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Mrs LENOX.

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CHARLOTTE LENNOX, FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN PLAYWRIGHT?*

Wendy Nelson-Cave, Ph.D.

Charlotte Ramsay Lennox (c.1720-1804) is generally considered to be the first woman born in America to have written a play which was both professionally produced and published, and which had the added distinction of being the first American play to be translated into a foreign language. The Sister (1769) was a sentimental comedy based upon a portion of her novel, Henrietta (1758). Charlotte Lennox is also credited by some scholars with being the first American novelist, since her novels The Life of Harriot Stuart (1751), and Euphemia (1790), are the first to depict American backgrounds.

These distinctions are disputed, however, because of the scantiness of knowledge of the author's early life in America and the contradictions within what is known. Her subsequent life and death in England are well documented, and virtually all of her work seems to have been written there. She therefore appears to be an English author, although perhaps Anglo-American would be a more accurate description. There is agreement on the excellence of her best novel, The Female Quixote (1752), the first of a line of imitations of Cervantes, in which Mrs. Lennox burlesques the French heroic romances of the seventeenth century, and also on the importance of her Shakespear Illustrated (1753), the first work in which the sources of Shakespeare's plays are identified and an attempt made to compare them with his treatment.

Charlotte Lennox was a prolific and versatile author who was noted as a poet, playwright, translator, adaptor, critic, and above all as a novelist. Although all of her literary work was published in the first instance in England where most of it was written, Philippe Sejourne in his book The Mystery of Charlotte Lennox: First Novelist of Colonial America (1967), suggests that some of her early poetry was written before she left America. Her early life in America is indeed a mystery, and the confusion arises from the fact that she herself gave biographical data which modern scholarship has revealed as at least partially untrue. In 1792, twelve years before her death in ill-health and poverty, her case was introduced to the Royal Literary Fund by friends in hopes of

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Chairman: Revd. F.M. Hodgess Roper

obtaining some aid for her. In consequence, Mrs. Lennox declared to the Fund that she was born in New York in 1720, the daughter of the Royalist Governor of the colony, Colonel James Ramsay. But when Miriam Small wrote the first full-length biography of Charlotte Lennox in 1935, certain contradictions appeared. In her severe distress, Mrs. Lennox almost certainly lied about the position of her father, and she was probably born later than 1720. It must be stressed that she was by all accounts a sterling character, and if she lied it was because of her pressing need. She may have seen an advantage in representing herself as the daughter of the Governor, and as older than she actually was. But there is no reason to think she lied about the place of her birth, and most authorities accept that she was born in New York, either Albany or New York City.

It was also held until recently that young Charlotte Ramsay went to England in 1735 when she was about fifteen years old, but obviously a later birth date puts her departure for England at about 1743. She left either just prior to her father's death or shortly thereafter. She may have been anywhere from fifteen to her early twenties when she arrived in London. The reason for her emigration to Britain is also the subject of speculation. Some versions say she was not told of her father's death, but was sent to England to finish her education and to live with a wealthy aunt. On arrival the aunt was found to be insane and no provision made for Charlotte. Both of her parents having now died and left her no property, she was thrown on her own resources. But Sejourne has made an exhaustive study of her two American novels, which are thought to be autobiographical, and he upholds a nineteenth-century source which claims her mother did not die until 1765 in New York. Her mother did not send her to England to finish her education, but to be rid of her, and thus Miss Ramsay was left to educate herself. In her old age, Charlotte Lennox writes despairingly of finding enough money to send her wayward son to her relatives in America, so evidently she did keep in touch with these relatives throughout the Revolution.

What is beyond doubt is that her circumstances on arrival as a young woman in London were either desperate, or shortly became so. The overwhelming evidence of her life-long diligence and her continued poverty, make it likely that she was self-educated. She turned almost at once to her pen to earn her living, as she was devoted to literature and in addition had an amazing gift for languages. She never returned to America.

In London, Charlotte Ramsay soon came under the patronage of Lady Rockingham. Their friendship was short-lived, and she passed to the sponsorship of her ladyship's sister, Lady Finch. It was to the latter that Charlotte Ramsay dedicated her first book, a volume of poems entitled Poems on Several Occasions (1747). The year was a momentous one, for in addition to her book,she married Alexander Lennox. Their marriage is recorded at St. George's Church, Mayfair, in a manner to increase the mystery, for here the bride is referred to as Barbara Ramsay. Perhaps her name was Barbara Charlotte. Mr. Lennox seems to have worked in the printing business, but unfortunately he proved to be shiftless and irresponsible. Although their marriage may have been happy for a time, it was not long before she undertook his support and that of the two children born to them. Her marital situation became well-known to her many literary friends and aristocratic benefactors, and Charlotte Lennox became an object of pity and charity.

Things looked brighter in the beginning when her first book received some favourable attention. But she soon turned to acting, probably more out of financial need than vocation for the stage. Indeed, we have Horace Walpole's word for her being a "deplorable actress." Her career was brief, her last appearance being in 1750. Literature was more her forte, and in addition to her first book, individual poems were published by her and several pieces written to her appeared in print. Mrs. Lennox is also mentioned in correspondence about this time, and it is clear that a number of educated ladies had taken a dislike to her. This feminine disapprobation was to continue throughout her life, and is in marked contrast to the high esteem in which she was held by many prominent men, including Johnson, Fielding, Goldsmith, Garrick and Richardson. Yet in spite of this, it is noteworthy that she retained a reputation for virtue even among her female enemies who had most cause to envy her popularity among male intellectuals. The most enduring and devoted of her friendships was that with Dr. Johnson. She is believed to have made his acquaintance sometime before 1751, and their friendship lasted some thirty odd years until his death.

At some point early in her career, Charlotte Lennox came under the patronage of the Duchess of Newcastle and this friendship does not seem to have ended as unfortunately as previous ones with titled ladies. In due course, Mrs. Lennox's third novel, Henrietta (1758), was dedicated to the

Duchess in its second edition. The Duchess seems at some point to have tried to find work for the lazy Mr. Lennox. One is struck by the enormous amount of assistance that Charlotte Lennox inspired in her long life. Obviously she was considered to be a talented and hard-working woman whose abilities and misfortunes merited assistance.

Dr. Johnson guided her literary efforts to a large extent. She may have met him originally through the printer, William Strahan. What is certain is that her friendship with Dr. Johnson was a firm one by the time of her publication of her first novel, The Life of Harriot Stuart (1751). This sentimental novel in two volumes was moderately well-received, and there is extant a charming description of a dinner party which Dr. Johnson gave for Mrs. Lennox to celebrate publication. He proposed to have an all-night dinner at the Devil Tavern to which he invited a group of twenty including the hapless Mr. Lennox. After an elegant meal which Dr. Johnson had particularly selected, he is recorded as performing a small ceremony of his own devising which culminated in his crowning the authoress with laurel. This was but the first of many attentions which he bestowed on Charlotte Lennox during the next three decades. In fact, her friendship with Dr. Johnson was the most important thing in her literary life, because he took an active interest in her work. This is especially interesting, since he had a reputation of being severe with female authors. The story was related how Johnson remarked to Boswell in 1784, "I dined yesterday at Mrs. Garrick's, with Mrs. Carter, Miss Hannah More, and Miss Fanny Burney. Three such women are not to be found: I know not where I could find a fourth, except Mrs. Lennox, who is superiour to them all."[1] Several others were present when he said this, and the remark was much quoted to the great advantage of Mrs. Lennox's reputation.

Her novel, The Life of Harriot Stuart, is interesting because the heroine is taken to be the authoress herself, and because the book is believed to be the first novel to make use of authentic American backgrounds written from first-hand knowledge. These include the Hudson River area, the fort of Albany, the Mohawk Valley, and the descriptions of events and people there in the 1740's. Her last novel, Euphemia, is even richer in Americana. These two novels have inspired two critical books, that of Sejourne, and Gustavus H.Maynadier's The First American Novelist? (1940). Not only these novels, but the importance of her play, The Sister, rests on her American connection.

It seems likely that the moderate success of her first novel and the encouragement of Dr. Johnson, not to mention her pressing financial need, resolved Mrs. Lennox to write a second novel. The Female Quixote; or, The Adventures of Arabella, was published in two volumes the following year. It is her most important work, and had numerous English editions as well as editions in Dublin, Hamburg, Lyon, Leipzig and Paris. Oxford University Press reprinted it in 1970. The novel was dedicated to the Earl of Essex, and the dedication along with possibly one of the chapters was written by Dr. Johnson.

The book begins a vogue for "Quixote novels" by other writers which continued for the next five decades. Her novel tells the story of a young girl who tries to live like the heroines of fashionable French fiction. Mrs. Lennox achieved fame with The Female Quixote, but her future books lacked the originality of this one, because she fell back on writing the very thing she had satirized.

It was about this time that Charlotte Lennox became friendly with Fielding, who wrote the most favourable and comprehensive review which her famous novel received. He actually rated her book higher than Cervantes.

The first literary influence of Mrs. Lennox's novel, and the only one of minor relevance here, was a play called Angelica; or, Quixote in Petticoats. This play was published anonymously in 1758, but was never staged. It has been attributed to Charlotte Lennox by some modern scholars, and obviously this two-act comedy is based upon her book, but most authorities consider the play to be spurious.

Charlotte Lennox was now in her full maturity as an author, and her other major work, Shakespear Illustrated (1753), followed right after The Female Quixote. She probably undertook this enormous task of Shakespearean scholarship at the suggestion of Dr. Johnson, but before doing so she considered it necessary to learn Italian. Her amazingly quick mastery of languages is impressive, not to mention the monumental task of locating and translating Shakespeare's sources. Had she left it at that, she would have been better off, for the critical appraisal which she included on the art of Shakespeare met with great disapprobation at the time and was injurious to her literary reputation. Worse still, it seems to have been the cause of the disastrous treatment of her play, The Sister, by a very hostile audience at Covent Garden some sixteen years later.

But the immense value of her Shakespearean work lies in the fact that it was the first detailed study of his sources, and moreover Mrs. Lennox accomplished this mostly from her own translations, and not from secondary translations. Of minor interest in the development of Charlotte Lennox the playwright, is her translation of Plautus' comedy, The Twin Menaechmi now wellknown as the principal source for The Comedy of Errors. A further point of interest is that Shakespear Illustrated was the only one of her works to be published in her birthplace within a near proximity to her lifetime. Volume one was published in Philadelphia in 1809, five years after her death.

The author undertook a massive amount of translation over the next five years by way of supporting her family. Unfortunately, this distracted her from more creative and original writing while she was in the prime of life. From the publication of The Female Quixote in 1752, until the publication of her first play, Philander, in 1757, she published exclusively translations and the actual period of labour on this group of volumes is probably much longer than five years. These include Memoirs of the Duke of Sully (1755), Memoirs of the Countess of Berci (1756), and Memoirs for the History of Madame De Maintenon (1757).

At this point, Charlotte Lennox turned back to original writing, and published her first play, the dramatic pastoral, Philander (1757). In due course she was the author of three published plays, which came out at rather widely separated intervals. After Philander in 1757, twelve years were to elapse before The Sister in 1769, and six years later she produced her last play, Old City Manners (1775). Mrs. Lennox's connection with the stage was singularly unsuccessful, beginning with her brief career as an actress. David Garrick refused to stage both Philander and The Sisters, although he did stage Old City Manners, which was written at his suggestion.

Her first play, Philander, differs from The Sister and Old City Manners in that it is a serious play in verse which is short, while the latter two are comedies of the usual length written in prose. Philander marks the end of her work as a poet, and it is written in the vein of her earlier love poems in blank verse. It was composed under the influence of her Italian tutor Giuseppe Baretti who, in 1754, had written an ode to Charlotte Lennox in which he urged her to continue writing love poetry, and implying that

he knew it was Dr. Johnson who was guiding her towards more austere topics. Nevertheless, Dr. Johnson did write the dedication for Philander which she signed and addressed to Lord Charlemont.

In its own day, Philander received at least two good reviews, of which an excerpt from the more interesting one in the Critical Review follows:

> Whether this piece has been offered to the stage we know not; but, even though the author may have suffered a repulse in that quarter; we will venture to recommend it as an ingenious performance...written with uncommon elegance and purity. The sentiments are proper, soft and delicate; the versification is varied, spirited and correct.[2]

Philander was successful enough to be reprinted in Dublin the following year. It impresses me today not only with the graceful simplicity of the verse and characters, but with the picturesque arrangement of the spectacle. It is true that the plot and characters are clichés of the period, but Philander is a more than competent representative of the dramatic pastoral, and is visually striking.

Structurally, the play consists of three acts of which the last requires two scenes. The locale is naturally Arcadia, described in the beginning as "an open plain, with a prospect of a wood at a distance." The scene later moves to a grove, and concludes at the temple of Apollo. Not only the locales but the characters are typical of the pastoral. Two sets of lovers are contrasted, Philander and Sylvia, and their young friends, Thirsis and Nerina. This symmetry is carried further by two opposing non-human characters, the satyr and Apollo. The only other character is Montano who, as a priest of Apollo, represents the link between the human and the divine. This small group of classical figures is backed up by several groups of silent characters, a party of nymphs, a herd of satyrs, and a procession of virgins.

Although the figures are stock characters of the pastoral, Sylvia has a touch of originality. She is a beautiful young lady who lives an unspoilt rural existence, but she has gone back on her word to marry the devoted Philander. This stubborn streak in her forms the basis for the very slight plot. The play is more about her than about Philander, and the feminine emphasis is noted right from the opening scene.

Another touch of originality is the author's technique of interpolating sung verses after virtually every spoken speech, which repeats or paraphrases the spoken dialogue. This device of short bursts of song to underscore the spoken word is used throughout the short play. Although it is not always clear who is doing the singing, the idea of a mysterious voice from the air is not inappropriate to the enchanted wood in which the story takes place. Actually, almost half of the slim content of Philander is taken up with song.

Mrs. Lennox's mammoth translation of the Greek drama entitled Father Brumoy's Greek Theatre was published two years after Philander. Not surprisingly, a number of Greek influences appear in her play such as the setting, certain characters, a deus ex machina, two choruses, and heavy use of music. It is likely that she had been working on the two projects simultaneously. In fact, one could call Philander a satyr play!

The first complication of the plot is the appearance of the satyr, who lusts after Sylvia. Although he is the villain of the piece, he is a rather charming villain, an animal figure who both sings and dances. There is also a chorus of satyrs who make a brief appearance at his command to sing and dance for the benefit of the two girls, but they are not impressed and steal away. As the story continues, Philander, a noble youth, professes his love for Sylvia and saves her from the satyr who, having found her sleeping alone in the woods, has accosted her. But Sylvia still scorns Philander. Montano, the father of Philander, informs his son of Apollo's command that she must either marry or be sacrificed to the god. His friend Thirsis expresses the fear that Philander will do himself some violence in his despair. Montano replies in one of the better speeches in the play.

Montano

Dismiss thy fears, thy unexperienc'd youth
Reads not the secret heart of varying woman;
Form'd to ensnare, and practis'd to delude,
She flies, but flying, hopes to be pursu'd,
With doubling arts long keeps the doubtful field,
And yields, or seems to force alone to yield.

(Act II)

Philander is a delicate play which keeps to the point, retaining a clarity of expression which, although poetic, is not marred by irrelevant flights of fancy. Written mainly in blank verse, the playwright breaks into rhymed couplets at the point of highest emotion, the scene where Philander declares his love. Yet as has been remarked, the charm of the piece derives as much from what would be seen if staged, as from what is said. The playwright is particularly strong in her arrangement of spectacle. Colourful aspects include the individual songs, the song and dance of the satyrs, the entrance of the nymphs with Sylvia, a solemn hymn and procession to the temple of Apollo involving virgins and other silent figures, the general costume especially that of the satyrs, and the spectacular climax of the descent of the god in his chariot on a bright cloud. Although a critic of 1757 took exception to this deus ex machina, it seems now to be in perfect keeping with the artificiality of the style.

A final point is worth noting about Philander, and that is that the play represents the first published play by an American woman. Although the piece may have more style than substance, it is a minor milestone.

Shortly after, Charlotte Lennox published her third novel, Henrietta (1758). This two-volume novel ranks second among her works of fiction. Dr. Johnson wrote the dedication for her, and also assisted with her next effort, a work of translation and criticism. Father Brumoy's Greek Theatre (1759), was published in three volumes and was based upon a French work of scholarship. Her efforts were unflagging, and it is not surprising that she suffered ill health from about 1759 until 1761, probably from overwork. In about 1761, Mrs. Lennox sat for her portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds. The picture was incomplete and is now lost, but is known from an inventory of the work of the artist and from two engravings which were made from it. A copy of one engraving hangs in Dr. Johnson's house.

It seems to be about the time of her portrait that Mrs. Lennox undertook to publish and edit her own magazine, known as the Lady's Museum. The first edition appeared on March 1, 1760, and the last on January 1, 1761. For her magazine, she wrote stories and articles, and re-published some of her earlier poems. Her new novel, Harriot and Sophia, first appeared in the magazine and was later re-published as Sophia (1762), in two volumes.

With the demise of her magazine, Charlotte Lennox was inactive for a time. During this period her daughter, Harriot Holles Lennox, was born in 1765. Her son, George Louis Lennox, was born a few years later. The age of Charlotte Lennox when her children were born has been remarked upon, because if we accept her birth date as 1720, she would have been 45 when her daughter was born and even older at the birth of her son. This would be somewhat unusual. Her life became even more troubled after 1765, as age and ill health increased the burdens which in insolvent husband put upon her.

The Sister (1769), belongs to the school of sentimental comedy. A letter written to David Garrick the year before indicates that it was the recent success of other female playwrights which encouraged Mrs. Lennox to try her own hand at comedy. She may have thought that writing for the stage would provide more income for her family than publishing a magazine, but this was not to be. Mrs. Lennox had known Garrick for some years, and she writes sending him The Sister which she says was written on a hint he had given her some years before. She begs him to read the play, promising to make what alterations he may require. It is not known why Garrick refused her comedy, but it was brought out instead by the rival playhouse, Covent Garden, on February 18, 1769. Although it was produced with a distinguished cast, The Sister suffered a disastrous rejection by the audience. The performance was so chaotic that several of the press commented on the disturbance. Lloyd's Evening Post said,

> ...part of the audience shewed great marks of disapprobation, which interrupted the piece for some time; it went on, notwithstanding great opposition, until the beginning of the fifth act, when the noise was so great that the actors were unable to proceed in their parts...Mr. Smith, however, entreated permission to give it out for this evening, but we are assured the Author, having heard the reception it met with has entirely withdrawn it from the stage.[3]

It appears that there was a deliberate attempt to ruin the play before it began. Miriam Small has pieced together the tentative conclusion that playright Richard Cumberland was responsible for this malicious act. Dr. Johnson is supposed to have said that Mrs. Lennox suspected Cumberland, who was notorious for his irritability and jealousy of other authors long before Sheridan satirized him as Sir Fretful Plagiary in The Critic (1779). Moreover, an anecdote has survived

whereby Goldsmith is alleged to have told Dr. Johnson that "a person" (presumably Cumberland) had asked him to go and hiss Mrs. Lennox's play because she had attacked Shakespeare in her book, Shakespear Illustrated, sixteen years previously! This "person" presumably didn't know that Goldsmith had written the Epilogue for The Sister.

Contemporary reviews were kind to The Sister, possibly in an effort to make up for the unwarranted and shameful treatment of the play by the audience, although the play is certainly not without considerable merit.

> The dialogue is natural, lively and elegant, the incidents are uncommon, yet within the pale of dramatic probability, and the sentiments are just and refined; it wants an inter-mixture of light scenes, such as a familiar acquaintance with the stage might have furnished.... She has published it without remonstrance or complaint, and those who read it in the closet will probably wonder at its treatment on the stage, especially considering the merit and sex of the writer.[4]

One does wonder, since the text does not justify the condemnation it received, and The Sister compares favourably with other sentimental comedies of the day. Moreover, it contains nothing controversial or offensive. In spite of, or perhaps because of the furore, the play went to a second printing. A third edition appeared in Hamburg in 1776, and it is believed that the play was produced there before 1775, since a cast list is recorded. Mrs. Lennox had an international reputation as the author of The Female Quixote, which had also been published in Hamburg.

There is perhaps no greater compliment than imitation. The Sister served as the basis for a very successful later play, The Heiress, by General Burgoyne. His play was produced at Drury Lane in 1786, and also published. Although Burgoyne does not acknowledge his debt to Mrs. Lennox, The Heiress owes its entire plot and several characters to The Sister. The presentation of this re-write of her comedy, presented at the theatre which had first rejected her original, must have given Charlotte Lennox some solace in her old age.

Her comedy, which is sometimes referred to as The Two Sisters, or The Sisters, is based upon one episode from volume two of her novel, Henrietta. The play is in five acts,

with a verse prologue by Colman and a verse epilogue by Goldsmith. The story is a rather typical one for the genre of sentimental comedy. Harriet Courtney has been living with her friend, Miss Autumn, and her step-mother, Lady Autumn. Harriet's brother, Mr. Courtney whom she hasn't seen for a long time, is tutor to the young Lord Clairville, with whom he is travelling. The two gentlemen come over from Paris secretly under assumed names to inspect the lady whom Lord Clairville's father has chosen for his wife. Instead Clairville falls in love with Harriet, while Mr. Courtney falls in love with Miss Autumn. But Mr. Courtney feels it is his duty as a tutor to prevent his charge, Lord Clairville, from forming an alliance with Harriet whom he believes is beneath his station. Instead Mr. Courtney tries to persuade Harriet to accept illicit advances from Lord Clairville, not realising he is addressing his own sister. When Mr. Courtney discovers who she is he is even more determined to prevent his sister marrying Lord Clairville, for fear of appearing opportunistic.

Comic complications multiply when Miss Autumn construes his attention to Harriet as a romantic attachment, and becomes jealous, as does Lord Clairville who challenges his tutor to a duel. Moreover, old Lady Autumn flatters herself that Mr. Courtney loves her. The stern father arrives at the last minute, and before he can become sensible of Harriet's sterling character, flies into a rage at his son's behaviour and the tutor's seeming encouragement of it. The relationship of brother and sister is revealed, together with their virtuous characters, and the lovers are united thereby achieving a happy ending for everyone but the hapless old Lady Autumn.

The Sister follows the time-tested formula of two sets of lovers who are beset by the complications of mistaken identity, and the barrier of class distinctions. Their situation is further complicated by the machinations of an amorous old lady in the tradition of Lady Wishfort in Congreve's The Way of the World (1700), and by three dim-witted servants, and a stern father. These are clichés of the genre, but a more serious flaw in the play, as was realised by early critics, is the lack of comic force. The comic element resides mainly in Lady Autumn who is only a secondary character.

> The situation of the persons in this play is in general too uniform, and the characters have too much sobriety, to exhibit any entertaining peculiarities.[5]

Whether the lack of lighter scenes was due to the playwright's inexperience with the requirements of the stage, is difficult to say. She had acquired some experience as a working actress some years before. The Sister is very chaste and moralistic. Suggestive comedy was not Mrs. Lennox's forte, and it is noteworthy that when she came to adapt Eastward Hoe! into her own Old City Manners some years later, she removed the salacious elements.

Like most sentimental comedy, The Sister concentrates on direct or indirect didacticism and the teaching of morals. There is little variety of plot motif in the genre generally. Many sentimental comedies lack unity because the characters do not really cause the plot to evolve, since they are governed by the over-riding necessity of coming to a virtuous conclusion. The Sister is not exceptional in that regard, but it is perhaps fair to say that her comedy isn't very funny. The didacticism of sentimental comedy can frequently culminate in a weak denouement, requiring the introduction of a deus ex machina of sorts in order to produce the required moral ending. In the case of The Sister the late introduction of the father, Lord Belmont, may be seen in this light. He only appears at the beginning of the fifth act, just in time to unravel the plot in a sanctimonious and unconvincing manner by abruptly changing his mind about his son's bride.

Lord Belmont

> Take her, Clairville; the best, the worthiest gift a father can bestow, a truly virtuous woman! She who could sacrifice her fortune to her conscience, and subject her inclinations to her duty; who could despise riches, and triumph over love; she brings you in herself a treasure more valuable than both the Indies. Take her, my son; and endeavour to deserve her.
>
> (Act V)

There are nine characters in the comedy, four men and five women which just tips the balance slightly in favour of the feminine. The main characters are the two sets of lovers, Lord Clairville and Miss Courtney, and Mr. Courtney and Miss Autumn. They are not differentiated as much as one might wish, and tend to be conventional and one-sided. As the title implies, the emphasis is on the brother and sister,

but all four of the lovers are typically young, attractive and completely honourable. Mr. Courtney is a more important figure than he was in Mrs. Lennox's novel. He is the dominating character in the play, and at least has the dynamism which the others lack. But Harriet his sister, the Henrietta of the novel, is a colourless and sententious young woman. Miss Autumn is slightly more lively, but Lord Clairville and his father Lord Belmont are stiff, cardboard characters. The amorousness of old Lady Autumn is amusing, but she is kept under decorous control by the playwright. The three simple servants are of no particular quaintness and indeed their comic potential could have been better exploited. They serve simply as confidants to their masters. The total effect of the nine characters is rather bland.

But in spite of its faults, The Sister is generally pleasant, and it can be said that her comedy compares favourably with many English plays of her day. The general effect of The Sister is summed up by Mrs. Lennox's biographer:

> Though lacking in characterisation and humour and conventionally sentimental in tone, the play has some merit. The action is clear and well-defined, the speeches are short and advance the plot, and the whole moves with some swiftness.[6]

The simplicity and clarity of the comedy derives from the small cast, the limitation of three locales, and the continuous action of only one day. Moreover, in a modern production, the period atmosphere and style would go a long way toward mitigating the faults of the comedy. Aside from the obvious effects of costume, the atmosphere and style reside chiefly in the dialogue which is graceful, articulate, and at times quite witty. The best example of this is the splendid scene between the two girls, of which the following selection will give an example.

Miss Autumn

> It is very true, my dear, when I told you this morning, that you would make but an awkward fine lady, you surveyed yourself in my glass with a certain consciousness (mimicking her); well, I will allow that you are tolerably handsome; but half that bloom which you brought from the country might be spared, provided you knew what to do with the remainder — indeed, Harriet, I am almost ashamed of your simplicity.

Miss Courtney

Why, my dear whimsical friend, what faults have I committed lately?

Miss Autumn

Faults! you never do one earthly thing that is right — all my documents are thrown away upon you — you blush, truly, when a fop looks attentively on you — you cannot meet the steady gaze with the confident stare. You speak without lisping; walk without tottering, and courtesy without tossing back your head.

Miss Courtney

All this is gross affectation

Miss Autumn

Indeed, Harriet, you are a silly girl, with all your knowledge — you have spent eighteen years of your life cultivating your understanding, without reflecting that it is by your beauty only you can hope to make your fortune; cease to be wise, child, and grow prudent; do not study the belle lettres, but the belle air — reason less with your tongue, and more with your eyes — why, really now, I believe you imagine nature gave you those two sparkling orbs for no other reason but to see with.

Miss Courtney

You railly your sex's follies so agreeably, my dear, that one would conclude you despised them, were you not too often seen practising them yourself - your eyes serve you for many other purposes besides seeing.

Miss Autumn

My eyes, child, are well disciplined troops; they know how to attack, conquer, pursue, retreat, beg quarter —

Miss Courtney

Beg quarter! I am sure they will never give any, if they can possibly hold it — what an obstinate seige have they laid, to the heart of poor Freeman!

Miss Autumn

True; and they have carried the place at last, you find.

Miss Courtney

Well, and what do you intend to do with it?

Miss Autumn

Do with it — Why, throw a garrison into it, and march off to new conquests.

Miss Courtney

I doubt the place is not tenable, my dear; two enemies to your power, pride and resentment, have got admittance, and it is more probable will expell your garrison.

Miss Autumn

That, indeed, would be a great disgrace upon my generalship.

Miss Courtney

Mr. Freeman is a man of sense; he has perceived that your design was only to torment him. You are too much and too little of a coquet, my fair friend; and have not artifice enough to dissemble the want of it.

Miss Autumn

Prodigious! What, the sage Harriet taking upon her to give me lessons in coquetry!

Miss Courtney

I might profit by your faults, were I disposed to commence coquet.

Miss Autumn

Well, since I find you have some skill, I may venture to consult you sometimes upon my operations; tell me truly, then, do you think Freeman will escape me? (Act I,i)

The diction in the comedy is consistently elegant throughout, and lives up to our expectation of eighteenth-century style. The verbal fencing is especially charming in this scene, and the use of the repeated military motif cleverly

underscores the seriousness with which these ladies approach their one goal in life — marriage. No less an authority on the American drama than Professor Arthur Hobson Quinn found that

> ...the speeches read with a certain crispness and the social satire is not uninteresting.[7]

The Sisters is set at Windsor, and it thus has no locales, nor any characters, nor even any references which are American. This factor does not strengthen its claim to be an American play. The comedy was not produced in America, however Professor Quinn, together with such scholars as Oral S. Coad, Montrose Moses and Arthur Hornblow do cite Charlotte Lennox as the first American woman to write a play. Hornblow also calls attention to The Sister as the first American play to be translated into a foreign language, the Hamburg edition of 1776.

The literary activity of Charlotte Lennox lapsed after The Sister, and this may have been due to ill health. By 1774, however, she had resumed her work, and eventually looked once again toward the stage, in spite of her earlier disappointment. She had remained friendly with David Garrick regardless of his rejection of The Sister, and this led to her next attempt to write for the stage after a gap of some years from original writing. Her letter to the actor dated August 20, 1775, is of note.

> I am not indifferent to theatrical rewards; could I obtain them, they would assist me to bring up my little boy and girl; but having once failed, when I had to a certain degree pleased myself, and several others whose judgement I relied on more than my own, I am grown diffident...A little success would embolden me, and this success I hope to owe to you,...[8]

The resulting comedy was not in fact an original work, but was an adaptation of Eastward Hoe! by Ben Jonson, George Chapman and John Marston, which Charlotte Lennox retitled Old City Manners. Her comedy was published in 1775, and it records her gratitude to Garrick at whose suggestion she had undertaken the work. Old City Manners was presented at Drury Lane, and was given at least seven performances on November 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 27 and January 8, 1776. The mild success of the comedy must have been gratifying to Mrs. Lennox, who received a benefit performance. But it is of considerably less merit than The Sister, and as an adaptation of other authors' work, need not detain us here.

Since Charlotte Lennox was the author of only three plays, of which two were original, and the overwhelming bulk of her work is non-dramatic, it clearly cannot be claimed that she was first and foremost a playwright. But although some of her other work is of more distinction, her place in American literature is of more unique historical importance. At the end of her long life, Charlotte Lennox returned to her early memories of America for source material for her last novel, Euphemia (1790). She was old and in poor health when Euphemia was published. Her daughter is believed to have died some years before. In 1793, she was able to send her wayward son to America, and it is unlikely that she ever saw him again. She separated from her husband in her late years, and he is believed to have died about 1797.

In spite of aid from compassionate people, Charlotte Lennox's last years were lonely and destitute. She died in Dean's Yard, Westminster, on January 4, 1804, and was buried in a common and unmarked grave in the precinct of Westminster Abbey. Charlotte Lennox lived a long life, no matter how one calculates her birth date, and it was a life marked by untiring industry. Her versatility is indicated by her novels, poems, plays, translations, critical works, and magazine. Her friendships alone indicate the respect which her own age afforded her, and she had no way of knowing that she would go down in history as the first American novelist and the first American woman playwright. The Sister is more distinguished than most other American plays prior to 1845, and deserves a revival in the land of the playwright's birth.

Documentation

1. Miriam Small, Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: an 18th Century Lady of Letters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935) p.1.
2. R. Baldwin, ed., Critical Review, IV (November 1757), p.468
3. Small, op.cit., p.37.
4. D. Henry, ed., Gentleman's Magazine, XXXIX (April 1769) p.199-200.
5. A. Hamilton, ed. Critical Review, XXVII (March 1769), p.223-224.
6. Small, op.cit., p.168
7. Arthur Hobson Quinn, A History of the American Drama from the Beginning to the Civil War (New York: Harper Brothers, 1923), p.29.
8. Small, op. cit., p.42.

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ON READING JOHNSON FOR LAUGHS*

Miss Isobel Grundy, MA, DPhil
Queen Mary College, University of London

It's not news to us that Johnson makes us laugh, but it is an aspect of him which seems to make many readers and commentators uneasy, an aspect often hidden. This is nicely symbolized by Reynolds's first portrait of him, 1756, known to us all from Heath's engraving (1791, done for the first edition of Boswell's Life and reproduced as frontispiece to Hill and Powell's edition) as a heavy, frowning, solemn face with an inward, closed expression. Reynolds may have produced this picture by later retouching; but since cleaning by the National Portrait Gallery we know now that in 1756 Reynolds painted a quite different picture — the quizzical face, caught darting a quick glance upward, of a man well able to make others laugh.

Johnson's Dictionary gives nine definitions for humour (beginning with "moisture"), recognizing it as a philosophical word, capable of assuming many meanings to keep pace with changing theories of the mind; the only meaning for which he provided no examples was the fifth: "Grotesque imagery, jocularity, merriment." For the noun laugh, by contrast, he gives only one meaning or pair of meanings, "The convulsion caused by merriment; an inarticulate expression of sudden merriment", and one example, four lines from Pope's Pastorals in which Delia runs to hide from her lover and "feigns a laugh" so that he shan't fail to find her. Johnson, not a humorous writer since he doesn't present a consistently amused or amusing view of the world, sees the word laugh as a physical, sensuous one; he is adept at providing us with at least some mental equivalent.

The Dictionary throws further light on his attitudes. Funny doesn't appear; fun (a "low cant word") means "sport; high merriment; frolicksome delight" — a mood less common in Johnson's writings than in his actions: rolling down a picturesque landscaped slope, sauntering in the churchyard during divine service and lying at ease on a tombstone like Hogarth's idle apprentice, embarrassing a snobbish hostess by pretending to

*A shortened version of a paper read at the Johnson Society of London Meeting on 15th October 1977.

Chairman: Lewis Raddon, LLB, DPA.

be a labourer, urging the painfully shy Fanny Burney to conversational combat with the great bluestocking Mrs. Montagu. He defines jest as "1. Any thing ludicrous, or meant only to raise laughter. 2. The object of jests; a laughing stock. 3. Manner of doing or speaking feigned, not real; ludicrous, not serious; game, not earnest." The concept therefore is linked to, and depends on, that of the serious. The quotations he gives under the first meaning of this word, and under ludicrous, merriment, ridicule, ridiculous, sport, include many (some though not all from seventeenth-century divines) which deplore jesting upon serious subjects, though he also gives under ridicule, noun and verb, four examples from Pope, Swift and Addison reflecting the common satirist's belief in ridicule as corrective.

Quotations under merry and under sport, noun and verb, remind us of the second definition of jest. The large majority refer to malicious not innocuous sport: Shakespeare's "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,/They kill us for their sport" is typical, not exceptional. Johnson apparently found no quotations to deplore malicious laughter as he did to deplore irreverent laughter; but his own writings, the review of Soame Jenyns memorably among others, frequently link a cluster of words (frolic, merry, jest, sport,) with disturbing associations of cruelty.

Johnson drew further limits to his appreciation of laughter in several satiric — and very funny — portraits of people who devote their lives to raising a laugh. The ladies' wit in Rambler 141, the wit tout court in Rambler 174, the scholar Gelasimus in Rambler 179, Tim Ranger in Idler 64, make experience meaningless in their desire to make it funny; their audiences are revealed as malicious, and as seeking amusement only out of boredom. The slow, ponderous Gelasimus, who knows that laughter is "a token of alacrity" and is therefore "careful not to fail in that great duty of a wit", who hopes that the people who don't laugh with him will come to comprehend his humour by degrees, reflects a particularly Johnsonian irony, an exploitation of comic incompatibilities of diction.

At the head of his Gelasimus paper Johnson quoted a line from Juvenal about Democritus shaking with laughter; it's hard to know whether he intended a parallel between Democritus and the Rambler, or an ironic contrast between Democritus and Gelasimus, but the latter seems more likely. It was not Johnson's manner, as he said of Democritus in The Vanity of Human Wishes, to "Dart the quick Taunt, and edge the piercing Gibe", but to show compassion for his satiric butts, as in Rambler 83 he

justifies the virtuosos mocked in the person of Quisquilius in No. 82. The image which he hinted at in "dart" and "edge" he had used the other way round in London:

> Some frolick Drunkard, reeling from a Feast,
> Provokes a Brawl, and stabs you for a Jest.

For him a wounding jest is more akin to the irresponsible weapon of the drunkard than to the "sacred Weapon" of Pope and Swift.

Boswell labours a good deal over his account of Johnson in paroxysms of laughter over Bennet Langton's making his will. (We should be grateful for the doggedness with which Boswell, who would have preferred melancholy and solemn silence, recorded that eerie tempestuous laughter.) Like Boswell and Chambers, we can find nothing remotely funny in the will or its making, little in the self-importance which Johnson attributed to Langton over it. But it must be this last which so stirred Johnson's "torpid risibility": that a mortal can find such satisfaction in what is in fact a preparation for death.

Let us then accept that Johnson finds some funny things funny; that he would despise the writer who goes through life looking for jests; and let us see what we find in his works of capacity for the shock of laughter. In this area as in others, his mind developed and expanded rather than radically altering with time, since his beginning in the tradition of the Scriblerus Club, with the exaggerations of London (the falling houses, the female atheist) which recall Pope, and the two political tracts of 1739, Marmor Norfolciense and A Compleat Vindication of the Licensers of the Stage, which recall Swift in saying the opposite of what they mean, appearing to support what they are actually attacking. In Marmor Norfolciense Johnson writes in the persona of a government hack, a bootlicker, full of subservience and reverent of authority. The prophetic inscription on the marble is a typical anti-Walpole opposition tirade; the fun of the essay lies in the agonised twists and turns of the persona trying to avoid recognising its obvious meaning Every topic raised casts new and apparently inadvertently damaging light on the methods of Walpole's government. Swift never had such an apt disciple.

For this reason I wish we could be sure that Johnson was responsible when in 1738 the Gentlemen's Magazine began reporting the debates in both Houses of Parliament under the guise of Lilliputian politics. Johnson was de facto editor of the magazine at that date, so we have good reason at least to

suspect his powers of invention in the central joke which makes Great Britain into Magna Lilliputia, thereby casting doubt on every use of such terms as great, mighty, important. Walpole (satirized by Swift as Flimnap) is made into Sir Rub. Walelop, his adversary Pulteney into "the great Patriot Wim-gul Pulnub, Urg., Chief of the high-heel'd Party", the prelate of Oxford into "the Boship of Odfrox" (a hit at academic gowns), Pitt into Ptit (a touch of French), and the Pretender into the bugbear-sounding Rednetrep. The doings and sayings of all are closely associated with that veracious genius Capt. Gulliver, whose travel book, "(however rejected at its first Appearance, by some, as incredible...) has, with the Success almost always attendant on Probity and Truth, triumphed over all Opposition".

The ridiculing of an aphorism, the disguising of nonsense as sense so cunningly that one may miss it, were to remain among Johnson's favourite methods; great people, and seriously-propounded systems, rather than simply the foolish, were to remain his favourite targets. Sometimes his jests reside in very few words: the fate of that daughter of an over-practical mother, who "knows not the difference between a Protestant and a Papist, because she has been employed three years in filling the side of a closet with a hanging that is to represent Cranmer in the flames"; the unemphatically mentioned ambition of Nekayah, who "desired first to learn all Sciences, and then...." (After such first, it's no surprise that the then — to found a college of learned women — also presents certain difficulties.) Others of his comic effects need more space for their working out, like the two Ramblers on the subject of garrets; No. 117, the pseudo-scientific, and No. 90, the pseudo-historical and scholarly. Each of these shows Johnson's delight in the comic possibilities of words: the paragraph of excuses which people give when refusing to rent the garret shows a quick ear for the way people really talk, and the running of all the phrases together gives that sense of excess which is one of his great sources of laughter. He also parodies stilted language of many kinds. Each essay depends for a good deal of its effect on the technique of coming down with a bump. The opening of each could be read as serious, well suited to the humourless Johnson of the touched-up Reynolds portrait: the revelation of the real subject of each is a surprise. One can hardly over-emphasize the importance of context in Johnson's fun. The fall of the flyer in Rasselas would be a poor joke without his previous raptures, and the patronising letter which Dick Shifter writes to his friend on his first morning in the countryside,though funny in itself, needs to be completed by the following sentence, in which he discovers the existence of furze and briars. Dick, and the enthusiastic occupants of garrets, are less Johnson's

targets than those anonymous but influential thinkers who have inculcated reverence for scientific jargon, classical precedent, or the equation of the countryside with transcendental delight. To close, I'd like to draw attention to Rambler 109, where Johnson the laugher takes the solemn Johnson as his butt.

JOHNSON AND GOLDSMITH: COMIC THEORY AND COMIC PRACTICE*

Professor Peter Dixon,
Department of English,
Westfield College, University of London

For Goldsmith, proud of his authorial independence, the dedicating of a book was not a bid for a purseful of guineas but the affirmation of friendship, a public testimony of affection. The Traveller, with its concern for domestic joys and self-content, is fittingly addressed to his brother Henry. The Deserted Village is dedicated to Reynolds, as the friend who most fully shared its author's sense of the absurdity and pathos of life, and She Stoops to Conquer, in all simple sincerity, "To Samuel Johnson, L.L.D.";

> Dear Sir,
>
> By incribing this slight performance to you, I do not mean so much to compliment you as myself. It may do me some honour to inform the public, that I have lived many years in intimacy with you. It may serve the interests of mankind also to inform them, that the greatest wit may be found in a character, without impairing the most unaffected piety.
>
> I have, particularly, reason to thank you for your partiality to this performance. The undertaking a comedy, not merely sentimental, was very dangerous; and Mr. Colman [the manager of the Covent Garden Theatre]... always thought it so. However, I ventured to trust it to the public; and... I have every reason to be grateful.
>
> I am, Dear Sir,
>
> Your most sincere friend,
>
> And admirer,
>
> OLIVER GOLDSMITH.[1]

* This essay is a modified version of a talk given to the Johnson Society of London on 19th November 1977.

Chairman: Dr. David Brown.

This is a handsome and dignified tribute to Johnson's moral support and encouragement, given generously to his friend's first play, The Good-Natured Man, as well as to his second. But it is also a grateful acknowledgment of Johnson's critical approval of the two plays. Johnson delighted in their comic means, as he endorsed their comic ends. In this paper I wish first to consider the emotional indebtedness of the"anxious Bard" to his dependable friend, and then to examine some of the literary affinities between the theorist of comedy and its practitioner.

Goldsmith's involvement with the stage began in the same unhappy spirit in which it was to continue. He devoted a substantial chapter of his first substantial work, An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe (1759) to the lamentable condition of the English theatre, enumerating the obstacles which block the path of the aspiring dramatist. Not the least of these are unenterprising theatrical policies, and the greed and power-seeking of the managers. David Garrick, by that date a manager of standing, authority, and not a little vanity, was naturally offended, and when some eight years later Goldsmith submitted the manuscript of a comedy for performance at Drury Lane, Garrick was (naturally again) somewhat frigid. George Colman, in charge of the rival theatre, gave the play a slightly warmer reception and agreed to stage it during the 1767-8 season. But Goldsmith's troubles were not therefore at an end, for he discovered that another new comedy, Hugh Kelly's False Delicacy, was scheduled to open at Drury Lane on January 23rd, just six nights before The Good-Natured Man. To Goldsmith's sensitive eyes this appeared a spiteful scheme to mar his dramatic fortunes, a scheme devised by Garrick and connived at, perhaps helped on, by Colman.

When the first night of his play at last arrived, Goldsmith, fretted and harassed, was in anguish. He friends in the audience did their best to allay his fears, and to ensure success with their "uncommon exertions" of loud laughter and applause.[2] Johnson had exerted himself already,[3] first as mediator between Goldsmith and Garrick, and more recently by writing the Prologue. Given the state of his mind at this period, what Boswell calls his "great perturbation and distraction", that exertion is eloquent witness to the strength of Johnson's feeling for Goldsmith and his determination to be of help — even though the Prologue itself does not seem entirely appropriate to the ensuing play:

> Prest by the load of life, the weary mind
> Surveys the general toil of human kind ....[4]

Boswell ingeniously argues that the "dark ground" of these lines might serve to enhance the play's humour, making it "shine the more".[5] It appears to have had no such effect on the first night. Nor was the laughter of the author's friends infectious. The play stumbled along, some of the actors inaudible and not always word-perfect, until the beginning of Act III, when it seemed likely to stumble into oblivion. For the hero's being forced to keep company with a comic bailiff and his assistant, and to engage the heroine in elegant conversation in front of these shabby fellows, was too much for the susceptibilities of the audience. Hisses came from the gallery, while cries of "low" and "damned wulgar" rose from the pit.[6] But the critical minute passed, and in the following Act Ned Shuter, playing Mr. Croaker, gave a brilliant reading of the "incendiary letter", restored the audience to their comic senses, and earned Goldsmith's sincere thanks in the greenroom. There followed the well-known celebration at the Turk's Head, with Goldsmith endeavouring to conceal his agitation by noisy hilarity. And when all but Johnson and he had departed, came the nervous collapse, the tears, and the vow that he would never write again.

Happily this vow was soon broken. Within three years Goldsmith was working on She Stoops to Conquer — only to involve himself in difficulties remarkably similar to those he had come painfully through. For this play too was passed back and forth between Drury Lane and Covent Garden. Now, however, Johnson's intervention was decisive: Colman, he recalled, "was prevailed on at last by much solicitation, nay a kind of force, to bring it on". Johnson's physical and moral weight were alike irresistible. But Colman could not be bullied into optimism. Nor could his actors, two of whom relinquished their parts, to the further intensification of the manager's gloom. On March 4th 1773 Johnson reported to the Reverend William White: "Dr. Goldsmith has a new comedy in rehearsal... to which the manager predicts ill success. I hope he will be mistaken. I think it deserves a very kind reception."[8] Gauging the resistance which the play had to overcome, Johnson took practical measures to ensure justice and a "very kind reception" on the opening night. He arranged a tavern dinner to put the author's friends and supporters in the right frame of mind; when the party arrived at the theatre he occupied a prominent position in the front row of a front box, and prepared to lead the laughter. His anxieties were soon proved groundless, for the audience's reaction was vigorously and spontaneously favourable. Ten days later, when

the play was published with its brief epistolary dedication, a wider public received intimation of his friendly concern.

As I have suggested, Johnson's "partiality" to this comedy was not simply the emotional response of one friend to another in need. The letter to William White makes a critical judgement: it is the play, not its author, which "deserves a very kind reception" — and "deserves" is not a verb that Johnson ever uses lightly. What then are the qualities of this play which earned Johnson's acclaim? And what were his grounds for believing The Good-Natured Man to be the best comedy that had appeared for forty years? What, in short, were Johnson's criteria for judging comedy? It may be helpful to begin with his review of seventeenth-century drama in the Prologue written for the opening night (15th September, 1747) of Garrick's first season as joint-proprietor and manager of Drury Lane. From the reservations and censures which Johnson voices we can deduce some features of his comic ideal. First, the careful eulogy of Ben Jonson implies, in its weighty adjectives, an obtrusive erudition and artfulness in his plays that offsets their excellences:

> His studious Patience, and laborious Art,
> By regular Approach essay'd the Heart....[9]

The contrast is with Shakespeare, whose "unresisted Passion storm'd the Breast", and with Restoration comedy, whose authors found all too easy solutions to the problems of dramatic investion:

> Themselves they studied, as they felt, they writ,
> Intrigue was Plot, Obscenity was Wit.

Their comic writing is a self-indulgence, undisciplined by art, and having about it a spurious air of spontaneity. Instead of divising significant plots they are lazily content to dramatise their own (or their friends') amatory adventures. More damningly still, their work lacks any sense of moral values and purpose:

> Vice always found a sympathetick Friend;
> They pleas'd their Age, and did not aim to mend.

It would seem to follow that for Johnson a satisfactory comic action must appear unstudied, natural, probable. He admires Shakespeare for having drawn "Each Change of many-colour'd

Life", and She Stoops to Conquer because the incidents "are so prepared as not to seem improbable".[10] Dramatic flexibility and movement must not be impaired by too obvious attention to structural symmetries and critical unities; on the other hand the playwright cannot abandon his authorial responsibilities of artistic and moral control. For as Johnson well knew, a comedy will seem life-like and "probable" precisely because, indeed only because, its author is skilled in the "art of dramatic disposition". This phrase occurs in The Idler (no. 25) where Johnson briefly indicates what such "disposition" entails: "the contexture of the scenes", their happy weaving together and linking into a harmonious whole, a technique which presumably includes (but also goes beyond) the French liaison des scènes; "the opposition of characters ... the expedients of suspension, and the stratagems of surprize".[11] In The Good-Natured Man the temperamental "opposition" of the Croakers ("she all laugh and no joke; he always complaining, and never sorrowful") is not only exploited for local effect, but functions in the plot as a test of Honeywood's personality, as he shifts allegiance from one to the other while they argue — and in arguing prolong the comic suspense — about how they should respond to the apparent threat to their lives posed by the misinterpreted letter:

> Croaker: How, Sir! do you maintain that I should lie down under such an injury, and shew, neither by my tears, or complaints, that I have something of the spirit of a man in me?
>
> Honeywood: Pardon me, Sir. You ought to make the loudest complaints, if you desire redress. The surest way to have redress, is to be earnest in the pursuit of it.
>
> Croaker: Ay, whose opinion is he of now?
>
> Mrs. Croaker: But don't you think that laughing off our fears is the best way?
>
> Honeywood: What is the best, Madam, few can say; but I'll maintain it to be a very wise way.
>
> Croaker: But we're talking of the best. Surely the best way is to face the enemy in the field, and not wait till he plunders us in our very bed-chamber.
>
> Honeywood: Why Sir, as to the best, that —that's a very wise way too.

In Goldsmith's second comedy the antithesis between Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle gives immediate life and tension to the opening scene, as well as providing a natural excuse (a wife's grumbling) for the introduction of a most significant physical circumstance — that their house "looks for all the world like an inn". But that is the least of Mrs. Hardcastle's complaints:

> Our best visitors are old Mrs. Oddfish, the curate's wife, and little Cripplegate, the lame dancing-master: And all our entertainment your old stories of Prince Eugene and the Duke of Marlborough. I hate such old-fashioned trumpery.
>
> Hardcastle: And I love it. I love everything that's old: old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine; and, I believe, Dorothy, (taking her hand) you'll own I have been pretty fond of an old wife.
>
> Mrs. Hardcastle: Lord, Mr. Hardcastle, you're for ever at your Dorothy's and your old wife's. You may be a Darby, but I'll be no Joan, I promise you. I'm not so old as you'd make me, by more than one good year. Add twenty to twenty, and make money of that.
>
> Hardcastle: Let me see; twenty added to twenty, makes just fifty and seven.

Mrs. Hardcastle's prompt denial of this slander leads to the unforced disclosure of some necessary information about Tony Lumpkin, the subsequent appearance of that hallooing gentleman, and a neat example of the "contexture of the scenes" as he ominously explains why he can't linger at home: "The Three Pigeons expects me down every moment. There's some fun going forward."

The fun which Tony goes on to contrive is productive of more than his laughter. His ruse allows Kate to appear as both the jaunty barmaid and genteel lady, and so makes it possible for her to penetrate and begin to understand Marlow's nature as no other of his female acquaintance has yet succeeded in doing. Johnson perceived that here lay the play's single weakness: "The chief diversion arises from a stratagem by which a lover is made to mistake his future father-in-law's house for an inn. This, you see, borders upon farce...."[12] The comedy is, so to speak, "willed",is

set in motion by Tony's decision to play a practical joke, instead of developing from the obsession, weakness, self-deception, or whatever, of a central character. In Johnson's terms it is grounded in "artifice" rather than an "original humour or peculiarity of character"; the generating force is provided by a "jest of action" not a "jest of sentiment".[13] Something similar might be urged against The Good-Natured Man, where the hero's uncle instigates a sort of grim hoax, exacerbating his nephew's distresses in order to help him set his values in order. Goldsmith's excuse for this arbitrariness of plotting would no doubt resemble Sir William Honeywood's justification for his subterfuge: in both plays the stratagems rapidly unlock and expose "sentiments"; in both the arbitrary, unfair means are justified by worthy ends — the final scenes of moral self-discovery. For in the happy endings Goldsmith's young men share the fate of all comic heroes and heroines; like Benedick and Beatrice, like Lydia Languish and Professor Henry Higgins, they come to their senses. Young Honeywood is brought to the embarrassed admission that "universal benevolence", delicious virtue, may be merely a smug rationalisation of weakness. It may serve as an excuse for imprudence and temporising. It may be exquisitely selfish under its selfless mask, as when Honeywood prides himself on his magnanimity in surrendering his rights in Miss Richland to the bogus and malicious Lofty, dwelling on his own noble suffering with little understanding of her feelings or regard for her happiness. In She Stoops to Conquer Marlow learns that the two Kates are one and the same; more important, he realises that his own self-division into bold and sheepish, rakish and polite, is as false to himself and as illusory as the double image of Kate that Tony's plot, colluding circumstances, and his own nature, have tricked him into seeing. The resolution, as Hardcastle joins their hands, assures us that the two sides of his personality, trimmed of their excesses, will be harmonised through Kate's "wholeness": "as you have been mistaken in the mistress, my wish is, that you may never be mistaken in the wife".

When the scales fall from their eyes, some comic characters choose to pretend that nothing much has happened. Like Benedick, or Mr. Lofty, they attempt to save appearances, to sustain an increasingly uncomfortable public stance, before they acknowledge their errors. Others may humbly accept, and wonder delightedly at, the contrast between their former ignorant darkness and the unfamiliar light of truth. Such

postures and such discrepancies will move us to laughter, the comic response which it is, after all, the dramatist's purpose to arouse. As so often Johnson seizes the main point: comedy exists to give the spectator its own proper, specifically comic pleasure. Hence it may be adequately defined as "'Such a dramatic representation of human life, as may excite mirth'".[14] For Johnson the value of a comedy is to be measured, quite directly, by its ability to arouse merriment, jollity, gaiety. Thus Cowley's Cutter of Coleman Street has the power of "exciting merriment"; The Old Bachelor is a "gay comedy", though taken as a whole Congreve's comedies "raise admiration oftener than merriment";[15] and Rambler no. 156 describes comic effects in terms of "mirth", "merriment" and "jollity". Tried by this basic test She Stoops to Conquer is proved eminently worthy: "I know of no comedy for many years that has so much exhilarated an audience, that has answered so much the great end of comedy — making an audience merry."[16] The Dictionary's definition of exhilarate — "to make cheerful; to cheer; to fill with mirth; to enliven...to gladden" — makes it clear that Johnson is not thinking simply, or even primarily, of the explosions of laughter that will greet the high points of the action (as when Mrs. Hardcastle mistakes her husband for a highwayman), but rather of the state of mirthful delight in which the audience may be kept throughout if "the dialogue is quick and gay", as it is in She Stoops to Conquer, if, that is, the whole work is imbued with "dramatick spriteliness".[17] This is what ensured the popular success of The Beggar's Opera, that "general spirit and gaiety of the piece, which keeps the audience always attentive, and dismisses them in good humour".[18] It is what Johnson, and many of his contemporaries, found lacking in the "genteel comedy" of the 1760's, in for example Frances Sheridan's The Discovery. Boswell, present at its first performance (February 3rd, 1763) tells us that it was allowed to "jog through" without serious disturbance; his verb is apt.[19] In Goldsmith's opinion the plays of Farquhar notably possessed this essential "spriteliness", which set them above the other comedies of that period. In An History of England (1764) Farquhar is described as "still more lively, and, perhaps, more entertaining" than Congreve and Vanbrugh, while four years later Goldsmith was commending him for the "life, spirit, and vivacity" so conspicuous in his dialogue.[20]

When Johnson reviewed the current literary scene (at Oxford in the spring of 1768) he did not look quite so far back as Farquhar to find a match for Goldsmith's new work.

"Talking of some of the modern plays," Boswell reports, "he said 'False Delicacy' was totally void of character. He praised Goldsmith's 'Good-Natured Man;' said, it was the best comedy that had appeared since 'The Provoked Husband' [of 1728] and that there had not been of late any such character exhibited on the stage as that of Croaker."[21] Once again Johnson is driving straight to the heart of the matter in his demand for memorable comic characters, and in his uncompromising dismissal of False Delicacy for its inadequacy in this respect. Throughout his criticism Johnson's response to comic character is marked, and markedly enthusiastic; we remember his pleasure in Falstaff ("unimitated, unimitable Falstaff"), in Mercutio and Juliet's nurse, and his unabated enjoyment of Fanny Burney's Mr. Smith: "such a fine varnish of low politeness!"[22] Similarly, The Provoked Husband (the play that Vanbrugh bequeathed to Cibber as the unfinished "Journey to London") lives for Johnson because of the character of Sir Francis Wronghead, the Yorkshire squire newly and corruptly elected to Parliament, whose schemes for his family's advancement are amusingly frustrated by his family's indiscretions. Boswell describes how Johnson, during their Oxford conversations, "very happily" repeated Sir Francis's self-satisfied account of his approaches to a political "great man" with Court sinecures at his disposal:

> Sir Francis: Ecod, I shot him flying, cousin. Some of your hawlf-witted ones naw, would ha'hummed and hawed, and dangled a month or two after him, before they durst open their mouths about a place, and, mayhap, not ha' got it at last neither.
>
> Manly: Oh, I'm glad you're so sure on't —
>
> Sir Francis: You shall hear, cousin. "Sir Francis," says my lord, "pray what sort of a place may you ha' turned your thowghts upon?" "My lord," says I, "beggars must not be choosers. But ony place," says I, "about a thousand a year, will be well enough to be doing with till something better falls in" — for I thowght it would not look well to stond haggling with him at first.
>
> Manly: No, no, your business was to get footing any way.
>
> Sir Francis: Right, there's it! Ah cousin, I see you know the world.
>
> Manly: Yes, yes, one sees more of it every day....[23]

Sir Francis has followed up this promising start by attending a debate in the House of Commons; perplexed by arguments he doesn't understand he has succeeded in voting for the wrong side. The Provoked Husband was extremely popular, and served others besides Johnson as a standard for eighteenth-century comedy. It is probable that Goldsmith himself was thinking of its Wronghead sub-plot, including the brilliant wooing scene in Act IV, when he referred in his well-known essay of 1773 to "Laughing and even Low Comedy" as having "been last exhibited" on the English stage by "Vanburgh and Cibber". That he certainly knew the play is evident from his echoing it in The Good-Natured Man. When Honeywood offers to keep Mrs. Croaker in good spirits — "Well, do you find jest, and I'll find laugh, I promise you" — he has the cadence, though not the pertness, of Jenny Wronghead assuring her lover: "Well, well, do you find equipage, and I'll find airs, I warrant you."[24]

Although he admired The Provoked Husband, Johnson did not place Sir Francis in the highest category of fictional characters. He told Boswell that "though drawn with great humour" Sir Francis is a "character of manners" not a "character of nature". He is endowed with some general qualities — bluntness, credulity, ill-founded pride and ambition, pretensions to shrewdness — but remains nevertheless an English country gentleman of the 1720s, bearing the cultural and political imprint of that era, and therefore chiefly "discriminated by properties superficial, accidental, and acquired."[25] Sir Francis's place is with Squire Western (Fielding's novels, according to Johnson, are peopled solely with characters of manners). He does not keep company with Falstaff, or Malvolio, or Fanny Burney's Mr. Smith, comic figures who are motivated by principles of "general nature", and who become more than life-size through their vitality, or grow in complexity as we see ever more deeply into their minds and passions. The tone and context of Johnson's remark on Croaker, the professional melancholic, the man with a grudge against life, suggests that that character has a claim to belong in this exalted class, though Johnson was not unaware of the family likeness to his own Suspirius, the human screech-owl whose great business in life is to complain, who delights in "painful remembrances of the past" and "melancholy prognosticks of the future" (The Rambler, no. 59). Boswell was quick to point out Goldsmith's debt, but the latter had already admitted it to Johnson. It is at first sight considerable, for it extends beyond traits of character to the impact which this kind of personality makes upon his acquaintences:

> To those, whose weakness of spirits, or timidity of temper, subjects them to impressions from others, and who are apt to suffer by fascination, and catch the contagion of misery, it is extremely unhappy to live within the compass of a screech-owl's voice....

Honeywood has just such a "timidity of temper" and early in the play we see him catching the contagion of misery as he chimes in with Croaker's sombre clichés (Croaker is lamenting the recent suicide of Dick Doleful):

> Croaker: Ay, he grew sick of this miserable life, where we do nothing but eat and grow hungry, dress and undress, get up and lie down; while reason, that should watch like a nurse by our side, falls as fast asleep as we do.
>
> Honeywood: To say truth, if we compare that part of life which is to come, by that which we have past, the prospect is hideous.
>
> Croaker: Life at the greatest and best is but a froward child, that must be humour'd and coax'd a little till it falls asleep, and then all the care is over.
>
> Honeywood: Very true, Sir, nothing can exceed the vanity of our existence, but the folly of our pursuits. We wept when we came into the world, and every day tells us why.
>
> Croaker: Ah, my dear friend, it is a perfect satisfaction to be miserable with you.

Suspirius, however, is not simply a type we recognise among people we meet, like the fellow-commuter who gets satisfaction from deploring the imminent collapse of the transport system. He embodies the discontent each of us harbours, the irritation and despondency that we feel while we see others prospering around us. His is the voice of the tempter within:

> Another of his topicks is the neglect of merit, with which he never fails to amuse every man whom he sees not eminently fortunate .... For a genius in the church, he is always provided with a curacy for life. The lawyer he informs of many men of great parts and deep study, who have never had an opportunity to speak in the courts ....

> Whenever my evil stars bring us together, he never fails to represent to me the folly of my persuits, and informs me that we are much older than when we began our acquaintance, that the informities of decrepitude are coming fast upon me ....

This fretful and malicious envy has no part in Croaker's make-up. Suspirius disturbs us, since we recognise our potential or propensity for augmenting others' distress; Croaker diverts us, because he is perpetually and carefully augmenting his own. Materialistic and stubborn, he is yet disarmingly tender: "It goes to my heart to vex her" he mutters when he has to assume a firm line with his daughter. Indeed he can only take such a line by adopting a heavily jocular manner: "No, I'm to have no hand in the disposal of my own children. No, I'm nobody. I'm to be a mere article of family lumber ...". This is uncomfortably near the truth. He has already confessed to Honeywood:

> You know but little of my authority at home. People think, indeed, because they see me come out in a morning thus, with a pleasant face, and to make my friends merry, that all's well within. But I have cares that would break an heart of stone. My wife has so encroach'd upon every one of my privileges, that I'm now no more than a mere lodger in my own house.

His grumbling melancholy is a sort of comic stoicism, the only way left to him of proclaiming his personal identity and significance. His technique for defeating a hostile world is to ally himself with the agents of misfortune. Though the foundations of his character lie in the Rambler essay, he is not, finally, a melancholic of the same type as the malign, allegorical Suspirius. So that in admiring the portrayal of Croaker ("there had not been of late any such character exhibited on the stage") Johnson was not indulging in covert self-praise. His comment is an objective judgment which is not the less objective for being warmed by personal feeling. There lies behind it both the knowledge of Goldsmith's debt to The Rambler and the much more important awareness of a shared faith in "character" as the sine qua non of comedy. For that was certainly Goldsmith's faith too: the preface to The Good-Natured Man declares that its author "never imagined that more would be expected of him" than the presentation of nature and humour," and therefore to delineate character has been his principal aim."

Johnson welcomed Goldsmith's plays as the fulfilment of his best hopes for the English comic theatre. Here at last was the "useful Mirth" that he had looked forward to in 1747 Drury Lane Prologue. And since that Prologue was itself the fruit of long reflection on the drama, we may be allowed to find in an even earlier poem of Johnson's, the Prologue to Garrick's Lethe (1740), an appropriate epigraph for Goldsmith's two plays. Their author sought to show

> That useful Truth with Humour may unite,
> That Mirth may mend, and Innocence delight.

Documentation

1. Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford, 1966), vol. V, p.101.
2. Quoted in Collected Works, vol. V, p.5, from William Cooke's vivid account of the first night: European Magazine vol. XXIV (1793), pp. 94-5.
3. It is likely that Johnson and Reynolds were involved in these negotiations: see The Collected Letters of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Katharine C.Balderston (Cambridge,1928) pp.76-7.
4. Lines 1-2. Johnson's poetry is quoted from Samuel Johnson The Complete English Poems, ed. J.D. Fleeman (Harmondsworth, 1971).
5. James Boswell, The Life of Johnson, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, revised L.F.Powell (Oxford, 1934-50), vol.II,pp.45-6.
6. Collected Works, vol. V, p.5, citing Cooke. Goldsmith must have recalled with bitterness his own accurate words: "by the power of one single monosyllable, our critics have almost got the victory over humour amongst us. Does the poet paint the absurdities of the vulgar; then he is low:does he exaggerate the features of folly, to render it more thoroughly ridiculous [as Goldsmith does Honeywood's embarrassed equivocations], he is then very low" (An Enquiry, ch. xi: Collected Works, vol.I.p.320).
7. Life, vol. III, pp.320-1.
8. Ibid., vol II, p.208.
9. Lines 11-12. The phrase "By regular Approach" occurs in Pope's Epistle to Burlington (l.129), describing the showy array of steps and terraces which a visitor to Timon's Villa must negotiate before being blessed with a sight of the owner. It therefore hints at a studied remoteness about Jonson which forbids intimacy.
10. Letter to Boswell of 24 February 1773 : Life, vol II, p.206.
11. Johnson's periodical essays and Shakespeare criticism are quoted from the Yale Edition of his works.

12. Life, vol II, pp. 205-6.
13. From Johnson's observations on Dryden's comedies: Lives of the English Poets, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford, 1905), vol. I, p.459.
14. The Rambler, no. 125. The Dictionary, it must be said, does not make the evoking of mirth a property of comedy. As lexicographer Johnson is constrained by usage, his fidelity is to his linguistic authorities. In this case one of the illustrative quotations is Pope's line: "A long, exact, and serious comedy ...".
15. Lives, vol. I, p.14; vol. II, pp. 216, 228.
16. Life, vol. II, p.233.
17. The first quotation is from Johnson's letter to Boswell (Life, vol. II, p.206), the second from his discussion of Butler's Hudibras (Lives, vol. I, pp. 211-12). Johnson regrets that this poem has not more of the qualities of a good comedy. The long speeches should have been diversified, as in animated conversation, by "quicker reciprocation", and broken by "seasonable interruptions" and "sudden questions" from the listeners.
18. Life, vol. III, p.321.
19. Boswell's London Journal 1762 - 1763, ed. Frederick A. Pottle (London, 1950), p.178.
20. An History of England, in a Series of Letters (1764), vol II, p. 139; James Prior, The Life of Oliver Goldsmith (London, 1837) vol. II, p.160.
21. Life, vol. II, p.48
22. Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay, ed. Charlotte Barrett, revised Austin Dobson (London, 1904-5), vol. I, p.72.
23. Sir John Vanbrugh and Colley Cibber, The Provoked Husband, ed. Peter Dixon (Lincoln,Nebraska, 1973), p.105 (Act IV).
24. The Good-Natured Man, Act I (Collected Works vol. V, p.29); The Provoked Husband, V.iv. 57-8 (ed.cit., p.151).
25. The phrase occurs in Johnson's discussion of Polonius, who is a "mixed character", partly of manners (the product of his court breeding) partly of nature, in that he exemplifies a general truth, "dotage encroaching upon wisdom": note on Hamlet II.ii.86 — perhaps Johnson's subtlest use of the manners/nature distinction.

ANNUAL COMMEMORATION 1977

The Annual Commemoration was held on Saturday 17th December in Westminster Abbey by courtesy of the Dean and Chapter. Canon A.R. Winnett laid a wreath on Dr. Johnson's grave and gave the Commemorative Address. The service was conducted by The Very Reverend the Dean of Westminster.

Following the Commemoration, the Johnson Society of London held its Christmas Luncheon at the Vitello d'Oro Restaurant, Church House, Westminster, and then adjourned to the Vestry Hall of St. Edmund the King where Canon Winnett presented his paper on "Dr. Johnson and the Irish".

THE COMMEMORATIVE ADDRESS 1977

The Revd. Canon A.R. Winnett, Ph.D., D.D.

Let me take as my text or starting-point the opening words of Joseph Wood Krutch's biography of Johnson: "Samuel Johnson was a pessimist with an enormous zest for living." Krutch is surely right in taking these two contrasted characteristics as descriptive of Johnson's personality, and each finds ample illustration in his life and writings.

All who have written on Johnson have dwelt upon his pessimism, that is, his sense of the incompleteness and imperfection of human life, of its inescapable evils and frustrations, which led him to put into the mouth of Imlac in Rasselas the judgment that "human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed."

In part Johnson's pessimism had a physical and genetic origin. He spoke of the "vile melancholy" which he believed himself to have inherited from his father, and the scrofula from which he suffered in infancy left him with impaired sight and hearing, and with psychological consequences in the form of irritability, inertia and a tendency to depression. According to Boswell he felt himself overwhelmed at the age of twenty with "a dejection, gloom and despair which made existence a misery", and for the rest of his life this state of mind was never far away, giving rise to his fear that he might lose his reason.

But Johnson's pessimism had deeper roots. As a Christian he could not be unaware of the world's evil, that dimension of existence which traditional Christian theology expressed in its doctrine of the Fall. Nature and man alike, though the creation of God, reflect only imperfectly the will of the Creator and fall short of His design and purpose. It was Johnson's sense of the reality of evil as something that could not be explained away which led to his attack on Soame Jenyns' Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil. Jenyns' work was a popularisation of the treatment of evil in Pope's Essay on Man, according to which things were evil only as they were viewed in isolation from the whole, "partial evil" being "universal good"; and in the theodicies of Leibniz and Archbishop King, who held evil to be a necessary concomitant of finite being and to exist in no greater measure than is necessary for the world to exist, so that this is "the best of all possible worlds." For Johnson Jenyns had healed too lightly the pain and perplexity which evil causes to every sensitive heart and mind, and had justified on too superficial a level the ways of God to man. Johnson, who had known poverty, in particular scorned Jenyns' attempt to minimise the misery of poverty: if the poor are exempted from certain anxieties and vexations which afflict the rich, "their happiness", he said, "is like that of a malefactor who ceases to feel the cords that bind him when the pincers are tearing his flesh." Johnson was too deeply conscious of what the New Testament calls "the mystery of iniquity" and of the challenge it presents to faith in a just and loving God to accept the rationalisations of a poet like Pope, or philosophers like Leibniz and King, or a populariser like Jenyns.

There was a third source of Johnson's pessimism, which I would identify as an awareness of the transcendent element in man. Because man transcends nature and there is in him that which is akin to the Infinite, he can never find his satisfaction in finite things nor escape from what has been called, even though not always recognised as such, a "divine discontent." Here we turn to Rasselas and to the Happy Valley where the young prince finds his life of unbroken pleasure wearisome and unsatisfying. He contrasts his state with that of an animal, which, when its corporal wants are satisfied, is content and at peace, while as for himself:

> "I am hungry and thirsty like him, but when thirst and hunger cease I am not at rest. I am like him pained with want, but I am not like him satisfied with fullness....

> I can call the lutanist and singer, but the sounds that pleased me yesterday weary me today and will grow yet more wearisome tomorrow. I can discover within me no power of perception which is not glutted with its proper pleasure, yet I do not feel myself delighted. Man has surely some latent sense for which this place affords no gratification, or he has some desires distinct from sense which must be gratified before he can be happy."

Here Rasselas, and through him Johnson, speaks with the voice of the author of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament. Like Rasselas he was one who dwelt in his "happy valley", with houses, vineyards, parks and pools, with slaves and singers and concubines, with not only those carnal delights but also the intellectual pleasures of wisdom and knowledge; yet happiness eludes him, and his verdict is, "All is vanity and a striving after wind." Like Rasselas he finds himself satiated yet unsatisfied. Rasselas locates the source of his discontent in "some latent sense" or in "desires distinct from sense", whose gratification is a condition of man's happiness, and these have their counterpart in the "eternity" which, according to Ecclesiastes, God has set in the heart of man (Eccles. 3, 11 R.S.V.). Only the Transcendent, the Beyond to which he is akin, can still man's restlessness and discontent. The "conclusion of the whole matter" in Ecclesiastes is "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Rasselas ends with "a conclusion in which nothing is concluded", but there are hints of the conclusion which Johnson would have us draw. There is the discussion on immortality; there are the words of Nekayah, "I hope hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity"; and there is the penultimate sentence, "Of these wishes they had formed they well knew that none could be obtained." Is Johnson here really meaning to say that even if their wishes — to preside over a convent, to found a college of learned women, and to rule over a model kingdom — were obtained, the sought-for happiness would still elude them? Johnson seems to be trembling on the verge of saying (in the so often quoted words of St. Augustine that I apologise for quoting them yet again), "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee." The "vanity of human wishes" — the title of Johnson's greatest poem — is a witness to man's kinship with the infinite and divine Ground of his being.

Let us leave Johnson's pessimism and consider the complementary and contrasting quality of his "enormous zest

for living", which Krutch specifies more particularly as "an almost gargantuan appetite for learning, for literature, for good company, for food." If Imlac's assessment of human life as "a state in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed" represents Johnson's own judgment, it must be said that Johnson was being less than just to his own experience. That he had much to endure no one could question — he knew ill-health, poverty, melancholy, bereavement — but the overwhelming impression we gain of Johnson, from the accounts of those who knew him best, is of one who was rich in the power of enjoyment, of one who savoured life to the full, and was always reaching out for new experiences, whether in exploring fresh countries of the mind or in undertaking a tour of the Highlands and Hebrides. A juster verdict would be that for Johnson that which had to be endured was small in comparison with the wealth to be enjoyed.

Krutch speaks of Johnson's appetite for learning and literature, and this hardly needs to be illustrated. "All knowledge is of itself of some value", he said, "there is nothing so minute or inconsiderable that I would not rather know it than know it not." He could talk of tanning and brewing as though he had been bred to those trades. He conducted chemical experiments in his house, and tried his hand at making china at the Chelsea China Works. The Dictionary revealed both the wide extent of his reading and his knowledge of the correct use of words. By his writings as essayist, biographer, critic and moralist he won for himself a permanent place in English literature and a homage which increases with every generation of readers and scholars.

Then there was Johnson's love of good company. The first picture that comes into our minds when we think of Johnson is of him folding his legs and having his talk out in the company of his friends. Such was his gift for friendship and his outgoingness towards others that his appetite for good company was seldom unsatisfied — and what a great roll-call of names passes before us! — Garrick, Goldsmith, Burke, Reynolds, Langton, the Thrales and, of course, Boswell. And let us not omit the down and out Richard Savage with whom Johnson once walked the streets all night, and John Wilkes, whose opinions and way of life Johnson abhorred but to whom he immediately warmed when Boswell contrived their meeting.

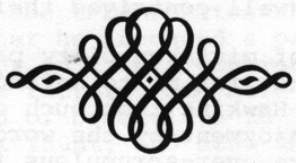
We must not out of mistaken piety pass over Johnson's appetite for food. It is not for me to defend Johnson's table-manners, to which Sir John Hawkins took such exception, and I will rather justify Johnson's enjoyment by the words of St. Paul to those of his day who were over-scrupulous in matters of diet,

"Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving."

Johnson's pessimism and Johnson's zest for living: it would not, I hope, be far-fetched or pretentious to see in these two qualities of Johnson's character a correspondence to the world-denying and world-affirming aspects of the Christian religion. Christianity affirms the reality and the essential goodness of the world as God's creation. The world is the sphere in which God is to be served and His good gifts enjoyed. But equally Christianity sets not an absolute but a relative value upon the world, which it sees as part of a greater whole and as a place of preparation for an eternal destiny beyond it. The imperfection and incompleteness of the world, and the burdens which life in the world lays upon us, may be seen as belonging to its very nature as "a vale of soul-making."

Christians from early times have likened the life of man to a pilgrimage, and a pilgrimage is a journey with a purpose and a destination. But though the journey derives its meaning from the goal, it also possesses value within itself. There are things to be enjoyed on the journey: the sights and the scenery, the good companionship of the road, the warmth and welcome of the inn, and the telling of tales in the evening like those with which Chaucer made us familiar. The pilgrim life is a good life, yet always the destination must be kept in view, and pilgrims can never make themselves so comfortable as to forget that they are men on the move. For Johnson as for Bunyan, the Christian life was a progress from this world to that which is to come. The distinctive character of the Christian life is set forth in the words of a Latin collect inadequately rendered in our Book of Common Prayer: we are so to pass through the bona temporalia, through the good things of time, that we finally lose not the things eternal.

The earthly stage of Johnson's pilgrimage ended on 13th December, 1784, and a week later his body was laid to rest beneath the place where we are now standing. In tribute to his memory, in reverence, gratitude and affection, I lay on behalf of our Society this wreath upon his grave.



JOHNSON AND THE IRISH*

The Revd. Canon A.R. Winnett, Ph.D., D.D.

The late Professor Constantia Maxwell suggested with reference to Johnson that "an instructive book might be written on the great Doctor's connection with Ireland and his Irish friends."[1] So far as I know this book has not been written, and on consulting several bibliographies I find that the subject has hardly ever been treated in journals and reviews, in contrast to the many pages that have been written concerning Johnson and the Scots.[2] This paper cannot claim to fill more than partially this lacuna in Johnsonian literature, but it will, I hope, serve to indicate some of the links between Johnson and a country in which he never set foot.

Everyone has an opinion, favourable or unfavourable, of the Irish. No people has been more subject to generalising characterisation than the Irish. The Irish are — friendly, easy-going, good-humoured, hot-headed, lazy, improvident, etc. Take your pick of any of these epithets to fill in the blank. Johnson gave his opinion of the Irish: "The Irish", he said, "are a fair people. They never speak well of one another." This remark needs to be read in its context. Johnson did not mean that the Irish were exceptionally given to disparaging or speaking ill of one another, but that unlike the Scots they were not engaged in a conspiracy to further one another's interests or to secure one another's advancement. Johnson's remark, made in 1775, was called forth by the apprehension expressed by the Dean of Derry, Dr. Barnard, that if Johnson visited Ireland he might treat the people of that country more unfavourably than he had done the Scotch (that is, in his Journey to the Western Islands). "Sir", answered Johnson, "you have no reason to be afraid of me. The Irish are not in a conspiracy to cheat the world by false representations of the merits of their countrymen. No, sir, the Irish are a fair people. They never speak well of one another."[3]

Scottish clannishness and exclusiveness were with Johnson almost an obsession. In Johnson's eyes the Scots formed a close corporation, a mutual benefit society for securing the advantage of their countrymen to the detriment of others. Dr. Maxwell quotes Johnson as saying, "No Scotchman

*A paper read at the Johnson Society of London Meeting on 17th December, 1977.

Chairman: J.R.G. Comyn, Esq.

publishes a book or has a play brought upon the stage, but there are five hundred people ready to applaud him."[4] According to Sir Joshua Reynolds, Johnson complained that the Scots in England "united and made a party by employing only Scotch servants and Scotch tradesmen."[5] From this fault the Irish were free. They clung together far less than the Scots and lacked what Johnson called the "extreme nationality" of the Scots. The result was that the Irish mixed much better with the English than the Scots did; and the fact that their speech was nearer to the English meant that they were successful as actors in a way that the Scots were not.[6] One final remark of Johnson's regarding the difference between the Irish and the Scots may be noted: it is recorded by Arthur Murphy in his Essay on the Life and Genius of Samuel Johnson — "The impudence of an Irishman is the impudence of a fly that buzzes about you, and you put it away, but it returns again and flutters and teazes you. The impudence of a Scotchman is the impudence of a leech that fixes and sucks your blood."[7]

At this point mention must be made of two Irishmen who made important contributions to our knowledge of Johnson. One was Dr. William Maxwell, a former scholar of Trinity College, Dublin, who on coming to England was appointed Assistant Preacher of the Temple. In 1754 he was introduced to Johnson by George Grierson, the Government Printer in Dublin. Maxwell described his friendship with Johnson, which continued until the latter's death, as "a connection that was at once the pride and happiness of my life." Maxwell's recollections, incorporated by Boswell in the Life, are a vivid record of Johnson's opinions and pronouncements on a variety of subjects. He described Johnson as "the most accessible and communicative man alive" and as "a kind of oracle, whom everybody thought they had a right to visit and consult." He drew a picture of Johnson's weekday levees, and observed of Johnson's charity that "he frequently gave all the silver in his pocket to the poor, who watched him between his house and the tavern where he dined."[8] In 1775 Maxwell left London for the Rectory of Mount Temple in County Westmeath. His final meeting with Johnson took place at the Mitre, where they dined together tête-à-tête. He wrote thus of their farewell: "He then took a most affecting leave of me; said, He knew it was a point of duty that called me away. 'We shall all be sorry to lose you' said he, 'laudo tamen.'"[9]

Another Irish clergyman who left on record his recollections of Johnson was Dr. Thomas Campbell, a graduate of Trinity and Chancellor of St. Macartan's Cathedral, Clogher.

He is best remembered as the author of A Philosophical Survey of the South of Ireland, published in 1777 and written in the form of letters by an imaginary English visitor. "A very entertaining book", Boswell called it, "which has however one fault-that it assumes the fictitious character of an Englishman."[10] It was in Campbell's Philosophical Survey that Johnson's celebrated Latin epitaph on Goldsmith first appeared in print, three years after Goldsmith's death. (The completion of the inscription was delayed until Goldsmith's precise place of birth could be ascertained). Campbell was a frequent visitor to London and came over first with the specific intention of meeting the great men of the day, and chief among them was Johnson. Boswell reports Campbell as saying of Johnson that "having seen such a man was a thing to talk of a century hence."[11] Campbell's Diary of a Visit to London in 1775 existed only in manuscript until it was published in 1854, having been edited by Samuel Raymond, Proto-Notary of the Supreme Court of New South Wales. Campbell's nephew had taken the Diary with him to Australia and it was lost to sight for fifty years, being eventually discovered behind a cupboard in the office of the High Court of Sydney. (The Diary was reprinted in Mrs. Napier's Johnsoniana and extracts from it in the Birkbeck-Hill Miscellanies. An edition by Professor Clifford was published in 1947).[12] Campbell's first meeting with Johnson took place at the Thrales' on 16th March, 1775, and we have Maxwell's somewhat unflattering and perhaps exaggerated description of Johnson's appearance on that occasion:

> He has the aspect of an idiot, without the faintest ray of sense gleaming from any one feature — with the most awkward garb and unpowdered grey wig, on one side only of his head. He is for ever dancing the devil's jig and sometimes he makes the most drivelling effort to whistle some thought into his absent paroxysms.

It was on the same occasion that Johnson sat beside Campbell on a sofa and told him that "he had heard two papers had appeared against him in the course of this week, one of which was that he was to go to Ireland next summer in order to abuse the hospitality of that place also" — the implied reference being, of course, to Johnson's criticisms of Scotland in his Journey to the Western Islands.[13]

Eighteenth-century Ireland had both its glorious and its inglorious aspects. Some of its glory is still to be seen in the Dublin squares and in buildings like Thomas Burgh's Library Building in Trinity College, Edward Pearce's

Parliament House (now the Bank of Ireland) and James Gandon's Custom House. Men of creative intellect like Swift and Berkeley would have been an adornment to any age and society. Trinity College compared more than favourably with contemporary Oxford and Cambridge: examinations were taken seriously, its Fellows worked hard in teaching and administration, and in the course of the century the number of its undergraduates doubled from just under 500 to close on 1,000. But eighteenth-century Ireland had its inglorious side, which called forth Johnson's strictures. It was the Ireland of the Ascendency, the rule of a small and privileged minority over a poor and oppressed majority. The preceding century had seen the Rising of 1641, the Cromwellian Settlement, James II's attempt to make Ireland his power-base, and the Williamite victory at the Boyne. The Protestants were determined to forestall any further threats to their security and power, and the era of the Penal Laws had begun. The Roman Catholic majority were debarred from membership of Parliament and the Parliamentary franchise, while the Sacramental Test excluded them from holding any public office. They were prohibited from conducting their own schools and from sending their children for education abroad. Severe restrictions were placed upon Roman Catholic worship. No Roman Catholic could buy or inherit land; he could not possess arms or a horse of greater value than £5. These oppressive laws had the support of even the most charitable and enlightened Protestants. Jonathan Swift is rightly honoured for his championship of the rights of the Irish against the restrictive and discriminatory policies of the English government, yet it never entered his mind to oppose the laws which treated the majority of his countrymen as less than second-class citizens. And side by side with the upper and middle class prosperity that marked the fashionable districts of Dublin, there was the poverty and squalor of its slums, and the even greater poverty and squalor of the rural areas, where the peasantry just managed to exist with the minimum of shelter and clothing and were reduced to starvation if the potato crop failed.[14]

Johnson felt deep sympathy for the state of the Irish and shame at England's treatment of Ireland, as the following account given by Dr. Maxwell makes clear:

> He had a great compassion for the miseries and distresses of the Irish nation, particularly the Papists, and severely reprobated the barbarous debilitating policy of the British government, which, he said, was the

> most detestable mode of persecution. To a gentleman who hinted such policy might be necessary to support the authority of the English government, he replied by saying, "Let the authority of the English Government perish rather than be maintained by iniquity. Better would it be to restrain the turbulence of the natives by the authority of the sword, and to make them amenable to law and justice by an effectual and vigorous policy, than to grind them to powder by all manner of disabilities and incapacities. Better (he said) to hang or drown people at once than by an unrelenting persecution to beggar and starve them."[15]

That was in 1770. Three years later Boswell reports Johnson as saying:

> The Irish are in a most unnatural state, for we see there the minority prevailing over the majority. There is no instance, even in the ten persecutions [i.e. of the Christians by the Roman Empire] of such severity as that which the Protestants have exercised against the Catholics. Did we tell them we have conquered them it would be above board: to punish them by confiscation and other penalties as rebels was monstrous injustice.

And Johnson was ready to defend the Irish who adhered to King James, thereby disclosing his Stuart, indeed Jacobite, sympathies: "King William was not their lawful sovereign. He had not been acknowledged by the Parliament of Ireland when they appeared in arms against him."[16]

It may seem surprising that Johnson, who showed such sympathy for the Irish, should have shown none for the Americans in their attempt to secure independence from British rule. The reason for this lies in Johnson's attitude to slavery. Johnson detested slavery, which he regarded as a violation of human dignity and natural justice. Once when dining in Oxford he proposed a toast "to the next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies", and we recall that his personal servant and eventual heir, Francis Barber, was a negro and former slave. Johnson saw the freedom demanded by the American colonists as a freedom to oppress their slaves. "Why is it", he asked in Taxation No Tyranny, "that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty from the drivers of negroes?"[17] By contrast Johnson's sympathy for the Irish arose from the fact that the condition of the majority of the people was one of virtual slavery.

The American War of Independence brought about a change in Ireland. France having lent its support to the colonists there was fear of a French invasion, and a volunteer force was formed by the Irish Protestants, not without a measure of Roman Catholic support. The services of the Volunteers were not called for in the field, but being armed they formed a strong political pressure group which succeeded in wresting from the English government the repeal of the centuries-old Poyning's Law and gaining independent power of legislation for the Irish Parliament. Returning to Johnson, we observe here a marked change from his earlier views. Dr. Campbell is our authority, and the date is 1781. Baretti asks Campbell about the disturbances in Ireland, and Campbell denies that there have been any disturbances, whereupon Johnson intervenes vehemently, "What, sir, don't you call it disturbance to oppose legal government with arms in your hands and compel it to make laws in your favour? Sir, I call it rebellion, rebellion as much as the rebellion in Scotland." Campbell replies that the Irish consider themselves the most loyal of the King's subjects but deny that they owe any allegiance to the British Parliament. Johnson violently disagrees. "You do owe", he says, "allegiance to the British Parliament as a conquered nation, and had I been minister I would have made you submit to it. I would have done as Cromwell did. I would have burned your cities and wasted you in the fires of them." Campbell remarks that times have changed and refers to the American Revolution. "What you say is true", replies Johnson,"the times are altered. But, sir, had we treated the Americans as we ought and as they deserved, we should have at once razed all their towns and let them enjoy their forests." After this outburst, Campbell gives Johnson time to cool. When Johnson's passion has subsided and the conversation is resumed he says, smiling, "Although I hold the Irish to be rebels, I don't think they have been so very wrong, but you know that you compelled our Parliament by force of arms to pass an Act in your favour. That I call rebellion." Campbell then puts a final question to Johnson, "Do you think Ireland would have obtained what it has got by any other means?" Johnson's reply is significant: "Sir, I believe it would not. However, a wise government should not grant even a claim of justice if an attempt is made to extort it by force."[18] I have sadly to say that behind this last remark of Johnson's I see an attitude of mind which was responsible for the long embitterment of Anglo-Irish relations — the failure to anticipate and to grant legitimate demands, the initial refusal to grant them when backed by force, only in the end to yield to force and to grant the demands when no goodwill is gained by doing so.

If Johnson's views on the Irish question showed a lack of consistency, it ill becomes us to blame him overmuch in view of the complexity of the problem and the tragic ambiguities of the Irish situation at the present time. Johnson condemned the treatment of the Irish by the English, yet when the Irish Parliament in 1782 secured its independence, he saw it as an act of rebellion. It appears that Johnson shared the fears of certain opponents of Devolution today, who see in Devolution the first step to UDI and even alignment with a foreign power, for he wrote to his friend Dr. Taylor: "Suppose the Irish, having already gotten a free trade and an independent Parliament, should say, we will have a king and ally ourselves with the House of Bourbon, what could be done to hinder or overthrow them?"[19] How hard it is to discover consistency in Johnson's views on Ireland is shown by the fact that only three years earlier, in 1779, he had equally declared himself against a union of Ireland with England. "Do not make a union with us, sir", he is recorded as saying to a gentleman from Ireland, "we should unite with you only to rob you. We should have robbed the Scotch, if they had had anything of which we could have robbed them."[20] The Act of Union was passed twenty-two years later, and to some Johnson's words of warning might have appeared sadly prescient. It is a matter of debate among historians how far the Union brought benefit or loss to Ireland. It meant the loss of its own Parliament and a diminution of national identity, but the term robbery cannot justly be applied to it. While Ireland's population was just under one-half that of England, Wales and Scotland 5 million as against 12 million — it was required under the Act to bear only two-seventeenths of the total expenditure of the United Kingdom.[21]

What Boswell called his "kindness for the Irish nation" was shown in Johnson's desire to become acquainted with Ireland's language and early history. Writing in 1757 to Charles O'Connor he regrets that the ancient history of Ireland is less known than that of any other country, and he gives as the reason for this that "the natives have had little leisure and little encouragement to enquiry, and strangers not knowing the language have no ability."[22] Twenty years later he writes to O'Connor expressing disappointment at the latter's Dissertations on the History of Ireland, from which he "expected great discoveries in Irish antiquities and large publications in the Irish language, but the world still remains as it was, doubtful and ignorant." He would particularly wish to know more about the affinities of the

Irish language and the history between the conversion of Ireland to Christianity and the English Conquest, the period when Ireland was "the school of the West, the quiet habitation of sanctity and literature." Johnson's correspondent, O'Connor, was an antiquary, a collector of manuscripts and one of the first members of the Royal Irish Academy.[23]

The reference to Ireland as the "school of the West" recalls the characteristic response made by Johnson when Dr. Campbell informed him that the first professors at Oxford and Paris were Irish: "I believe there is something in what you say, and I am content with it since they are not Scotch."[24]

The title of Doctor which is now inseparably joined to the name of Johnson was first bestowed upon him by Trinity College, Dublin, in 1765, the year which also saw his introduction to the Thrales and the publication of his Shakespeare. Earlier, in 1739, when Johnson was a candidate for the mastership of Appleby School in Leicestershire, for which appointment he needed to be a Master of Arts, Lord Gower, on the recommendation of Pope made application to a friend of Dean Swift requesting that the Dean might use his influence to secure the degree for Johnson from Trinity College. Either there was some break in the line of communication, or Swift failed to use his influence, or the University refused to bestow the degree on one who to them was an undistinguished stranger. The general opinion was that Swift declined to use his good offices, and this may well have been the case, for he knew that both his reputation and his influence in the College stood low. His own career there had been singularly unmeritorious, and moreover, in one of his poems he had lampooned the Provost, Dr. Baldwin.[25] Johnson received neither the degree nor the headship and thereby as Boswell observed and we may recall with thankfulness, Johnson was saved from "wasting in obscurity those hours in which he afterwards produced his incomparable works."[26]

The diploma by which Johnson was created Doctor of Laws of Dublin in 1765 made reference to "the outstanding elegance and usefulness of his writings", and Boswell justly remarks that the distinction "did much honour to the judgement and liberal spirit of the College." Johnson wrote in acknowledgement

of the honour to the Provost, Dr. Andrews, and to the Senior Fellow, Thomas Leland, the only two signatories of the diploma of whom he had personal knowledge, though we have no record of how Johnson became acquainted with them.[27] It is possible, though evidence is lacking, that Edmond Malone may have represented Johnson to his Trinity friends as deserving of recognition by the College.[28] Highly, however, as Johnson esteemed the Irish honour, he declined, according to Sir John Hawkins and Arthur Murphy, to be known by the title of Doctor until his own University of Oxford made him a Doctor of Civil Law ten years later.[29]

Those familiar with Trinity College, Dublin, will recall that the statues on either side of the main entrance to the College commemorate two of its most illustrious alumni, Oliver Goldsmith and Edmund Burke, both friends of Johnson and foundation members of the Club, or the Literary Club, as it came later to be known. Goldsmith and Burke entered Trinity in the same year, 1744, but their careers in College were very different. Goldsmith's time at Trinity was unhappy, largely through his having as tutor a sadistic cleric and mathematician, Theaker Wilder, and though he gained a small exhibition and College prize his academic record fell short of what his abilities might have achieved had he exercised them more fully.[30] Goldsmith's medical training was received at Edinburgh and on the continent. Although Trinity has no record of his having graduated there in medicine, he must be presumed to have done so as Oxford in 1769 made him Bachelor of Medicine ad eundem Dublin.[31]

Goldsmith to his contemporaries was something of a figure of fun and he had weaknesses which prevented his gifts from achieving their full potential, but it was no small achievement to have won the praise which Johnson bestowed upon him: not only the well-known words of the epitaph, Nullum fere scribendi genus non tetigit, nullum quod tetigit non ornavit, but those other words which Johnson spoke of him, "Let not his frailties be remembered; he was a very great man" and "If nobody was suffered to abuse poor Goldy but those who could write as well, he would have few censors."[32]

"Burke in College was everything that Goldsmith was not", wrote Constantia Maxwell.[33] His gifts were recognised at the College entrance examination, and he later competed successfully for Scholarship. His great contribution to the College during his time as an undergraduate was the founding of

a Debating Club, later to become the College Historical Society, the equivalent of the Union Societies at Oxford and Cambridge. When in 1790 Burke received from Dublin the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, the record in the College Register referred to "the various endowments of his mind and his transcendent talents and philanthropy" and described him as "the powerful advocate of the Constitution, the friend of public order and virtue, and, consequently, of the happiness of mankind." Johnson was not uncritical of Burke, and he had occasion to deplore his politics, especially on the American question, but he recognised in him "a great man by nature" and said of him, "That fellow calls forth all my powers."[35] Equally Burke held Johnson in great respect, and admired both his literary and his conversational gifts. In Johnson's company it was, he said, "enough for me to have rung the bell to him."[36]

Another Irishman who was a member of the Club was the already mentioned Edmond Malone, barrister, man of letters, editor of Shakespeare, Boswell's assistant in the writing of the Life and himself responsible for editions of the Life from the third to the sixth. Malone was present at Johnson's funeral, riding in the second coach behind the executors, and he was active in raising funds for Johnson's memorial in St. Paul's Cathedral. Malone's tribute to Johnson's intellectual powers deserves quotation here:

> The universality of his knowledge, the promptness of his mind in producing it on all occasions in conversation, and the vivid eloquence with which he clothed his thoughts however suddenly called upon, formed in my apprehension a very distinguished part of the character of his genius.[37]

Malone's friendship with, and influence upon, Boswell, his reliability and industry which contrasted with Boswell's proneness to be diverted from his task by the distractions of "dinners, executions and girls", and the steady pressure which he exerted on Boswell to complete the Life, are the subject of a well deserved tribute in James M. Osborn's opening essay of the Festschrift to L.F. Powell, Johnson, Boswell and their Circle.

Also within Johnson's circle were an Irish father and son, Thomas and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Thomas Sheridan was an actor and for several years manager of the Theatre Royal in Smock Alley, Dublin. Coming to England in 1754 he played at both Covent Garden and Drury Lane, and later settled in England as a teacher of elocution. The early friendship of Johnson and Thomas Sheridan ended in an estrangement for which Johnson

was partly though not wholly responsible. The story of Johnson's pension and his hesitation over accepting it in view of his definitions of 'pension' and 'pensioner' in the Dictionary is well known. Sheridan had been one of the friends who had urged the claims of Johnson upon the Government, but when Johnson learned that Sheridan too had been granted a pension he exclaimed, "What, have they given him a pension? Then it is time for me to give up mine." Johnson evidently regarded it as an affront that an actor should have been rewarded in the same manner as a man of letters, though as Boswell points out, the pension had been granted to Sheridan for his pro-Government stand at the time of the Patriot demonstrations in his theatre in 1753. Johnson's remark was hastily and thoughtlessly made, and he qualified it by adding, "However I am glad that Mr. Sheridan has a pension for he is a very good man." Unfortunately, the original remark but not the subsequent qualification was repeated to Sheridan, who felt deeply hurt and thereafter refused to meet or hold communication with Johnson, a breach which to Boswell as a friend of both was the cause of grief.[38] Sheridan showed his resentment of Johnson by describing him in his Life of Swift as "a writer of gigantic fame in these days of little men", and Johnson seems to have missed no opportunity for belittling Sheridan. "Sherry", he said, "is dull, naturally dull; but it must have taken a great deal of pains to become what we now see him. Such an excess of stupidity, sir, is not in nature." Of Sheridan's efforts as a teacher of elocution to improve the use of the English language Johnson said, "It is burning a farthing candle at Dover to show light at Calais."[39] When it was remarked in Johnson's hearing that a certain barrister was unfortunate in not having been taught oratory by Sheridan, Johnson retorted that "if he had been taught by Sheridan he would have emptied the room". But while Johnson thought little of Sheridan's abilities he respected his character. "He is not a bad man. No, sir. Were mankind to be divided into good and bad he would stand considerably within the ranks of good."[40] When in 1783 Boswell told Johnson that he had seen Sheridan, who warmly remembered their former intimacy, Johnson replied, "Tell Mr. Sheridan I shall be glad to see him and shake hands with him."[41] We do not know if this meeting took place to end an estrangement of over twenty years.

Very different from his estimate of the father was Johnson's opinion of the son. Of Richard Brinsley Sheridan Johnson said, "He who has written the two best comedies of his age is surely a considerable man", and in 1777 he was honoured by election to membership of the Literary Club. In that year Savage's Tragedy of Sir Thomas Overbury was produced at Drury Lane with a prologue by the younger Sheridan, who thus alluded to Johnson as both the biographer of Savage and lexicographer:

So pleads the tale that give to future times
The son's misfortune and the parent's crimes;
There shall his fame (if own'd tonight) survive,
Fixed by the hand that bids our language live.[42]

To an Irishman, Arthur Murphy, is due the credit of having introduced Johnson to the Thrales.[43] Murphy was the son of a Dublin merchant, but came to England where he made his name as editor, dramatist and actor. While editing the Gray's Inn Journal he translated and printed in it an Oriental tale from a French magazine, only to discover that in its original form it had been written by Johnson for the Rambler. Murphy's visit to Johnson to apologise for this unwitting error was the beginning of their long friendship.[44] Murphy paid his tribute to Johnson in his Essay on the Life and Genius of Samuel Johnson.

Three friends of Johnson and members of the Literary Club were called to the Irish episcopal bench, and of these the best known was Thomas Percy, of the famous Northumberland family, and editor of The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry. He had no connections with Ireland, but appointment to an Irish see was looked on as a fitting reward for those deserving ecclesiastics who were not quite up to a bishopric in England. His consecration as Bishop of Dromore took place in 1782, two years before Johnson's death.

Thomas Barnard was mentioned earlier as the one who elicited from Johnson the remark about the Irish being a "fair people." Born and educated in England he became Dean of Derry in 1769, Bishop of Killaloe in 1780 and of Limerick in 1794. He was one of the signatories of the Round Robin requesting that Johnson should revise his epitaph on Goldsmith and change its language from Latin to English. An argument between him and Johnson as to whether a man could improve himself after the age of forty-five, in which Johnson expressed himself with some rudeness, led Barnard to write the lines:

Johnson shall teach me how to place
In fairest light each borrowed grace;
From him I'll learn to write:
Copy his clear familiar style
And by the roughness of his file
Grow, like himself, polite.[45]

Boswell mentions the incident in a footnote, but a fuller account was given by Miss Reynolds. When Barnard maintained that no one could improve after forty-five, Johnson replied "You who are perhaps forty-eight may still improve if you will try. I wish you would set about it, and I am afraid there is great room for it." Later in the evening Johnson regretted the remark and apologised to Barnard with (to quote Miss Reynolds) "such a beseeching look of pardon and with such fond gestures — literally smoothing down his arms and his knees — tokens of penitence, which were so graciously received by the Dean as to make Dr. Johnson very happy."[46]

Johnson had a great regard and affection for Barnard. On one occasion when the latter was leaving London for Derry, Johnson addressed to him this punning verse or charade:

> My first shuts out thieves from your house or your room.
> My second expresses a Syrian perfume.
> My whole is a man in whose converse is shar'd
> The strength of a Bar and the sweetness of Nard.[47]

Later Johnson said of his farewell to Barnard on his departure for his Irish bishopric, "It would have hung heavy on my heart if I had not seen him. No man ever paid more attention to another than he has done to me and I have neglected him, not willingly, but from being otherwise occupied."[48]

Richard Marlay, a Trinity graduate and son of a Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, was Dean of Ferns, whence he was appointed in 1787 Bishop of Clonfert and translated eight years later to Waterford. He was known as a wit and the author of light verse, but his chief claim to remembrance is that he was one of the two bishops to oppose the Union with England. Marlay's deanery was the subject of Burke's sally, "I don't like the deanery of Ferns; it sounds so like a barren title." "Dr. Heath should have it", ventured Boswell: which Johnson capped by suggesting Dr. Moss.[49]

"A name which Ireland ought to honour" was Johnson's judgement on Dr. Samuel Madden[50], a wealthy clergyman residing in County Fermanagh, who was one of the founders in 1731 of the Royal Dublin Society, whose object was the improvement of Irish agriculture and manufactures. He gained the name of "Premium Madden" on account of his scheme for premiums or prizes to be given to the best answerers at the quarterly

examinations in Trinity. Madden submitted for Johnson's criticism his memorial poem on Archbishop Boulter's death in 1743. Johnson dealt somewhat severely with the poem, but Madden, he said, "was very thankful and very generous, for he gave me ten guineas, which was to me at that time a very great sum."[51]

The greatest and most original thinker whom Ireland produced in the 18th century was George Berkeley, the exponent of the philosophy of immaterialism, who held that sensible objects have no existence apart from the mind which perceives them, that "their being is to be perceived or known". Johnson's failure to understand Berkeley's immaterialism was shown by his attempt to refute it by kicking his foot against a stone. This took place at Harwich, when Johnson was seeing Boswell off to the continent.[52] "He kicked the stone but missed the point", comments the Berkeley scholar, Professor T.E. Jessop. On another occasion, when a man who had declared his admiration for Berkeley's philosophy was leaving the company, Johnson called out to him, "Pray, sir, don't leave us, for we may perhaps forget to think of you and then you will cease to exist."[53] In spite of his misunderstanding of Berkeley, Johnson described him to Maxwell as "a profound scholar as well as a man of fine imagination."[54]

Johnson never met Berkeley, nor to our great loss did he meet that other outstanding genius of 18th-century Ireland, Jonathan Swift. Indeed he could hardly have met Swift, for Swift, after some years of mental deterioration, died in 1745, when Johnson was only just rising into fame. Johnson and Swift have this in common, that in addition to the permanent reputation of their writings, their personalities have exercised a perpetual fascination for the psychologist and analyst of human character. What would we not give for them to have met and for us to have sat in at their conversation! Although Maxwell records Johnson's judgement of Swift as "a man of great parts and the instrument of much good to his country",[55] to Boswell it seemed that "Johnson had a certain degree of prejudice against that extraordinary man."[56] Boswell's impression is borne out by the remarks of Johnson concerning Swift which he records. "Swift", said Johnson "has a higher reputation than he deserves",[57] and "Swift is clear but he is shallow."[58] Johnson thought the Tale of a Tub too good for Swift to have written and questioned his authorship.[59] Swift's The Conduct of the Allies was "a performance of little ability. Swift has told us what he had to tell distinctly enough, but that is all. He had to count ten and he has counted it right."[60]

On Gulliver's Travels Johnson's judgement was, "When once you have thought of big men and little men, it is very easy to do all the rest", though he allowed great merit to the passage in the Travels about Gulliver's watch.[61] Of the Journal to Stella he said, "There is nothing wonderful in it, for it contains slight topicks and it might soon be written."[62]

It is difficult to account for this prejudice on the part of Johnson against Swift. In reply to a question from Boswell, Johnson denied that Swift had ever offended him. We can dismiss at once Percy's explanation that it was due to Dr. Madden, who turned Johnson against Swift because the latter had declined to contribute to his fund for prizes in Trinity College.[63] And scarcely less improbable is that it was due to Swift's supposed inactivity in the matter of the Master's degree which was sought for Johnson from Dublin — an explanation advanced by Sheridan but considered by Boswell to be insufficiently grounded.[64] Mrs. Piozzi sought the cause in Swift's attitude to doctors. Johnson, she wrote, "always hated and censured Swift for his unprovoked bitterness against the professors of medicine".[65] Swift certainly satirised doctors, and Johnson had many medical friends, yet this seems a hardly adequate explanation. It could scarcely have been politics, for Swift like Johnson sided with the Tories, and Johnson approved Swift's stand for the rights of Ireland in such matters as Wood's Halfpence. If it were Swift's seeming irreverence in handling sacred subjects — for which Queen Anne considered him unsuitable for a bishopric — or the scatological character of some of his verse, it is strange that Johnson is nowhere recorded as condemning Swift on these counts. It is happy, however, to observe that near the end of his life, when he wrote the Lives of the Poets, he judged Swift much more favourably.[66] No longer does he equate Swift's clarity with shallowness, but says that "his easy and safe conveyance of meaning...deserves praise, though perhaps not the highest praise."[67] He is now prepared to acknowledge Swift as the author of The Tale of a Tub,[68] Of Swift's personal character he writes approvingly though not uncritically, remarking on the disinterestedness and independence which marked his attitude to the politics of the day, his devotion to his Church and his cathedral, his readiness in company to listen and let others speak, and his generosity.[69] At the same time he mentions his petulance and arrogance and the fact that "his beneficence was not graced with tenderness or civility."[70] With great perceptiveness Johnson calls attention to one aspect of Swift's character: "The suspicions of his irreligion proceeded in a great measure from his dread of hypocrisy; instead of wishing to seem better, he delighted

in seeming worse than he was."[71] Johnson's own fear of madness led him to write with impressive pathos of Swift's last days of mental decline. He ends his account of Swift by quoting at length Dr. Delany's eulogy of him with its closing words, "He lived a blessing, he died a benefactor, and his name will ever live, an honour to Ireland."[72] So at last the heart of Johnson is united to the heart of Swift, and the two towering literary geniuses of the 18th century are at one.

With all these links between Johnson and Ireland, it requires an effort to remind ourselves that Johnson never set foot in Ireland. Though in London: a Poem he asked:

> Who would leave, unbribed, Hibernia's land
> Or change the rocks of Scotland for the Strand?

Johnson felt no inclination to exchange even temporarily the Strand for Hibernia. Boswell had visited Ireland in 1769, drawn thither by the youthful charms of la belle Irlandaise, Mary Anne Boyd. During his three weeks' stay in Dublin he was accorded a welcome befitting the traveller from Corsica and was entertained by the Lord Lieutenant and the Lord Mayor. Dublin he considered a "noble city" and life there "magnificent". "I never saw such feasting."[73] But the charms of Mary Anne could not prevail against the more mature attractiveness of his cousin, Margaret Montgomerie, and he never fulfilled his intention of revisiting Ireland. In 1779 Boswell suggested to Johnson that they might visit Ireland together, but he did not repeat the success he had gained six years earlier with his proposal to tour Scotland and the Western Isles. Ireland was dismissed by Johnson as "the last place where I should wish to travel." "Should you not like to see Dublin, sir?", asked Boswell. "No, sir", Johnson replied, "Dublin is only a worse capital." But Boswell persisted: "Is not the Giant's Causeway worth seeing?", to which Johnson's answer was, "Worth seeing, yes, but not worth going to see."[74] In an undated letter to Mrs. Anna Maria Smart, Johnson wrote, "I am not surprised that you are not much delighted with Ireland. To one that has passed so many years in the pleasures and opulence of London there are few places which give much delight. Dublin, though a place much worse than London, is not so bad as Iceland."[75]

So we are faced with the paradox that Johnson was willing to visit Scotland, for whose people he expressed his dislike, yet in spite of his "kindness for the Irish nation" and the number of his Irish friends he was unwilling to make the crossing and see Ireland for himself. Johnson had

visited Wales and France with the Thrales in 1774 and 1775, but Boswell's proposal of a journey to Ireland came perhaps too late, when the prospect of any journey was unwelcome to him. We can only regret that Ireland did not even briefly enjoy Johnson's presence. No place in the world was more full of clubbable men than 18th-century Dublin; nowhere would he have met with more congenial company and a greater warmth of friendship; nowhere would it have been easier for him to fold his legs and have his talk out. He might even have discovered that "the full tide of human existence" flowed not only at Charing Cross but also on College Green.

Documentation

1. Constantia Maxwell, A History of Trinity College, Dublin, 1591 - 1892, p.165.
2. The only two articles I have been able to trace are: "Johnson and Ireland", Westminster Review, CXXIX, Jan. 1888, and R.J. Kelly, "Dr. Johnson and Ireland", Irish Review, I., July 1911. I have not had access to either of these articles.
3. Boswell, Life (ed. Birkbeck Hill - Powell) ii., p.307.
4. ibid. ii., pp. 121-2.
5. ibid. iv., p.169.
6. ibid. ii., p.242.
7. Johnsonian Miscellanies (ed. Birkbeck Hill) i., p.427.
8. Life, ii., p.119.
9. ibid. ii., p.133.
10. ibid. ii., p.339.
11. ibid. ii., p.343.
12. ibid. ii., pp. 338-9 (n). The authenticity of the Diary has been questioned, but Birkbeck Hill stated his opinion thus: "On the whole I think that the Diary is genuine, and accordingly I have quoted it more than once."
13. John. Misc. ii., p.41.
14. On 18th-century Ireland see Constantia Maxwell's two works, Dublin under the Georges and Town and Country in Ireland under the Georges; also J.C. Beckett, The Making of Modern Ireland.
15. Life ii., p.121.
16. ibid. ii., p.255.
17. Works (Yale edn.) x., p.454.
18. John. Misc. ii., pp. 55-56.
19. Letter 797 (4th August 1782) in Letters of Samuel Johnson (ed. R.W. Chapman).
20. Life iii., p.410.
21. J.C. Beckett, The Making of Modern Ireland, p.281.
22. Life i., p.321.

23. ibid. iii., p.112.
24. John. Misc. ii., p.49.
25. "On Dr. Rundle", Swift's Poems (ed. H.Williams) iii., p.821.
26. Life i., p.134. The application to Trinity College is the subject of an article by Jeffrey Meyers, "Swift, Johnson and the Dublin M.A." in American Notes and Queries, iv., No. 1 (Sept. 1965).
27. Life i., p.489.
28. Johnson, Boswell and their Circle, p.3.
29. Hawkins, The Life of Samuel Johnson in Works of Samuel Johnson (1787 edn.) i., p.446.
Murphy, An Essay on the Life and Genius of Dr. Johnson, in Works of Samuel Johnson (1823 edn.), i., p.100.
30. Constantia Maxwell, A History of Trinity College, Dublin p.164; Dublin under the Georges, p.194.
31. Life i., pp. 548-9.
32. ibid. ii., p.281.
33. Dublin under the Georges, p.195.
34. J.W. Stubbs, The History of the University of Dublin, p.263.
35. Life ii., pp. 16 and 450.
36. ibid. iv., p.27.
37. Johnson, Boswell and their Circle, p.9.
38. Life i., pp. 386-8.
39. ibid. i., pp. 453-4.
40. ibid. ii., p.87.
41. ibid. iv., p.222.
42. ibid. iii., pp. 115-6.
43. ibid. i., p.493.
44. ibid. i., p.356.
45. ibid. iv., p.115.
46. John. Misc. ii., pp. 262-3.
47. Life iv., p.195.
48. ibid. iv., p.115.
49. ibid. iv., p.73.
50. Life of Addison, in Works (1823 edn.) vii., p.122.
51. Life i., p.318.
52. ibid. i., p.471.
53. ibid. iv., p.27. In The Idler, No. 10, Johnson writes of "the follower of Berkeley, who while he sits at his table, declares that he has neither table, paper nor fingers."
54. Life ii., p.132.
55. ibid. ii., p.132.
56. ibid. iv., p.61.
57. ibid. i., p.452.
58. ibid. v. (Tour to the Hebrides), p.44.
59. ibid. i., p.452.
60. ibid. ii., p.65.
61. ibid. ii., p.319.

62. ibid. iv., p.177.
63. John. Misc. i., p.211.
64. Life iv., p.61.
65. John. Misc. i., p.223.
66. A. Murphy, An Essay on the Life and Genius of Dr. Johnson, in Works of Samuel Johnson (1823 edn.), i., p.177: "Johnson, it is well known had conceived a prejudice against Swift. His friends trembled for him when he was writing that life, but were pleased at last to see it executed with temper and moderation."
67. Life of Swift in Works (1823 edn.), viii., p.38.
68. ibid. pp. 8 and 37.
69. ibid. pp. 17, 39, 41 and 44.
70. ibid. p.41.
71. ibid. p.40.
72. ibid. p.47. Johnson refers to Swift's dotage in The Vanity of Human Wishes, l.318 "And Swift expires a Driv'ler and a Show".
73. C.B. Tinker, Young Boswell, p.160
    F.A. Pottle, James Boswell, the Earlier Years p.408.
74. Life iii., p.410.
75. Letter 1154 (n.d.) in Letters of Samuel Johnson (ed.R.W.Chapman).