sublimity in the wild scenery of the Alps. On the response of Dennis and Addison to Alpine scenery, and their probable association of the aesthetic emotion they then felt with the sublime, see S.H. Monk, The Sublime (ed.cit.), pp. 207-8. For Gray's reaction to the Alps see his Letters, ed. P. Toynbee and L. Whibley (Oxford, 1935), i, 125, 126, 128. As Monk notes (op.cit., pp. 211-12), Gray avoids the adjective sublime as much as possible, but the blend of terror and beauty which he found in mountain scenery is amply expressed".
49. See J.H. Hagstrum, Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism (1952), p. 146, esp. Johnson's quoted description of Sir Rowland Hill's seat at Hawkestone.
50. See ibid., pp. 149-52, on the way Johnson's rationalism "tended to limit the flight of the imagination toward sublimity".
51. Works (1825), iii, 293. Johnson is here, of course, speaking specifically of the poetry of Macbeth, but in that play poetry, supernatural and unnatural incident, and the total "atmosphere", are so closely inter-related, that it seems just to regard his response to this evocative poetry as symptomatic of his reaction to the play as a whole.
52. Shakespeare's Plays, vi, 484.
53. Ibid.
54. Life, iii, 382.
55. See, e.g., the "Dedication" to Charlotte Lennox's Shakespeare Illustrated (1753), in Samuel Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications, ed. Allen T. Hazen (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1937), p. 108: "Among the Powers that most conduce to constitute a Poet, the first and most valuable is Invention" - though here Johnson is speaking of that faculty primarily in connection with plot-construction; Lives, iii, 298 (Thomson "is entitled to one praise of the highest kind: his mode of thinking and of expressing his thoughts is original"). One may note before leaving Johnson's criticism of Macbeth that he still maintains an interest in the psychology of the characters: see, e.g., Notes XVI and XXIII of the Observations (in Works (1825), v, 69, 74).
56. Life, i, 70.
57. "Anecdotes", Johnsonian Miscellanies, ed. G.B. Hill (Oxford, 1897), i, 158.
58. Ibid., i, 159.
59. Shakespeare's Plays, viii, 160, n.9
60. Ibid., p. 311.
61. Ibid.
62. Cf. above p. 3, on Johnson's acceptance of supernatural elements because of their realistic presentation.
63. Shakespeare's Plays, viii, 311.

64. See, e.g., Lives, ii, 216: "the lighter species of dramatick poetry professes the imitation of common life, of real manners, and daily incidents".
65. In Works (1825), ix, 176-90.
66. Lives, i, 271.
67. In the eighteenth century the belief that the end of poetry was pleasure was frequently used to justify the supernatural in literature. For a full statement of this belief and its implications, see Thomas Twining, ed., Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry (London, 1789), pp.xv-xvi ("Preface"); and cf. John Aikin, Essays on Song-Writing (London, 1772), p.8.
68. Adventurer 137, in Works (1825), iv, 142.
69. Shakespeare's Plays, ii, 349n. The Winter's Tale does contain elements other than supernatural which could be referred to by Johnson as "absurdities", e.g., the bear in III. iii; but it seems probable that when he made this pronouncement, he had also in mind such incidents as the "statue's" coming to life, and the accompanying enchanted music, in V.iii.
70. Lives, i, 454.
71. See above p. 10 , n. 55.
72. "Prologue, ...At the opening of the Theatre-Royal, Drury-Lane, 1747", l. 4, in The Poems of Samuel Johnson, ed. D.N.Smith and E.L. McAdam (Oxford, 1941), p.51. The comment seems to apply to the comedies, and more particularly to The Tempest, rather than to any of the tragedies which contain supernatural elements.
73. Lives, iii, 233.
74. See, e.g., Shakespeare's Plays, i, 25, n.9 (where he speaks of "the fairy kind, an order of beings to which tradition has always ascribed a sort of diminutive agency"); ibid., p.70, n. * (on The Tempest): p.105, nn. 4, 5, 7; p. 107, n.3; p.174, n.3 (on A Midsummer Night's Dream).
75. This seems to be the attitude behind his comment, added in 1773 (The Plays of William Shakespeare, in ten vols. With...Notes by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens (London. 1773: hereafter referred to as Shakespeare's Plays (1773)), iii, 107), that fairies in Shakespeare's time "were much in fashion; common tradition had made them familiar".
76. E.g., in Shakespeare's Plays, i, 69, n.5; 105, n.5; 107, n.3.
77. Ibid., i, 107, n.2.
78. E.g. in L'Allegro ll. 100-110, as Johnson duly notes in Shakespeare's Plays, i, 106, n.2.
79. Shakespeare's Plays (1773), iii, 107.

80. Both these plays may justly be compared to masques. In the introduction to the Arden edition of The Tempest (London, 1958), pp. lxxi-lxxvi, Frank Kermode deals with that play's masque elements (though he himself does not feel that it is as much influenced by the masque as is generally believed); while Frank Sidgwick points out that A Midsummer Night's Dream "is more of a masque than a drama - an entertainment rather than a play" (The Sources and Analogues of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' (Shakespeare Classics, London, 1908), p.2).
81. Lives, i, 168. He is speaking of Milton's Comus.
82. Shakespeare's Plays (1773), iii, 107.
83. Ibid., i, 100-101.
84. Lives, i, 168
85. Shakespeare's Plays (1773), i, 101. He could have discovered the same propriety in the characters of Bottom and Co. in A Midsummer Night's Dream.
86. Shakespeare's Plays, i, 25-26, n.9.
87. "Preface" (1765), in Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare ed. Nichol Smith (1963), p.155. Cf. Lives, ii, 311; and see also Works (1825), vi, 38.
88. See Life, ii, 104. The remark is called forth by Johnson's refusal to embark on any further discussion of the problem of free will and pre-destination.
89. Hurd regarded the lines as an expression of the "magic virtue of poetry" (A Dissertation on the Idea of Universal Poetry (1766), The Works of Richard Hurd D.D. (London, 1811), ii, 9-10); while Mrs. Montagu prefixed the lines of the speech which refer to the creative poet to her chapter "On the Preternatural Beings" (An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare (1769), p.131).
90. Shakespeare's Plays, i, 160, n.8. - Johnson quotes the speech in Adventurer 50.
91. It is possible to argue that the reference to the poet's imagination in this speech is deprecatory; but it seems more plausible to suppose that the deprecation lies with Theseus rather than with Shakespeare: see R.W. Dent, "Imagination in A Midsummer Night's Dream", Shakespeare Quarterly, xv (1964), esp. pp. 128-9. If Shakespeare is in the speech celebrating the poet's imaginative vision (as, indeed, the critics of the eighteenth century consistently believed), then the epithet "romantic" is justifiable.
92. For Warton's enthusiasm for the fantasy of The Tempest see Adventurer 93. Mrs. Montagu, in her Essay on Shakespeare, speaks of "the pleasing sportfulness and poetical imagination" of his fairy-tales (op. cit., p.152).

93. Shakespeare's Plays, i, 3.
94. Ibid., p.17, n.3.
95. Shakespeare's Plays (1773), i, 101.
96. Idler 34, in Works (1825), iv, 249
97. Fanny Burney's Diary, ed. John Wain (1961), p.122. For a similarly limited view of poetic creation, see the example of "Compounded Imagination" which Thomas Hobbes gives in Leviathan, ed. A.R. Waller (Cambridge, 1904), p.4. Johnson's attitude to Caliban appears all the more singular if we bear in mind that for the greater number of eighteenth century critics, Caliban was the most evident example of Shakespeare's powers of original creation. Lewis Theobald, e.g. could report in 1733 that the part of Caliban "has been esteem'd a signal Instance of the Copiousness of Shakespeare's Invention" (The Works of Shakespeare (London, 1733), i, 44, n. (21)).
98. Lives, i, 178.
99. Rambler 121, Works (1825), iii, 76.
100. Works (1825), iv, 279. Cf. Lives, i. 212, where imagination is equated with "the power of combination" of materials supplied by study and observation; and ibid., iii, 166, where he speaks of "a fancy fertile of original combinations". This, of course, is a concept of the imagination which may be conveniently traced to Hobbes: see above n.97. It remained current throughout the eighteenth century.
101. Rambler 92, in Works (1825), ii, 432. He is dealing with the question of "the accommodation of the sound to the sense" in poetry.
102. Ctr. Edward Young, who was content that the "mysteries" in poetry should not be explained, but admired (Conjectures on Original Composition (London, 1759), ed. E.J. Morley (1918), p.14).
103. "Preface" (1765), in Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, ed. Nichol Smith (1963), p.106.
104. The Novels of Jane Austen, ed. R.W. Chapman (1926), v, "Persuasion", 100-101.
105. Letter of 19 March 1774 (?), in The Letters of Samuel Johnson, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford, 1952), i, 401.



E.L.CLOYD: James Burnett-Lord Monboddo, xiii, 196 pp., Oxford 1972 £4.50

In a recent article in the T.L.S this book was described as "a lively little study". The adjectives do not strike one as very appropriate.

The subject might perhaps be called "lively", but his reputation as a "character" and his eccentricities have always tended to overshadow his solid contributions to the world of speculative thought and philosophy. The author has given due weight to the anecdotal side of the subject, including, of course, his relations with both Johnson and Boswell.

The real achievement of this book, however, seems to lie in having made "digestible" the mass of Monboddo's writings. The present reviewer, in a short paper, once referred to the works as being "largely unread and perhaps indeed almost unreadable". If this book is a "little study", then the measure of its success is in having condensed and made intelligible what must have been somewhat intractable material.

Monboddo's interests were even more varied and all-embracing than one had realised; for example, his views on literary style and his opinions on the poetry of Milton and Dryden. His whole life was lived by and for the mind; an intellectual in the true rather than in the debased modern sense. His obsession with the idea of man's gradual decline does not perhaps strike one as ridiculous as it did to his "rational" contemporaries or to more recent generations with their faith in "progress".

Ridicule was to some extent the inevitable lot of such a man. Nevertheless, it is not very pleasant to dwell on how his marriage proposals, when in his late sixties, became common gossip in society or how his written proposal to Mrs. Garrick provided "Horace Walpole and the blues with amusement for more than a year".

ERIC M. BONNER

Mr. Bonner's review was received some time before news reached us of his death. His passing leaves the Society the poorer. He was one of the stalwarts of our Society and gave many years of loyal service both as a member of the Committee and as a former Honorary Treasurer. His paper on Lord Monboddo, to which he referred in his review, was given to the Johnson Society of London in April 1968 and appeared in the January 1970 issue of The New Rambler.

J.H.L.

J & B: LEARNING TO LOVE THE SCOTCH

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The appearances, in 1775, of Samuel Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands and, in 1785, of Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides prompted popular and critical reactions bordering on violence among both the Scottish and the English.¹ Since these reactions are somewhat illustrative of the way in which Johnson and Boswell were regarded by their contemporaries, and since to a certain extent they show how Boswell manipulated public opinion, it is of some interest to study them.

Although Johnson thought his Journey sold poorly, Boswell assures us, in the Life, that his mentor was mistaken; the Journey, he tells us, went through a first printing of four thousand copies and, shortly after Johnson's death, was reprinted.² In addition, if Boswell is to be trusted, most of the letters Johnson received about his work were favourable. It is, of course, possible that Boswell either did not know of or ignored whatever unfavourable correspondence might have existed. It would seem, though, that the Journal enjoyed a favourable popular reception. The critical reaction, however, was most definitely mixed. A review in the Gentleman's Magazine of February, 1775, indicates the main lines of thought on the Journey:

But, tho' many individuals among them (the Scottish) will be pleased with this publication, and with the grateful testimonies that are paid to their kindness and civility, yet, by the nation in general, and by the Highlanders in particular, we cannot think that it will be perused with satisfaction. The attack upon Ossian and the Erse will offend some, the imputation of credulity, vanity, and deception, will displease others, and the "mediocrity of knowledge," which is allowed them, will exasperate the numerous and irascible swarms of pedagogues and tutors.³

The review goes on to discuss Johnson's equitable treatment of the Scottish clergy, his expressions of support for Scottish nationalism, and his discussion of "the second sight." Here we have a good outline of the elements which were most prominent in the book's general reception; questions of hospitality and gratitude, the state of Scottish education and religion, and

especially the discussions of Ossian and "the second sight" predominate. In January, 1775, a reviewer had questioned Johnson's attack on Ossian by saying that the poetry was so beautiful it did not matter who wrote it; and, at the same time, a writer in the Monthly Review noted, "The public attention hath been much excited by the altercations to which this work hath given birth, concerning the Earse language, and our Author's opinions as to the originality and authenticity of Ossian's Poems as published by the ingenious Mr. Macpherson."⁴ Johnson's comments on Ossian, in fact, triggered long discussions and much "railing and ridicule in the newspapers."⁵

As for the "second sight", the Monthly Review reported:

The appearance of an inclination in our Author to believe in the second sight...hath given rise to some pleasantry at the Doctor's expence. He does not, however, profess his entire faith in this species of prophecy. He declares that, on a strict inquiry into the subject, he never could "advance his curiosity to conviction." But he acknowledges that he "came away, at last, only willing to believe." - This will, no doubt, extort a smile even from the gravest of our Readers.⁶

At the same time, "It was felt...that in this account... there was a good deal of ungraciousness, as many hospitalities were requited with faultfinding, and even ridicule." While these specifics stirred up controversy, there were also numerous general opinions ventured on the work. Reverend Donald M'Nicol, for example, wrote Remarks on Dr. Samuel Johnson's Tour to the Hebrides, an attack on what M'Nicol considered Johnson's derogatory views on Scotland. M'Nicol's work, which is much longer than Johnson's, was censured in reviews: "In the present performance, our young Author hath attacked a most respectable veteran in literature with much ill-nature, and with a degree of petulance still more intolerable and disgusting than his acrimony....He hath magnified errors and mistakes, which a candid mind would scarcely have perceived, or, if it had perceived, would readily have excused them."⁸ Even Boswell tells us that there were bad reviews, but "all the miserable cavillings against his 'Journey'...only furnished him with sport."⁹ Furthermore, he says, "I had brought with me a great bundle of Scotch magazines and newspapers, in which his 'Journey to the Western Islands' was attacked in every mode; and I read a great part of them to him, knowing they would afford him entertainment."¹⁰ The general opinion in the English reviews, however, was that the Journey was "a faithful

representation, both of men and manners, and, as such, highly acceptable..."¹¹ In fact, one review in the Monthly Review ended by saying, "We must now...take leave of this very able and entertaining writer; but not without expressing our thanks for the pleasure we have received in the perusal of this animated and instructive narration."¹² Thus, the critical reception of the Journey, except on certain points, was generally favourable in England, while, as Boswell wrote, the work was "misapprehended, even to rancour, by many of my countrymen."¹³

As diverse as the reactions were to Johnson's Journey, those to Boswell's Journal were far more spectacular. Sales were "immediately, though not phenomenally, successful."¹⁴ The book quickly went through two large editions, and in the Life, Boswell boasts that the "publick has been pleased to honour it by a very extensive circulation."¹⁵ Private letters, though, which often became public correspondences, were not nearly so favourable. The majority of these letters concern Boswell's insulting treatment of such people as Lord Macdonald, Mrs. Piozzi, Mrs. Montague, and Bishop Percy. These people, especially Macdonald, and their friends demanded retractions and apologies, with which demands Boswell partially complied when, in the third edition, he corrected "some inaccuracies."¹⁶ His major defense, however, was that he had simply recorded exactly what Johnson had said, thus fulfilling his duty as historian and biographer, to which a Dr. Blagden replied, "'This is a new kind of libel, by which you may abuse anybody, by saying some dead person said so and so of somebody else.'"¹⁷ It was, indeed, generally recognised that those people who were most insulted were people whom Boswell was known to dislike. Unfavourable letters written by people other than those directly attacked include such comments as, "'It is the story of a mountebank and his Zany,'"¹⁸ or, "'I have been amused at it, but should be very sorry either to have been the author or the hero of it.'"¹⁹

Critically, the book "became at once a standard of indiscretion."²⁰ As Fitzgerald says, "The confessions he had made concerning himself caused hearty laughter and ridicule; while his unbecoming attacks on the living were resented."²¹ Boswell, of course, was impervious to most of the attacks: "I bid defiance to the shafts of ridicule, or even of malignity. Showers of them have been discharged at my 'Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides;' yet it still sails unhurt along the stream of time..."²² Although much adverse criticism appeared (e.g., "If we begin to select false and erroneous maxims, or hasty and bigoted reflections for animadversions and confutation, we should not know where to make an end."²³)

there were reviewers who liked the book: "Mr. Boswell has entertained us with a minute history of his fellow traveller, in a style that shows he possesses in an eminent degree, the skill to give connection to miscellaneous matter, and vivacity to the whole of his narrative: two rare qualities in a biographer."²⁴

Criticism of the book was expressed not only in letters and reviews, but appeared in caricatures and poetry. In May, 1786, Thomas Rowlandson published his book of engravings, Picturesque Beauties of Boswell, in which "Dr. Johnson is represented as a large, paunchy, sleepy-eyed figure, with a huge wig, very carelessly dressed; as he was in fact. Boswell is snub-nosed and double-chinned, a ridiculous little parasite, usually capering around his idol, a fatuous look of exultant admiration on his face."²⁵ Of course, Rowlandson chose to portray some of the more ridiculous moments of the Journal, but he always adhered to the text. All the pictures of Boswell, for example, show him carrying his Journal and his copy of Ogden.

Even more outstanding than these caricatures is the poetry of Dr. John Wolcot, who, under the pseudonym Peter Pindar, wrote two poems dealing with the Journal. The first, "A Poetical and Congratulatory Epistle to James Boswell, Esquire, on his Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with the Celebrated Dr. Johnson," published in London in 1787, is a criticism of Boswell's role as a biographer and Johnson's as a luminary. Pindar attacks many of the points we have already covered. On the insults in the Journal he writes,

Loud, of thy Tour, a thousand tongues have spoken
And wonder'd that thy bones were never broken (p.2)

and he refers to Boswell as "A tom-tit twitt'ring on an eagle's back" (p.3). Characteristic of Pindar's approach to Boswell's work are the following passages:

Sweet is thy page, I ween, that doth recite
How Thou and Johnson, arm in arm, one night,
March'd through fair Edinburgh's Pactolian show'rs,
Which Cloacina bountifully pours;
Those gracious show'rs that fraught with fragrance flow,
and gild, like gingerbread, the world below.
How sweetly grumbled too was Sam's remark,
"I smell you, Master Bozzy, in the dark" (pp. 3-4).

I see thee stuffing, with a hand uncourth,
 An old dry'd whiting in thy Johnson's mouth,
 And lo! I see, with all his might and main,
 Thy Johnson spit the whiting out again.
 Rare anecdotes! 'tis anecdotes like these,
 That bring thee glory, and the million please! -
 On these, shall future Times delighted stare,
 Thou charming haberdasher of small ware...(p.9).

Like Rowlandson, Pindar adapts actual scenes (often the same scenes as the caricaturist) and emphasises their ridiculous aspects, at the same time underlining Boswell's role as a gossip, scandalmonger, and dealer in trivia.

The second of Pindar's "Boswell-poems" is "Bozzi and Piozzi or, the British Biographers. A Town Eclogue." This poem tells of the competition between Boswell and Mrs. Thrale, with Sir John Hawkins as Judge, to see who will have the honour of writing Johnson's biography. The contest eventually disintegrates, as all three characters begin writing biographies. Once again Boswell is portrayed as a "pigmy planet" catching his lustre from the sun.²⁶ Bozzi and Piozzi both tell trivial stories about Johnson, from already published works (in Boswell's case from the Journal) and at the same time glorify themselves because of their association with Johnson. Pindar, in fact, has Boswell say,

Of Doctor Johnson, having giv'n a sketch,
 Permit me, Reader, of myself to preach -
 The world will certainly receive with glee,
 The slightest bit of history of me...(p.41)

but Pindar concludes by having Hawkins tell Boswell,

Thy egotisms the world disgusted hears -
 Then load with vanities no more our ears (p.56).

Pindar's works were very successful, going through many printings, which may have been just what Boswell desired.

Here we must raise the question of why Boswell waited ten years after the publication of Johnson's Journey to publish his Journal. Although we cannot be certain of his reasons, there are several possibilities. Since Johnson was dead, for example, Boswell may have felt safe in insulting people and saying that he was only quoting his obviously highly respected mentor. Another possibility is that he now felt

safe in violating Johnson's wishes. After Johnson's Journey had appeared, Boswell wanted to write a supplement, and he even wrote "Remarks on the Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland," correcting passages in Johnson. Shortly thereafter, however, he wrote to Temple, "Dr. Johnson does not seem very desirous that I should publish my supplement ... he is not apt to encourage one to share reputation with himself."²⁷ By publishing after Johnson's death, he did not lessen Johnson's fame, but did increase his own; and besides, Johnson could no longer offer objections.

Most probably, however, Boswell, under Malone's guidance, published the Journal as an advertisement for the forthcoming Life. After the uproar which he created with the Journal, he could be sure of a large audience for the Life. Even the reviews recognised this fact and offered him advice on changes he should make in his style for the Life;²⁸ and Pindar says, in the "Epistle,"

Say, Bozzi, when, to bless our anxious sight,
When shall thy volume burst the gates of light?
O, cloath'd in calf, ambitious brat be born -
Our kitchens, parlours, libraries, adorn!
My Fancy's keen anticipating eye,
A thousand charming anecdotes can spy (p.13).

Thus, in addition to Johnson's respected reputation, the bad reviews, the threats and scandals, the caricatures, and the poems all worked to Boswell's advantage; and it seems probable that, with his peculiar kind of genius, he knew from the beginning exactly what reactions he would evoke.

Documentation

1. For this article I include under popular reaction such items as sales and personal letters; under critical reaction I include publicly printed comments.
2. James Boswell, Life of Johnson, edited by Hill and Powell (Oxford, 1934), III, p.325, n. 5.
3. Gentleman's Magazine, Volume 45, February, 1775, p.85.
4. Monthly Review, Volume 52, January, 1775, reprinted in John Ker Spittal's Contemporary Criticisms of Dr. Samuel Johnson: His Works, and his Biographers (London, 1923), p.172.
5. Ibid., p.177.
6. Ibid., p.177.
7. Percy Fitzgerald, Life of James Boswell, I (London, 1891), p.193.
8. Monthly Review, Volume 63, October, 1780, in Spittal, p.186.

9. Boswell, Life, op. cit., II, pp. 307-8.
10. Ibid., II, p.363.
11. Gentleman's Magazine, Volume 45, February, 1775, p.86.
12. Monthly Review, Volume 52, January, 1775, in Spittal, p.178.
13. James Boswell, The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D., ed. Frederick A. Pottle (New York, 1963), p.10.
14. C.E. Vulliamy, James Boswell (London, 1932), p.167.
15. Chauncey B. Tinker, Young Boswell (Boston, 1922), p.217 and Boswell, Life, op. cit., II p.267.
16. James Boswell, The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D., third edition (1786), edited by Allan Wendt (Boston, 1965), p.125.
17. Fitzgerald, op. cit., II, p.39.
18. Ibid., p.46.
19. Tinker, op. cit., pp. 215-6.
20. Ibid., pp. 214-5.
21. Fitzgerald, II, pp. 36-7
22. Boswell, Life, op. cit., III, p.190.
23. Monthly Review, Volume 74, April, 1786, in Spittal, p.180.
24. Ibid., Volume 76, May, 1786, in Spittal, p.379.
25. Edward C.J. Wolf, Rowlandson and his illustrations of Eighteenth-Century English Literature (Copenhagen, 1945) p.172, and Joseph Grego, Rowlandson the Caricaturist (New York, 1880), p.193.
26. Peter Pindar, "Bozzi and Piozzi : or, the British Biographers. A Town Eclogue," ninth edition, (London, 1788), p.7.
27. Boswell, Life, op. cit., II, p.300, n.2.
28. Monthly Review, Volume 74, April, 1786, in Spittal, p.186.



JOHN HOME'S DOUGLAS; THE ROLE OF PROVIDENCE

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John Home's Douglas achieved enormous success on the Edinburgh stage and considerable success on the London stage when it first appeared and, despite Johnson's remark that there are "not ten good lines in the whole play,"¹ became standard repertory fare throughout Britain for the next hundred years.² The play also engendered a remarkably heated controversy in the Church of Scotland and a subsequent war of pamphlets during the first several months of 1757. Home's adversaries, both in the debate in the Scots presbyteries, which resulted in Home's resignation from his pastorate at Athelstanford and the church-trials of several clergymen who had attended Edinburgh productions of Douglas and in the pamphlet war attacked the play primarily because its success might stimulate further "sinful" theatrical activity and because writing plays was regarded by many as an unacceptable pastime for a minister. A few pamphlets criticised the play on aesthetic grounds and some objected because it "tended to encourage the monstrous crime of suicide."³ In view of the involvement of the church in the debate over Douglas, it is remarkable that almost no pamphlets raised serious theological objections to this play whose heroine dies not in a state of grace, but in a state of religious despair. A more careful reading of Douglas by Home's ministerial opponents might have led to a controversy based on theological problems rather than one focusing on the encouragement of theatrical activity in general since confidence in the justice of beneficent providence expressed early in the play gradually gives way to a despairing conception of a providence which make a suffering spectacle of man for no apparent reason, thereby raising doubts concerning the justice of God's will.

Changes in the concept of providence (interchangeably referred to as fate, destiny, omnipotence, heaven, and fortune) in Douglas can best be illustrated by examining the attitude of the wholly sympathetic main character, Lady Randolph, toward providence. Throughout the play, Lady Randolph appeals to heaven both to rectify the injustice of her plight and provide her with spiritual strength. Early in the play, her prayers and remarks about heaven reflect confidence that there is a beneficent providence controlling human action. As the play develops, however, she loses confidence in divine justice, doubts that there is a divine will operating in this world, and ends in despair. After Douglas, whose identity is yet unknown, providentially saves Lord Randolph from Glenalvon's

assination scheme, Lady Randolph remarks: "On this my mind reflected, whilst you spoke, / And blessed the wonder-working Lord of Heaven" (II.98-99). Similarly, she praises God when she discovers that her son is alive: "Unparalleled event! / Reaching from Heav'n to earth, Jehovah's arm / Snatched from the waves, and brings to me my son!" (III.226-228). Believing that she can defeat Glenalvon's plots, she prays that God will provide the necessary spiritual and pragmatic wisdom for success; "Heaven bestow / On me that wisdom which my state requires" (III. 163-164).

There is nothing in the early stages of the play to indicate that Lady Randolph's view of providence is mistaken. Even Glenalvon, whose religious disposition is the most unlike that of Lady Randolph, fears that there may be a just providence controlling men's lives: "Had I one grain of faith / In holy legends, and religious tales, / I should conclude there was an arm above / That fought against me, and malignant turned" (II.248-251). Although he claims that "chance and fate are words: / Persistent wisdom is the fate of man" (II.268-269), he must chide himself for behaving as a child who is the "shallow fool of coward conscience." It is clear that he does believe in the power of providence in spite of himself, and by the end of the third act, he discovers that he cannot control providence. Glenalvon is defeated because fate is whimsical and beyond man's control, not because he misjudges others' characters or because a beneficent providence forbids injustice: "The ebbs and flows / Of fortune's tide cannot be calculated" (III.353-355). His discovery of the capriciousness of providence prefigures Lady Randolph's later discovery; he is mistaken in believing that there is no such thing as providence much as Lady Randolph is mistaken in believing that providence is necessarily just.

The first suggestion that providence's plan may not be beneficent or that some opposing force successfully subverts the will of God occurs in the fourth act. After Douglas relates the tale of the hermit who killed his brother without knowing his identity, Lord Randolph exclaims: "There is a destiny in this strange world, / Which oft decrees an undeserved doom: / Let schoolmen tell us why" (IV.101-103). Lord Randolph's remark might stand as the central thematic statement of the play. The speech is effective dramatically (1) since it serves to increase the audience's sense of impending disaster when applied to Lady Randolph and Douglas, both of whom are on stage, and (2) since it undermines the confidence Lady Randolph had previously expressed in divine beneficence. Having raised the question of the relationship between worldly injustice and God's will, Home intentionally avoids answering

it. The statement "Let schoolmen tell us why" is rhetorical, of course, implying that there is no satisfactory answer and that Home will not attempt one in Douglas. From this point to the end of the play, malignant destiny is emphasised in order to increase pity for Lady Randolph and Douglas.

Lord Randolph's speech also functions to increase the audience's sense of cosmic irony since Lady Randolph continues to believe in divine justice after this speech. Recognising that Douglas' life may be endangered by Glenalvon's schemes, she prays: "O! thou all righteous and eternal King! / Who father of the fatherless art called, / Protect my son!" (IV.244-246). Old Norval, parting from Douglas for the last time, delivers a similar prayer shortly after Lady Randolph's: "O may heav'n's hand, which saved thee from the wave, / And from the sword of foes, be near thee still" (V.72-73). Such prayers go unanswered, however, and cosmic irony is underscored a few lines later when Douglas, shortly before he is killed by Glenalvon, remarks to his mother: "The God of battles of my life dispose / As may be best for you!" (V.160-161). But it is Douglas' death which drives Lady Randolph to despair and suicide. Her faith in divine beneficence shaken by the realisation that Douglas is near death, she cries: "Has heav'n preserved thee for an end like this?" (V.204). She calls on divine justice again, but Douglas falls, asking what solace there is for Lady Randolph; her answer is "Despair! despair!" By the end of the play, her faith in a just God is replaced by a pessimistic concept of an uncaring God who destroys his subjects merely to display his power; she views herself as "the object, now, / On which Omnipotence displays itself, / Making a spectacle, a tale of me, / to awe its vassal, man" (V.242-245).

In view of his calling as a Presbyterian minister and the lack of such pessimism in his other plays, it is unlikely that Home intentionally raises doubts concerning the justice of God's will in Douglas. The explanation for the movement from an optimistic to a pessimistic concept of providence is immediately apparent if we examine the role of providence in relation to the play's objectives stated in the Prologues and Epilogue. The primary intention of Douglas is to evoke pity for the untimely death of youthful valour and for thwarted maternal love. The Edinburgh Prologue combines appeals to Scottish national pride and to compassion for the "woes of heroes" by emphasising Douglas' role in the play, whereas the London Prologue draws the audience's attention to the domestic woes of Lady Randolph in order to avoid acerbating Scottish-English rivalries and to found its appeal for pity on universal bases of filial affection. The Epilogue confirms

the appeals of the Prologues by arguing that tragedy produces pleasure through the "overflow" of pity, which leads to "celestial melancholy."⁵ Although Douglas is free from the didacticism characteristic of much mid-eighteenth-century tragedy, the Epilogue claims a moral efficacy for the overflow of pleasurable pity; when the waves of pity retire, "They leave behind them such a golden soil, / That there the virtues without culture grow."

The principal source of the woes leading to pity for both Douglas and Lady Randolph is providence which "oft decrees an undeserved doom." No single character or combination of characters is able to control the action of the play, nor is any faced with choosing between two worthy sets of conflicting values; instead, nearly all actions of consequence are attributed to fate, and no character can or does assume responsibility for what happens. Although the title-page calls the play a tragedy and bears Douglas' name, it is clearly not his tragedy. He makes no decisions of moral consequence, nor is he in any way responsible for his death, which is blamed on "heaven"; Home's interest in Douglas extends only to the pathos inherent in the cosmic irony of his situation. Similarly, Lady Randolph's situation is exploited for the pathos of undeserved suffering at the hands of fate. The play revolves around her progression from grief for her lost husband and son, to momentary happiness at the unexpected recovery of her son, to despair and suicide after his death. But in the present action of Douglas, Lady Randolph's only decisions are those of timing for securing her son's inheritance, nor is she responsible for her suffering.⁶

Although Home's handling of providence effectively serves his primary intention of evoking pity, it works against the claim of moral efficacy set forth in the Epilogue.⁷ Tears of compassion flow more freely if the object of pity is innocence suffering an undeserved fortune at the hands of forces he cannot control, but the Epilogue does not view pity as an end in itself since virtues are to grow in the soil prepared by compassionate tears. The progression of the play is not well suited to encourage such growth if submission to or confidence in the will of God is to be numbered among the "virtues"; the virtuous heroine, after all, does abandon, with ample justification, the faith in divine justice which constitutes part of her initial appeal. The optimistic questions regarding divine justice raised by characters early in the play and the didactic side-effect

claimed by the Epilogue ultimately conflict with the dramatic demands of the central effect of the play.

Documentation

1. James Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. G.B. Hill, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper, 1904), V, 410.
2. Douglas was first performed at Edinburgh in December 1756, and at London in March, 1757. The best general discussion of Home is Alice E. Gipson, John Home; A Study of His Life and Works (Caldwell, Ida: Caxton Printers, 1916). For discussions of Douglas in relation to romanticism, see Hubert J. Tunney's introduction to Home's 'Douglas' (Lawrence, Kan.: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1924), and Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama 1660-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1952), III, 91-92; Bertrand Evans, Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1947), discusses Douglas as a precursor of Gothic drama.
All references to Douglas are to British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan, ed. George H. Nettleton, Arthur E. Case, and George W. Stone, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969).
3. From an account of a libel prepared by the Dalkeith presbytery against Alexander Carlyle given in the Scots' Magazine, as quoted by Gipson, p.80.
4. One pamphlet, reputedly written by John Haldane, an Edinburgh upholsterer, mentions Home's "doctrine of a necessity of sinning, and so making God the author of sin" (quoted in Gipson, p.104). More pertinent is the following comment in a review appearing in the Critical Review for March, 1757: "...the fate of Douglas and Matilda, who are both innocent, is scarce reconcileable with poetical justice, which seems to have been violated by their deaths, so that the audience has reason to cry out with Lady Randolph, 'Hear, justice, hear, are these the fruits of virtue?'".
5. The Epilogue may have been written by either Home or Barry, who played Douglas in the first London cast. Whether Home wrote it or not, he certainly approved of it since it is contained in the first Edinburgh edition, the first London edition, and all later editions. For a very useful discussion of textual problems in the play, see Dougald MacMillan, "The First Editions of Home's Douglas," Studies in Philology, 26 (1929), 401-409.
6. There is potential for tragic action in Lady Randolph's past; eighteen years before the current action, she deceived her father about her secret marriage, choosing love for Douglas above love for her father, and this is partially responsible for her misery. In one of the few pointed morals in the play, Lady Randolph remarks that "The first truth / Is easiest to avow. This moral learn, / This precious moral, from my tragic tale"

- (I.201-204). Home chooses not to develop this aspect of Lady Randolph's tale; it is not mentioned again, and all subsequent actions are viewed by Lady Randolph and those sympathetic to her as the work of "omnipotence."
7. The pre-eminent role accorded fate also vitiates much of the potential for tragic action in Douglas. However, the Prologues make it clear that Home strives for pity, not for pity and fear.



LOOKING AT JOHNSON'S LIFE OF DRYDEN

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Biography, as a literary form, derives its impetus, principally, from one inherent prompting in man, the instinct of curiosity. The commemorative and the didactic instincts, although elements of equal importance when viewed separately and in their own right, point back, ultimately, in the full circle of such motivation, to the instinct of curiosity, to one's eagerness for knowledge of the life of another man. Without curiosity, instruction and remembrance have no force.

This curiosity, in turn, focuses quite naturally on one aspect of the other's life: on the curious. Behind our general interest in the institutions of the subject's time, the expressions of his character, and the habits of his mind, lies our particular interest in the individual and the private, the intimate and the peculiar, the intuitive and the personal. We know this is where the subject lived most of his life, if he lived at all, and this is the facet of his life which most interests us. Our particular interest underlies our general curiosity.

Man is a curiously private creature who spends most of his time enquiring after that which has privacy and curiosity. Tell him about your subject's personal relations, his relation to himself, to his parentage, his youth, his education, his wife, or dog, or horse, or what you will; but tell him about your subject's personal world. He will go in search of these elements, nonetheless, write what you will. Neglect these elements in your narrative, and you have lost your reader. Indeed, fail in this regard, and you have not written a

biography, you have made a record. The instinct of curiosity motivates the writing, as well as the reading, of all good biography.

With probably only one clear exception, his own great biographer, Samuel Johnson knew these things as well as any man of his day. Indeed, in relation to the writing of Dryden's Life, he knew them better than any man of his day. After having gathered a considerable amount of material, he once abandoned such a project, apparently, because of the "great difficulty of obtaining authentick information" (*italics added*).¹ (Derrick, with whom he was working at the time, went on and completed the project by himself). "Speaking of the great difficulty of obtaining authentick information," Boswell tells us, Johnson confided to friends in 1776, "When I was a young fellow, I wanted to write the 'Life of Dryden.'"²

Ironically enough, however, less than one year later, he "treated with booksellers on a bargain" "to write little Lives, and little Prefaces, to a little edition of The English Poets," and two years later, published almost three hundred pages on the subject (except for his Life of Pope, the longest biography of them all). The Dryden narrative begins with this sentence: "Of the great poet whose life I am about to delineate, the curiosity which his reputation must excite will require a display more ample than can now be given."³ The first half of the work, the biography proper, concludes with this one: "So slight and so scanty is the knowledge which I have been able to collect concerning the private life and domestic manners of a man whom every English generation must mention with reverence as a critic and a poet" (192). (The second half of the work deals entirely with Dryden's works.)

In a word, Johnson's Life of Dryden commits biography's unpardonable sin: It omits the man John Dryden from his own life story. The reader's curiosity turns in every which direction.

Social history? Delightful! How delightful, for example, to discover that the laureate's salary "one hundred pounds a year and a tierce of wine" (26) represented "a revenue in those days not inadequate to the conveniencies of life" (26). Or that because of the disreputable character of the playhouses in Dryden's time "a grave lawyer would have debased his dignity, by appearing in those mansions of dissolute licentiousness" (87). Or that many persons in those days, Dryden among them, "put great confidence in the prognostications of judicial astrology" (191).

Literary history? Intriguing! According to one critic, Johnson was the first to suggest that a patch was placed upon Bayes's nose, a character from Birmingham's play, Rehearsal, in order to denote the current laureate, Davenant, whose "nose had suffered such diminution by mishap among the women" (98). He also contributed this new piece of information, one of the rare particulars on Dryden's personal habits. Speaking of the same character, Bayes, and his convertible use to ridicule the reigning poet, at that time Dryden, he says: "Bayes, when he is to write is blooded and purged: this, as Lamotte relates himself to have heard, was the real practice of the poet" (99). My favourite piece concerns his remarks on the popularity of the poem "Absolom and Achitophel." "Of this poem," he begins, "in which personal satire was applied to the support of public principles, and in which therefore every mind was interested, the reception was eager, and the sale so large, that my father, an old bookseller, told me he had not known it equalled but by Sacheverell's trial" (109).

Personality? Yes! Samuel Johnson's. In fact, more than any other single factor, it is the overwhelming presence of the author that dominates this entire work: his literary style, point of view, character, habits of mind, etc. Although I'm not sure one calls more than the sum of these parts personality, I am sure one calls the sum person of these parts Samuel Johnson.

Of Johnson's style in the Dryden, as well as in most of the Lives, the significant feature is the openness, the authentic attitude of enquiry, the persistent probing into the question of biography, the question of John Dryden. This is the actual driving force. There is an enthusiasm, a vigour and vitality, a dynamic thrust into the question: be it personal or historical, psychological or social, moral or literary, biographical or critical. The movement is nearly always free-swinging, independent, unpredictable. It is always forceful, positive, penetrating, incisive - sometimes "victorious." Lytton Strachey called it Johnson's "searching sense of actuality".⁴ It is a restless activity, an intense passion for enquiry, a compulsive instinct for curiosity. W.K. Wimsatt, in his brilliant analysis of Johnson's style, describes the movement in perfect terms: "Johnson is like a man who marches a short length in one direction, hitting to right and left as he goes, hammers three times at the end, then turns at right angles or back again and repeats. Logical progression is of that sort; it moves by distinctions, which are antitheses, which may be jerks."⁵

Almost any passage can serve to illustrate. Here is Johnson on Dryden's reputed ability to please his superiors. Notice the "jerks." "The merit of pleasing must, however, be estimated by the means. Favour is not always gained by good actions or laudable qualities. Caresses and preferment are often bestowed on the auxiliaries of vice, the procurers of pleasure, or the flatterers of vanity. Dryden has never been charged with any personal agency unworthy of a good character: he abetted vice and vanity only with his pen. One of his enemies has accused him of lewdness in his conversation; but if accusation without proof be credited, who shall be innocent" (169). The passage then begins to swell through larger forms of parallelism. "Of the mind that can trade in corruption, and can deliberately pollute itself with ideal wickedness for the sake of spreading the contagion in society, I wish not to conceal or excuse the depravity. Such degradation of the dignity of genius, such abuse of superlative abilities..." (170). And the more the passage "swells" the more certain it becomes: hence, the less open. "Of dramatic immorality," Johnson continues, "he did not want examples among his predecessors, or companions among his contemporaries; but in the meanness and servility of hyperbolical adulation I know not whether, since the days in which the Roman emperors were deified, he has been equalled, except by Afra Behn in an address to Eleanor Gwyn. When once he has undertaken the task of praise he no longer retains shame in himself, nor supposes it in his patron..." Here, he begins to close more and more tightly. "Of this kind of meanness he never seems to decline the practice, or lament the necessity: he considers the great as entitled to encomiastick homage, and brings praise rather as a tribute than as a gift, more delighted with the fertility of his invention than mortified by the prostitution of his judgement." With the next sentence he closes even further. "It is indeed not certain on these occasions that his judgement much rebelled against his interest." Then, finally and completely, slams the door. "There are minds which easily sink into submission, that look on grandeur with undistinguishing reverence, and discover no defect where there is elevation of rank and affluence of riches" (172).

Thus, has he come full circle in his narrative. And thus, do we encounter the complementary feature of Johnson's style in the Dryden, indeed, in his prose style per se: the general certitude with which he presents his narrative, the counter-movement. The how is complemented by the what. It is an attitude of finality, of reply and response, a consistent

ordering and concluding of the question of biography, the question of John Dryden. This is the actual restraining force. There is a compulsion towards centrality, a distinctive symmetry of balance, a closing up and rolling back, a dynamic recoil out of the question: be it biographical or critical. The movement is nearly always restrictive, predictable, dependent, dogmatic, orthodox, immovable. It is always confident, commanding, definitive, precise, correct, formal - sometimes "victorious." Lytton Strachey called it Johnson's "combined command of sanity and paradox."⁶ It is this "blessed rage for order," to use a phrase from Wallace Stevens, this obsessive need for certainty, that Wimsatt describes in the above quotation when he writes, "Johnson...hammers three times at the end."*

- * This discussion of Johnson's prose style in the Dryden was strongly influenced by Walter Jackson Bate's discussion of Johnson's prose style in his excellent study The Achievement of Samuel Johnson (New York, 1955), pp.170-76.

Documentation

1. Boswell's Life, ed. cit., III, 71. For a full discussion of his efforts to gather such material, working in concert with Derrick, see Professor Osborn's treatment of the subject in the above cited work, John Dryden: Some Biographical Facts and Problems, pp. 22-38. See also the previous chapter on Derrick's Dryden.
2. Ibid.
3. Johnson's Lives, "Life of Dryden," ed. G.B.Hill (Oxford 1905), I, 331. All subsequent references to Johnson's Life of Dryden are to that edition and volume by paragraph as part of the text.
4. Michael Joyce, Samuel Johnson (New York, 1955), p.150.
5. W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale Press, 1941), pp.46-47.
6. Michael Joyce, Johnson, op. cit. (above, note 4).



FIELDING'S FIRST ASSAULT ON GEORGE WHITEFIELD
AND PARSON ADAMS' "GOOD TURK"

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Fielding's satire upon the Methodist, George Whitefield in Shamela, Joseph Andrews and such later works as Tom Jones and Amelia is primarily directed at Whitefield's insistence that Salvation is achieved through Faith alone, not Good Works. The strong moral bias of the theology Fielding shared with the latitudinarian divines and such contemporaries as Bishop Benjamin Hoadly naturally led him to spurn the "detestable Doctrine of Faith over good Works" as an antinomian threat to public morality, a convenient cloak for pious hypocrisy and an insult to the just benevolence of God.¹ However, there is hitherto ignored evidence that "Libels" by Whitefield in 1740 upon Archbishop Tillotson, the popular classic of divinity, The Whole Duty of Man, and, slightly later, Bishop Hoadly, rather than the Methodist's doctrines, were the irritants that first led Fielding to join the satiric chorus against Whitefield.

Until the early summer of 1740, Fielding's writings reveal little interest in Whitefield or the Methodists. His only earlier allusion to Whitefield is a brief passage in a Lucianic dream-vision of the dead crossing the river Styx in the Champion for May 24, 1740, which ambiguously balances satire upon Whitefield and upon his antagonist, Joseph Trapp, and which may imply that Fielding's attitude toward Whitefield may still have been somewhat mixed. Whitefield had been attacked by Joseph Trapp in 1739 for demanding that the clergy return to the piety and poverty of the early church,² but the "Apology for the Clergy" series in the Champion (March 6 and 29, April 5, 12 and 19, 1740) repeats Whitefield's demand, and in Joseph Andrews (I,xvii) Parson Adams observes that if Whitefield had gone no further than demanding clerical reform, "I should have remained, as I once was, his well-wisher."

In late June, 1740, however, Fielding began to satirise Whitefield with great regularity and a specific focus. Whitefield's abhorrence of the moral bias of the theology that had dominated the Church of England since the

later seventeenth century led him violently and rather narrowmindedly to condemn Archbishop Tillotson and The Whole Duty of Man for slighting the crucial necessity of spiritual Regeneration. The Archbishop is attacked in a pamphlet published early in 1740 by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia: Three Letters from the Reverend Mr. G. Whitefield ...to a Friend in London...Wherein he Vindicates his Asserting that Archbishop Tillotson Knew No More of True Christianity than Mahomet. Attributing the sentiment to John Wesley, who first expressed it "in a private Society, when he was expounding part of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and proving the Doctrine of Justification in the Sight of God, by Faith alone, in contradistinction to good Works", Whitefield asserts of Tillotson's sermons that "any spiritual Man who reads them, may easily see that the Archbishop knew of no other than a bare historical Faith: and as to the Method of our Acceptance with God through Faith alone (which is the Doctrine of the Scripture and the Church of England) he certainly was as ignorant thereof as Mahomet himself." (p.3.) Utterly lacking in the caution that led Wesley to confine his sentiment to "a private Society" and a year later (July 25, 1741) to suppress a sermon attacking Tillotson for holding principles that "sap the very foundation of our Church,"³ Whitefield soon created a stir in London by publishing "A Letter from the Reverend Mr. Whitefield to a Friend in London, showing the Fundamental Error of a Book, intituled, the Whole Duty of Man" in the Daily Advertiser for July 3, 1740. It attacks the general stress on good Works in contemporary Church of England theology, and both condemns The Whole Duty of Man as showing "no true knowledge of the true gospel of Jesus Christ" since it never mentions "Regeneration" and repeats his insult to Tillotson. At about the same time, in A Short Account of the Dealings of God with the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, Whitefield also warned that Bishop Hoadly would be condemned by the "most high" for reducing the Lord's Supper to "a bare memorial" in A Plain Account of the Nature and End of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (1735). Though Fielding did not satirise the attack upon Hoadly until he composed Shamela in 1741, the assaults on Tillotson and The Whole Duty of Man in the Daily Advertiser provoked an immediate response.

In the "Puffs" section of the Champion for July 1, Fielding sarcastically advertised, "The Whole Duty of Man to be destroyed in tomorrow's Advertiser, by Apostle Whitefield," beginning a satiric campaign against Whitefield's "Libels" that was continued in that section of almost every issue through July and occasionally thereafter through the fall:

The not mentioning the Word Regeneration, the Fundamental error of the Whole Duty of Man, on the credit of Apostle Whitefield.--Archbishop Tillotson prov'd to be a Turk, by the said Apostle. (July 3.) Archbishop Tillotson no more a Christian than Mahomet, according to Apostle Whitefield. (July 5.) Mr. John Wesley to preach a Benefit Sermon at Kennington--Deacon Seaward to attend...and deliver Spiritual Libels on Archbishop Tillotson (July 19.)

Whitefield himself was later to regret that he had injured his "blessed cause" by being "too rash and hasty in giving characters...of...persons." And, as the satire in the Champion shows, Whitefield initially earned Fielding's active enmity by exercising what another angry contemporary described as a tendency to "depreciate the religious Works of all other Authors." Fielding's indignation did not rapidly cool, for though Shamela and Joseph Andrews concentrate upon ridiculing Whitefield's doctrine of Faith over Works, both include satiric allusions to the "Libels" of 1740.

Shamela's tiny "library" (Letter XII) significantly groups "The Whole Duty of Man, with only the Duty to one's neighbour torn out" with Whitefield's Short Account and another work that had attacked Hoadly's Plain Account, Thomas Bowyer's A True Account of the Nature, End, and efficacy of the Lord's Supper; being a Full Answer to the Plain Account (1736). Another ironic thrust at the attack on The Whole Duty of Man is blended with the satire on Richardson's vanity in Parson Tinkletext's letter to Parson Oliver, which thus concludes its praise of Shamela as an incomparable moral guide: "Happy would it be for Mankind, if all other Books were burnt....Thou alone art sufficient to teach us as much Morality as we want. Dost thou not teach us to pray, to sing Psalms, and to honour the Clergy? Are not these the Whole Duty of Man? Forgive me, O Author of Pamela, mentioning the Name of a Book so unequal to thine." Finally, Shamela's enumeration (Letter IX) of the topics covered in the sermon preached by Parson Williams (which satirises the doctrines of Whitefield and, in places, Joseph Trapp) includes an item (my italics) mocking Whitefield's "Libels" on those stressing Good Works: "That to go to Church, and to pray, and to sing Psalms, and to honour the Clergy, and to repent is true Religion; and 'tis not doing good to one another, for that is one of the greatest sins we can commit, when we don't do it for the sake of Religion."

That Those People who talk of Vartue and Morality, are the wickedest of all Persons."

There is no allusion to Whitefield's condemnation of The Whole Duty of Man in Joseph Andrews, though it is one of the "Good Books" that have influenced the virtuous Joseph (I,iii), but Whitefield's attacks upon Tillotson are ironically ridiculed twice in the "Barnabas" chapters, in one instance in combination with a defense of Hoadly's Plain Account. Barnabas' halting and illogical attempt to prepare Joseph for death near the end of Book I, chapter xiii is a reductive parody of Whitefield's theological emphasis, for he very unclearly describes "Grace" attained by "Prayer and Faith" as the key to Salvation, then shows his ignorance of the nature of Christian Charity in an absurdly inept attempt to convince Joseph that he must forgive the thieves who injured him. Not surprisingly, only a few pages later (I,xvi) Barnabas speaks slightly of Tillotson's sermons when the surgeon praises the moral efficacy of one he heard in his youth: "...as for Tillotson, to be sure he was a good Writer, and said things very well: but Comparisons are odious, another Man may write as well as he - I believe there are some of my Sermons... His reply, in such a context, not only recalls Whitefield's sneers at Tillotson, but implies that they were motivated by professional jealousy.

Fielding's principal assault on Whitefield, both as theologian and as polemicist, is, however, found in the discussion in Book I, chapter xvii between Parsons Barnabas and Adams and the Bookseller. Their discussion centres around Adams' much-quoted denunciation of Whitefield's stress on Faith over Works, but is flanked by arguments between Adams and Barnabas over the merits of Whitefield's call for clerical reform and Hoadly's Plain Account, which is attacked by Barnabas, as it had been by Whitefield, Bowyer and others, and defended by Adams as written "with the Pen of an Angel." Though the background of these flanking arguments is well known, one significance of the placement of Adams' doctrinal attack between reminders of Whitefield's polemical skirmishings, circa 1739-40, has escaped notice since the appropriateness of such a context is only apparent when it is recognised that Adams' attack upon Whitefield's doctrines ends with a stinging ironical rebuke to his "Libels" upon Tillotson in 1740.

Adams first states his objections (and, no doubt, Fielding's) to Whitefield's "Detestable Doctrine of Faith over good Works," stressing that it threatens the basis of

public morality, encourages hypocrisy and insults the benevolence and justice of God. Adams goes on, however, in answer to a question from the bookseller, to oppose the doctrines in his own Sermons to Whitefield's. His brief "credo" combines an extreme statement of his moralistic doctrine of Salvation with what seems to me to be an obvious, though subtle allusion to Whitefield's description of Tillotson as "as ignorant" of the doctrine of Salvation through Faith alone "as Mahomet himself." The relationship between Adams' answer and Whitefield's "Libel" is especially apparent in the light of Fielding's "translation" of the latter in the Champion for July 3, 1740 ("Archbishop Tillotson prov'd to be a Turk") and Fielding's habit of satirising Whitefield's pompous dependence on the authority of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans by calling him "Apostle Whitefield":

"Ay, Sir...the contrary, I thank Heaven, is inculcated in almost every page, or I should belye my own Opinion which hath always been, that a virtuous and good Turk, or Heathen, are more acceptable in the sight of their Creator, than a vicious and wicked Christian, tho' his Faith was as perfectly Orthodox as St. Paul's himself."

The recognition of Fielding's deft insertion of an answer to Whitefield's "Libel" on Tillotson's memory as a "coda" to Adams' denunciation of the Methodist's doctrines may not, moreover, do final justice to his satiric finesse. One additional stroke of satiric appropriateness is implicit in the suggestion that Adams' remark about the "good Turk" may echo a passage in Bishop Hoadly's sermon The Nature of the Kingdom, or the Church of Christ:

"We may be...certain, that an honest Heathen is much more acceptable to {God}, than a dishonest and deceitful Christian; and that a charitable and good-natured Pagan has a better Title to his Favour, than a cruel and barbarious Christian; let him be never so orthodox in his Faith."

Adams goes on immediately to defend Hoadly's Plain Account and there is a tempting irony in rebuking Whitefield's insult to Tillotson in the style of Hoadly, a fellow victim. Nor are the possibilities yet exhausted, for there is even greater ironical appropriateness in the possibility that Adams' remark was inspired by Tillotson's own sermons. One of Tillotson's favourite targets was the antinomian insistence that Faith alone, to the exclusion of Works, is the key to

Salvation, and from first to last Adams' denunciation of this "Detestable Doctrine" reproduces with great fidelity, though in brief, the basic arguments of literally dozens of Tillotson's sermons. More specifically, Adams' preference of the "good Turk" to the vicious Pharisee (as indeed Hoadly's preference of the "honest Heathen") echoes a commonplace sentiment in Tillotson's sermons:

Better had it been thou hadst never known one syllable of the Gospel, never heard the name of Christ, than that having taken it upon thee thou shouldst not depart from iniquity. Happy had it been for thee, that thou hadst been born a Jew, or a Turk, or a poor Indian, rather than that being bred among Christians, and professing thyself of that number, thou shouldst lead a vicious and unholy life.

The temptation is strong to see the most ringing of Fielding's denunciations of Whitefield's theology not only as interwoven with a rebuttal of his attacks in 1740 on the memory of Archbishop Tillotson, but also as a "Tillotsonian sermon" in which the great divine (in company, perhaps, with his fellow sufferer, Hoadly) has the last word from beyond the grave.

Documentation

1. Joseph Andrews, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Middletown, Conn., 1967), p.83. Future quotations will be from this edition and will be cited by book and chapter references in the text.
2. Trapp's sermons on the text, "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise" were answered in Whitefield's sermon, "The Folly and Danger of being not righteous enough". The Champion for May 24, 1740 mocks Trapp as well as Whitefield, for the Methodist is convinced not to be "righteous overmuch" by another passenger to Hades and both are thus allowed to enter Charon's boat.
3. The sermon (on the text: "How is the faithful city become a harlot") was to have been preached before the University in Oxford, but was suppressed on the advice of Lady Hertford until after Wesley's death. See The Works of John Wesley (Grand Rapids, Michigan, n.d.), vii, pp. 454-6.
4. Fielding also attacked Whitefield's extreme stress on Faith over Works for the first time in the Champion essay for August 26, 1740.
5. A Defense of the Author of the Whole Duty of Man, from the False Charges and Gross Misrepresentations of Mr. WhitefieldBy a Presbyter of the Church of England (Reading, 1740), p.40.

Whitefield's admission of his youthful rashness is recorded in The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield, M.A. (London, 1771), ii, p.144.

6. All quotations from Shamela are from Joseph Andrews and Shamela, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Boston, 1961).
7. Parson Barnabas' name may be intended to associate him with Whitefield since St. Barnabas is remembered for introducing St. Paul to the Apostles and accompanying him on his first mission to convert the Gentiles (Acts: 9-14) Whitefield's dependence on Pauline authority was so continual that Fielding called him "The Apostle Whitefield".
8. The parallel is suggested by Martin C. Battestin in Joseph Andrews (Middletown, Conn., 1967), p.83n.
9. The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson...containing Fifty Four Sermons, 8th ed. (London, 1720), p.78. A further double parallel may also suggest Tillotson's influence. Almost immediately before preferring the "good Turk," Adams rejects the idea that it will "be a good plea for the villain at the last day" to say "'Lord, it is true, I never obeyed one of thy commandments, yet punish me not, for I believe them all.'" One sermon of Tillotson's combines both of Adams' sentiments in a single paragraph, in which he insists that, "It will not be sufficient at the Day of Judgement, to plead our Profession of Faith in Christ and to say Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name," and maintains that, "Of the two I have more hopes of him that denies the Divinity of Christ, and lives otherwise soberly, and righteously, and godly in the World, than of the Man who owns Christ to be the Son of God, and lives like a Child of the Devil." The Works of John Tillotson, Late Archbishop of Canterbury (London, 1717), i, p.492.



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HEARTS OF OAK BENEFIT SOCIETY

WALTER ROBERT MATTHEWS

1881-1973

When Samuel Johnson spoke of "the full tide of human existence at Charing Cross", and when he said that to be tired of London was to be tired of life, he proclaimed himself a great Londoner. Walter Matthews had an even greater claim to be so called, for he was born in London and except for the three years which he spent in Exeter his whole life was lived in London. The greater part of his life's work was done at King's College, London, where he was Dean and Professor, and at St. Paul's Cathedral, of which he was Dean in a distinguished line of Deans, both places being within little more than a mile of Charing Cross, and between them that most Johnsonian of London thoroughfares, Fleet Street. One of his earlier appointments was that of Assistant Chaplain at the Magdalen Hospital in Streatham, successor to the Magdalen Hospital in Blackfriars Road, associated with Johnson through its ill-fated Chaplain, Dr. Dodd.

It was, however, in more than a local sense that a kinship existed between Walter Matthews and Samuel Johnson. No one could have had a deeper appreciation and understanding of Johnson than Matthews, and though he was far from sharing all Johnson's opinions and prejudices he was in many ways an eighteenth-century character whom we could picture as finding a congenial intellectual home in the circle which gathered round Johnson. It is perhaps significant that his first published work was an edition of the ethical writings of the eighteenth-century Bishop Butler. Certainly his mental outlook was more typical of the Age of Reason than of the present age with its competing fanaticisms and contending ideologies. He believed (with the Cambridge Platonists, so beloved by his predecessor at St. Paul's, Dr. Inge) that "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord"; that human reason is capable of attaining to at least a partial knowledge of God; and that no sincere quest after truth can ever lead away from Him. Matthews shared, too, the optimism characteristic of the eighteenth-century, though on a deeper level. His was not the philosophical optimism which declared this "the best

of all possible worlds", but the religious optimism grounded in a profound faith in God and in His providential and redemptive overruling of human life and history, a faith which stood the test of his personal experience of evil in the bombing of London, and still more in the death of his brilliant elder son, Michael, while serving with the Navy at Dunkirk. Intellectually and religiously a liberal, he represented less a dogmatic liberalism than a liberality of mind which was wide in sympathy, generous in judgement, and receptive, if at times critically, of new ideas and insights.

Shortly after his appointment as Dean of St. Paul's Walter Matthews was elected President of our Society, and on his retirement he took an honoured place among our Vice-Presidents. From time to time he addressed the Society - one recalls papers by him on William Law and Bishop Berkeley - and it was always a pleasure for us and for him when he took the chair at our meetings. We in the Johnson Society of London will cherish the memory of Walter Matthews and of his long association with us. His intellectual integrity and mature wisdom, his transparent sincerity and personal goodness, his deep and undaunted faith, entitle him to be coupled with Samuel Johnson in our thankful, affectionate and admiring remembrance.

A. R. Winnett



COMMEMORATION 1973

The Annual Commemoration took place in Westminster Abbey on 15th December. The Ven. E. F. Carpenter conducted the service and the Mayor of Lichfield laid the wreath on Johnson's grave. The address was given by Mr. M. M. Hallett, Chairman of the Johnson Society (of Lichfield).

Following the Commemoration, the Christmas Luncheon was held at the White Hall Hotel, where Professor J. P. W. Rogers addressed the Johnson Society of London on "Travel and Travellers in Dr. Johnson's Day". The chair was taken by Mr. Henry Callender, President of the Johnson Society (of Lichfield).

The occasion was both memorable and enjoyable - the more so as the proceedings were shared with our friends from Lichfield.

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