

THE NEW RAMBLER



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THE NEW RAMBLER

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Editor: David Parker, B Litt, MA
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From the Editor

I should like to express to my predecessor, Mr. James H. Leicester, the Society's thanks for and appreciation of his work on this journal during his eighteen years of editorship. I am also grateful for his personal welcome to myself in the 1984 issue.

No changes in the format or content of The New Rambler are at present envisaged. We shall continue to print summaries of papers delivered to the Society, giving the full text of one or more of them if possible, reviews of books of Johnsonian interest which are sent to us by publishers, reports on the Society's activities and occasional notes on relevant subjects. I should like to pay tribute to the Honorary Secretary, Miss Stella Pigrome; it is she who has provided (unless otherwise stated) the excellent summaries to which I have referred. The Society is most grateful to her.

One change, however, you will have noticed. It has been decided to bring The New Rambler year into line with the Society's year, so this issue covers not only the calendar year 1985, but the second part of the Society's 1985/6 programme. It thus runs from January 1985 to September 1986: the next issue will run from October (1986) to September (1987) and this will be the pattern hereafter.

You will note that a new serial - D - begins with this issue (No XXVI 1985/6).

IDEAS OF ILLNESS AND HEALTH - 200 YEARS OF CHANGE

Dr. D. G. Wilson, OBE, FRCGP - 19th January 1985

Chairman: Helen Forsyth

In introducing Dr. Wilson, the Chairman said that he had studied medicine at Cambridge and at the Middlesex Hospital. He had practised in the NHS, was a Fellow of the Royal College of General Practitioners and had been awarded the OBE. He had been involved in education and training for doctors and had sat on the Lane Committee on the Abortion Act. His other interests were music and literature, and he had been Chairman of the Charles Lamb Society since 1974.

Dr. Wilson began by drawing attention to the topics with which the Society was familiar, both from published literature and from the recent Wellcome Symposium: he quoted Mulhallen's article in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine (February 1984) ending: "Although a layman in medical matters, Johnson's enthusiastic interest in the subject combined with his great mental attributes ensured that many of his friends benefitted from what was usually, even by the standards of today, sensible advice." Dr. Wilson then explained that he would discuss the medicine of today, as perceived by doctors and by laymen and women, then track back to the ideas formulated by Aristotle and Galen; this would leave medical concepts of Johnson's time as a "Cham sandwich" in the middle.

Modern medicine was dominated by "science", broadly the idea that with enough research, enough knowledge, a cause could always be found for any effect ie. disease. Gradually realisation had emerged that disease was not something added to a person, but a process itself a part of that person. The mutual effect of body on mind, and mind on body, had to be considered in the light of a third factor, souls perhaps, which wise science always took into account. Dr. Wilson quoted extensively from Ramblers 32, 69 and 78, showing that Johnson was aware of these aspects. He then turned to some ideas about the autonomy of patients - their rights to choose, to be informed and to confidentiality, asking members to draw on their own knowledge of Johnson and his times to draw the appropriate parallels.

Dr. Wilson, as Chairman of the Charles Lamb Society, read part of Lamb's letter to Barton in 1823, pleading for ignorance in medical matters. This letter ended: "For, once fix the seat of your disorder, and your fancies flux into it like bad humours." Lamb chose alchemical language quite deliberately, of course, and Dr. Wilson went on to discuss the origins of humours, temperaments and dispositions, the great debate between Platonism and Atomism, the mechanistic views of human life; he

pointed out that such doctrines as that of "substantial form" heavily influenced medical thought and action well into the 18th century, even though better ways of exploring the world (such as the microscope) were being used then.

Dr. Wilson also drew attention to some helpful comment on Dante in Professor Boyde's recent book "Philomythes and Philosopher"; like Johnson, Dante had to wrestle with misfortune and lack of appreciation; like Johnson, Dante had a deep sense of the power of prayer, and suffered the confusions that arose from contradictions when authority was invested with Divine attributes, but acted in what seemed to be harmful ways. These ways of thinking inevitably affected attitudes to illness, to healing and to death, and Dr. Wilson explored the avenues in which Johnson had accurate knowledge e.g. "the itch" (scabies), and those in which his use of strong medicines, for instance, were nearer akin to magic or superstition.

Dr. Wilson concluded by quoting the final paragraph of King's Philosophy of Medicine in the 18th Century: "The squabbles between rationalists and empiricists are far less important than the problem: how did a critical sense, a critical judgment, develop in medical science and medical practice?" He asked members to consider the part played by Johnson during that century in this process, the process whereby authority (Galen) was superseded by science and by increased knowledge, and where an acceptance of uncertainty (Keat's "negative capability") began to appear respectable. The Johnson Society needed to know about science and about medicine from those professing those disciplines; equally, scientists and doctors needed the historical sense, the background and foundation of humanity, which the Society and its members could provide.

The discussion which followed was cut short by the advent of tea, and Mr. Leicester, on behalf of members, thanked Dr. Wilson for a very stimulating talk which had done much to confirm the extent that Johnson's thinking had touched life on so many points and that in medicine, as so often in other matters, he had been ahead of his time.

Perhaps it should be added that the preceding summary of Dr. Wilson's talk was provided by himself - but he confessed to having "taken a few liberties."

DR. JOHNSON AND THE DISSENTERS

Dr. G. M. Ditchfield

Lecturer in History, University of Kent - 16th February 1985

Chairman: Major-General M. H. P. Sayers OBE

The Chairman introduced Dr. Ditchfield as a Lecturer in history at the University of Kent since 1970, being as he described himself, a "product of Durham and Cambridge Universities." He had done considerable research into the subject of Dissenters and had contributed papers to many learned journals.

It is difficult to do justice in a page or two to the very comprehensive, wideranging and thoroughly documented paper given by Dr. Ditchfield, in which he reviewed not only Johnson's varying attitudes to the different persuasions of Dissenters, but theirs to him, against a background of the changing politics of the 18th century in Johnson's lifetime. He suggested that the general coolness of the 19th century towards Johnson might derive partly from the growth in numbers, political strength and cultural influence of Protestant Dissent. He pursued his subject under three broad contentions: that Johnson's attitudes towards Dissenters and theirs to him varied between the highly fragmented sections of Dissent; that Johnson widely separated cultural and aesthetic judgments from political ones (as did some of his Dissenting critics); and that some important shared assumptions put him on the same side as the Dissenters over many issues.

Dr. Ditchfield distinguished three forms of Dissent: "Old Dissent", ie pre-Evangelical and pre-Unitarian; "New Dissent", evangelically inspired, mainly after 1740; and "Rational Dissent", or Unitarianism. "Old Dissent" was descended from Tudor and Stuart Puritanism, and Johnson knew many belonging to these traditions, as well as Scottish Presbyterians and Quakers. On a personal level he had many friends and acquaintances among them, whom he could meet on a literary level. Most of these were for him theologically orthodox, in the Trinitarian sense, so that he did not feel too different from them. He had however deeper reservations about "Old Dissent" because of its regicide past and its assertion of Whiggish issues in politics. Johnson's relations were more cordial with "New Dissent", especially its principal form, Methodism. Wesley remained a loyal member of the Church of England, and Johnson both liked and respected him personally, and approved of the Methodists' efforts to do good to the "common people". There was some affinity between High Church Anglicanism and Methodism in a common emphasis on asceticism, piety, regular devotions, demands for high moral standards from the clergy, and a dislike of Whig domination in the Church of England. Johnson shared these ideals. "New Dissent" was

more acceptable to him, and to the mid-18th century Tory party, than "Old Dissent" because it was politically more conservative. Similarly, Johnson extended his approbation to the Moravian Church, of which his friend General Oglethorpe was a patron. The enthusiasm of Methodism's early days had repelled Johnson, but towards its later and more moderate form he showed more toleration.

Most of the differences between Johnson and the Dissenters emanated from "Rational Dissent", with which his relations were at their most frigid. As an orthodox Christian he did not regard Unitarianism as a Christian doctrine, though he once observed that all Christians agreed "in the essential articles", and that their differences were "rather political than religious". To the "rationalists" Johnson was a "vile pensioner", and an enemy of liberty, who scorned the "popular party" in the late 1760s, and whose political pamphlets of the 70s were "inconsistent with the principles of the English constitution and repugnant to the common rights of mankind". Rationalism was Dissent in its most political form and at its most aggressive against religious establishments, and Johnson felt more threatened by it, but his views did not prevent his having friendly relations with some individuals.

Johnson was best known to 18th century Dissenters as an essayist and critic; he was quite able to distinguish literary merit from political and religious considerations, and there were areas where he could meet the Dissenters on common ground, eg in attitudes towards commerce and material improvement and a belief in progress. Although from different motives, Johnson and the Dissenters shared a hatred of slavery, but they differed over the idea of "liberty" for reasons arising from four connected political developments of the 18th century. One was the alienation of much of the early 18th century Toryism from the Hanoverian order, seen as a menace to "liberty", with which Johnson grew up. The second, the accommodation of "Old Dissent" to the existing order, which gave Dissenters increasing, though not complete, civil equality, and kept them loyal during the Jacobite rebellions. The third development was the accommodation of post-1760 Toryism to the Hanoverians. Tories were now loyal subjects, received at Court and candidates for office. The fourth was the alienation of some elements of Dissent under George III, fearing for "liberty" in the age of Wilkes and the American Revolution.

Yet Johnson and Dissent shared some Libertarian assumptions: both had experience of insecurity, exclusion and opposition. Johnson never entirely abandoned the libertarian values acquired in the first 50 years of his life, but in the late 18th century he arrived at a personal accommodation with the Hanoverians, and appeared to his critics on the side of the Court and the Ministry. In the earlier part of the century

the threat to his beliefs came from above, towards the end from below. Dr. Ditchfield suggested that many historians had emphasised the antipathy between Johnson and Dissent as a whole: his paper had been a modest attempt to redress the balance. Johnson, he said, represented his century in all its complexity and its resistance to easy generalities.

After the following short discussion which was all that time allowed, Dr. Grundy thanked Dr. Ditchfield for such a comprehensive and illuminating account of Johnson and the Dissenters.

DR. JOHNSON AND THE ENGLISH ECCENTRICS

Professor J. W. P. Rogers MA, PhD Litt D
University of Bristol - 15th March 1985
Chairman: J. H. Leicester MA

The Chairman invited members to welcome Professor Pat Rogers of Cambridge University, now Head of the English Department at Bristol University, and Past President of the Lichfield Johnson Society. He was an authority on 18th century literature and had made a special study of that 18th century affliction, gout. Today he would be breaking what was new ground for the Society in a paper on DR. JOHNSON AND THE ENGLISH ECCENTRICS. After offering an unofficial greeting from the sister Society, Professor Rogers introduced his subject by saying that the modern sense of eccentric, other than as a technical word, had begun in 1690 and had gained ground during the 18th century, but the first use of the noun eccentric in the sense under discussion was by Scott. He went on to say that there was now a tendency to deny the term eccentric to Johnson, and to put less emphasis on his oddity of manner and appearance - so that he was seen as having character but not as being a character. There was no generally agreed definition of eccentricity or any clearcut division of the separate forms which eccentric behaviour could take. It might be worth distinguishing then between the stock types (misers, hunting squires, absent minded dons, etc), where there was an element of caprice and self-consciousness, and those driven to what seemed eccentric behaviour by internal stress or external pressure. Within the field of Johnson's contemporaries and acquaintances, the former might be represented by figures like Robert Vansittart, the Earl of Bristol, Lord Monboddo or Philip Thicknesse. The second category would include a number of fringe actors and writers, sometimes with clerical or medical backgrounds, who lived a difficult life on the edge of Grub Street and with whom Johnson could readily sympathise. As well as Richard Savage, this group included George Parker, Paul Hiffernan, S. J. Pratt, James Tytler and Henry Bate Dudley. These men were not just rebels, but people whose human peculiarities could be compared with Johnson's own. Johnson

was truly unique in his refusal to live life by rules, his suspicion of the falsely respectable, his willingness to take on unpopular causes, and his uncomfortable honesty. We did not dignify Johnson, he said, by trying to repudiate his 'eccentricity'.

Concluding the discussion which followed, Dr. Grundy thanked Professor Rogers, saying that one never knew enough about anything: he had produced people and stories new to members in an area where the borderline between normalcy and eccentricity was a fine one.

Note This report is based on a summary kindly provided by Professor Rogers.

CLUBS IN THE JOHNSON AGE

Ross Wilson MA, Th L
Hon. Schol. Trinity College, Melbourne - 20th April 1985
Chairman: J. R. G. Comyn

The Chairman said that so long-standing a member as Mr. Ross Wilson needed no introduction. Mr. Wilson began by tracing the origin of clubs back to Greek and Roman times, when groups of kin gave place to people linked by religious or commercial interests, which might become in time political parties, or might introduce foreign cults. In the middle ages city and trade Guilds assumed, with religious associations revived, the role of the club of the Roman Empire. The earliest revival of something resembling a club was founded in the late 14th century by the poet Occleve, but the later impetus came in the 16th-17th centuries from such groups as the writers and wits gathered at the Mermaid or Devil Taverns, the latter becoming known as the Apollo Club from the bust over the door. In the later 17th century the club as it then existed became political - for example the Rota or Coffee Club in 1659 as a republican debating society, suppressed at the Restoration, or the Calves' Head directed against the whole governmental structure. Coffee houses - and also taverns - in the late 16th century attracted not only disaffected persons who formed clubs connected with them, but also the leisured and wealthy who took over the houses and established them as restricted clubs or associations. In the modern sense of associations to promote good fellowship and social intercourse clubs began to develop early in the 18th century. Johnson founded his first club at the King's Head Tavern in Ivy Lane in 1748 in a time relatively free of wars and political troubles to amuse his evening hours with literary discussion. There were eight other members, and it lasted nearly ten years. Its most celebrated evening took place at the Devil Tavern where Johnson gave an all-night party to welcome Mrs. Lennox's first novel. The Dictionary defined a

Club as an "assembly of good fellows, meeting under certain conditions", before the question of regulated clubs with fixed premises had arisen. In 1764 Reynolds, who had for some months been dining his friends lavishly, proposed the formation of The Club, taken up by Johnson, with nine original members. In ten years the number reached 20, but by the time Boswell was writing the Life, they had risen to 35. They met originally at the Turk's Head in Gerrard Street, but later moved about as circumstances dictated, ending up at the Thatched House in St. James's St. Unsuitable candidates for admission were blackballed, and even Garrick was kept out for a time. Boswell was admitted in 1773. The Club was later renamed the Literary Club. In 1781 Johnson started a 'city club' at the Queen's Arms in St. Paul's Churchyard. Three years later he tried to revive the Ivy Lane Club, but it was not practicable, so he proposed to Reynolds that they should form a new club at the Essex Head in Essex St, kept by an old employee of Thrale's Brewery. "The terms are lax, and the expences light", said Johnson, "we meet thrice a week and he who misses forfeits two pence". He insisted that the "clubbable" Boswell should join though he was then in Scotland, he gave him the rules, written by himself, which Boswell preserved. Attending assiduously, Johnson was once seized with asthma, which kept him at home for several weeks, but he later continued until his death. There was a tendency for clubs, like The Club, to move away from the City towards the West End, particularly St. James's St, where the most fashionable came to be situated, and although many continued to maintain their political affiliations, many also became more renowned for their gambling and their fashionable membership.

Mr. Russell-Cobb concluded the discussion which followed by thanking Mr. Wilson for his highly interesting and comprehensive paper.

DR. JOHNSON AND THE LAW: AN ENLIGHTENMENT VIEW

Dr. James E. Reibman, Department of English Literature
Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, Massachusetts - 19th October 1985
Chairman: Lewis Raddon LLB, DPA

The Chairman introduced Dr. James E. Reibman as a graduate of Pennsylvania University, and a PhD from Edinburgh who had worked in the family law firm and as a political speech writer. He had written on Shakespeare, Scott, and Johnson and his contemporaries and was preparing for the University of Wisconsin Press a book on Johnson and the Law, the subject of his present paper.

Dr. Reibman said that throughout his adult life Johnson displayed an intense interest in the law, and in the three areas of capital punishment, natural law and slavery clearly showed himself to be a man of the Enlightenment, that "cultural climate" distinguished by intellectual inquiry derived from experience and speculation, freed from classical thought and christian dogma, which reflected many intellectual trends unified by the pursuit of knowledge.

Despite his conservatism Johnson respected and at times cherished changes in law, society and politics, most evident in the legal and literary structure of his periodical essays, where he employed jurisprudential thinking with a literary texture, his legal comments reflecting the moral and social truths he embraced, revealing a conservative 18th century humanist who had an affinity with the most radical thinkers of the Enlightenment. The points discussed in the moral essays illuminated the problems of a society governed by the appearance of justice and the rule of law. In particular Rambler No. 114 on Capital Punishment was a cogent well-reasoned appeal for radical change in contemporary reliance on the death penalty. He did not favour its abolition but recognised its failure as a deterrent under current statutes. He thought that the administration of justice was retarded by its over-employment: laws must be effective but also just.

In his contributions to the Law Lectures of Sir Robert Chambers Johnson showed the conservative jurisprudence of a forceful moral philosopher in the Enlightenment tradition, especially in the discussion of historical events and in an appreciation of natural law concepts. He trod an ambiguous path between the natural law revealed by a Superior Being and the natural law created by the repository of common ideals articulated by wise men. The strict adherent of Christian principles accommodated utilitarianism with the principles of natural law he deemed relevant and reasonable.

Johnson was concerned about the legal and moral issue of slavery. He queried whether slavery was ever to be supposed the natural condition of man, but accepted that an individual might forfeit liberty by a crime, and was morally and legally accountable for his actions.

Johnson was not always consistent in his views, arguing as a moralist against the disproportionate and capricious use of the death penalty yet accepting it for fraud and offering a wider justification for capital statutes than the single criterion of a life for a life.

Legal issues encouraged Johnson to indulge his wide-ranging intellectual interests and moral concerns. He tried to discern those passions in man that required them to be governed, and analysed those

ambiguous qualities that called for the application of law. He drew comparisons from other legal systems, cited assorted authorities and drew freely on natural law thinkers to help formulate his opinions. He shared familiarity with contemporary intellectual movements and despite reservations and inconsistency was most assuredly a man of the Enlightenment.

Dr. Reibman's paper was well-received, and Mr. R. F. Bailey, himself a lawyer, interested in this aspect of Johnson, expressed the thanks of members for an excellent paper from a speaker so eminently qualified in the subject.

JOHNSON AND SHAKESPEARE

Dr. Jonathan Bate
Trinity Hall, Cambridge - 16th November 1985
Chairman: Helen Forsyth

The Chairman introduced Dr. Jonathan Bate, Fellow of Trinity Hall Cambridge, who had previously been a Research Fellow at St. Catherine's, where he had obtained his degrees. He had also spent a year as Harkness Fellow at Harvard, where he had been taught by his namesake, W. Jackson Bate, a Vice-President of the Johnson Society of London. His book on Shakespeare and the Romantic Poets was due out from OUP early next year, and he was at work on a complementary book on attitudes to Shakespeare between 1760 and 1830. Today he would speak on JOHNSON AND SHAKESPEARE.

Dr. Bate said he had called his paper "Johnson and Shakespeare" before writing it, but its subject really was Johnson's Shakespeare in the context of contemporary comment on Shakespeare, compared with Johnson's, his predecessors' and successors', not excluding Shakespeare on the stage.

Starting with Dryden's famous comments of 1668, quoted in Johnson's Preface, he said that Johnson did not dissent from them, and in his life of Dryden called them "a perpetual model of encomiastick criticism". Both Dryden and Johnson tempered praise with the noting of faults, and praised Shakespeare for truth to nature, excusing his ignorance of books and the classical roles of drama. For Dryden, Shakespeare was the unlearned natural genius, to be admired but not imitated, and if possible improved. By the 1760s Shakespeare was becoming the great exemplar instead of the great exception, and the idea of poetry as imitative was giving place to the idea of poetry as essentially imaginative, a matter of individual creativity and expressiveness rather than of articulating shared truths. Johnson's Preface was a fundamentally conservative

document giving new clarity and weight to traditional precepts - one had to look to other critics for prefigurings of the ideas of Coleridge.

But if for today Johnson's Edition of Shakespeare was the great monument of the 1760s, for contemporaries it was Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee at Stratford - for it was Garrick who became Shakespeare's representative on earth, who established Bardolatry and elevated Shakespeare to the status of the poet of the English people, who achieved his pre-eminence in the theatre, although in "improved" form. Garrick did produce versions nearer to the originals, yet much cut and edited to give prominence to the hero (played by himself). In his time the actor's name began to assume greater prominence than the playwright's. Johnson's Preface implied that performance added nothing to appreciation of Shakespeare, and he appeared at times to belittle Garrick's achievement. But Johnson was after all concerned with the evaluation of Shakespeare and with previous editors: an actor had no place there.

It was the association of Shakespeare and Garrick which turned the Romantic critics against the stage. Both Lamb and Coleridge held that works appealing powerfully to the imagination could only inadequately be represented on the stage - a feature of criticism which distinguished the age of Coleridge from that of Johnson - crudely the distinction between reason and imagination. Johnson accepted witches, fairies and so on because Shakespeare's contemporaries believed in them: to Coleridge they were embodiments of Shakespeare's own almost supernatural imaginative force.

Johnson's historical elucidatory approach was proper to an editor attempting to bring readers to a better understanding of Shakespeare; Coleridge's approach was more private and personal, not for the beginner. Johnson gave a complete body of criticism; Coleridge's criticism was often fragmentary. Johnson was infuriating in his dismissals, his negative criticisms; the Romantic feeling was towards the magical and the imaginary to which Johnson was unsympathetic.

Johnson's practice of balancing Shakespeare's qualities against his faults - not unique to Johnson - Hazlitt attributed to the structure of Johnson's style. On the other hand, Garrick was establishing Shakespeare as the "god of our idolatry", in which he was followed by the Romantic and later 19th century critics, so that the idea of Shakespeare's greatness was culturally determined down to the present day. But Johnson's criticisms were also culturally determined, for example, by the need for literature to have a moral purpose, mingling pleasure with instruction. For him, moral literature must apportion rewards and punishments according to virtues and vices, and be well spiced with moral precepts. Here Shakespeare fell short, since he often allowed what was "just" in the sense of being true to life to override

poetic justic. Johnson felt that Shakespeare was writing without any moral purpose, and that his moral precepts and axioms were inserted too casually into his plays. But Johnson admitted that he had been so shocked by the ending of Lear that he could not bear to reread the play until he came to edit it - although he set less store by his personal responses than by his moralistic notions. To Johnson it was a writer's duty to make the world better. Hazlitt called Johnson in one sense the least moral of writers because his great sympathy with all aspects of human nature allowed him to find out good in the worst. Many of the 18th century philosophers cited Shakespeare as the classic exemplar of sympathy through his ability to enter into a range of characters so varied they seemed to embrace all human nature. Johnson himself admitted this faculty in Shakespeare when he referred to his power to approximate the remote and familiarise the wonderful - to go outside himself and take us outside ourselves so that we might participate in the passions and experience of others.

In this fundamental Johnson and the Romantics, through Keats, were in agreement: each producing a living response to Shakespeare: Johnson as a boy reading Hamlet alone in the kitchen, and coming up to the street door to see people about him, and Keats telling his schoolfellows that no-one would dare to read Macbeth alone in the house at 2 o'clock in the morning. Both on their deathbeds quoted Shakespeare. It was for such applications that one went to Johnson. Critical principles were bound by the age: human responses transcended it.

Mr. Cooke concluded the discussion which followed with an appreciative tribute to Dr. Bate's paper as representing the work of the younger generation of Scholars.

DR. JOHNSON AND THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

Christopher Ricks, Professor of English, Christ's College

Cambridge - 14th December 1985

Chairman: J. R. G. Comyn

The Chairman said that much had been written on Johnson in 1984, but it was a contribution to the Sunday Times by Professor Ricks that determined The Society to invite him to address it. He had had a very distinguished career in English studies both in his books and in visiting professorships abroad and had a wide variety of literary interests. He was at present working on the Oxford Book of Victorian Verse.

Professor Ricks had taken for his subject Johnson and the Falkland Islands. He referred briefly to the situation in Johnson's time and during the recent war, but his talk was less concerned with the political considerations of Johnson's comments than with the literary aspects, principally the surprisingly large numbers of allusions to Milton which occur in the Falklands pamphlet. Johnson detested Milton's politics but had a great respect for some aspects of his poetry.

In 1770 a Spanish force had ousted the British from the Falklands, and there was a great clamour for war. The question was settled amicably, and Johnson's pamphlet supported "quiet negotiation", by which he meant "not as to the restoration of the islands to the British, but as to the apology and rights of sovereignty." The pamphlet refers bitingly to the small understanding which people in general have of the nature of war, seeing it as "a splendid game; a proclamation, an army, a battle and a triumph.: Some do "die upon the bed of honour" and (with a reference to Addison's poem The Campaign) "resign their lives amidst the joys of conquest, and filled with England's glory, smile in death", but far more die from disease and neglect under adverse conditions. When the war is over the general public notices little but an increase in debt, and "how are we recompensed for the death of multitudes and the expence of millions, but by contemplating the sudden glories of paymasters and agents, contractors and commissaries whose equipages shine like meteors and whose palaces rise like exhalations" - an allusion to Pandemonium in the 1st Book of Paradise Lost:

Anon out of the earth a Fabric huge
Rose like an exhalation with the sound
Of dulcet Symphonies and Voices sweet.

Describing the Falklands, Johnson says that Captain McBride "found what he calls a mass of islands and broken lands, of which the soil was nothing but a bog, with no better prospect than that of barren mountains beaten by storms almost perpetual. Yet this, says he, is summer, and if the winds of winter hold their natural proportion, those who lie but two cables length from the shore must pass weeks without any communication with it."

In Paradise Lost Bk.II Johnson found, or remembered:

Beyond this flood a frozen Continent
Lies dark and wilde, beat with perpetual storms
Of Whirlwind and dire Hail, which on firm land
Thaws not....
A Gulf profound as that Serbonian Bog
Betwixt Damiata and mount Casius old
Where Armies whole have sunk

Books II and IX of Paradise Lost gave Johnson matter for comments on Junius in the course of his pamphlet:

Incenc't with indignation Satan stood
Unterrified, and like a Comet burn'd
That fires the length of Ophiucus huge
In th'Artick Sky, and from his horrid hair
Shakes pestilence and warr....

Hope elevates and Joy
Brightens his crest as when a wandring Fire
Compact of unctuous vapor, which the Night
Condenses, and the cold invirons round
Kindl'd through agitation to a Flame,
Which oft, they say, some evil Spirit attends,
Hovering and blazing with delusive Light,
Misleads th'amaz'd Night-wanderer from his way
To Boggs and Mires, & oft through Pond or Poole
There swallowed up and lost from succour farr....

This becomes, on Junius:

He will soon be more closely viewed or more
attentively examined, and what folly has taken
for a comet that from its flaming hair shook
pestilence and war, enquiry will find to be only
a meteor formed by the vapours of putrefying
democracy, and kindled into flame by the
effervescence of interest struggling with
conviction; which after having plunged its
followers in a bog, will leave us enquiring
why we regarded it.

These selections from a number of parallel passages cannot hope to do justice to Professor Ricks' illuminating commentary, delivered in so attractively lively a manner, nor do they touch on the tribute he paid to Johnson's magnanimity in some of his comments, but they will perhaps serve to recall a very enjoyable conclusion to the first part of the 1985/86 programme, to which Mr. Comyn paid tribute on behalf of members when closing the formal part of the meeting.

JOHNSON AND THE CRITIC AS IDEALIST: REFLECTIONS UPON FAMOUS PASSAGES
FROM HIS CRITICISM

James B. Misenheimer Jr.

Professor of English, Indiana State University - 18th January 1986

Chairman: Maj-Gen M. H. P. Sayers OBE

The Chairman said that Professor James Misenheimer, who was gracing the Society for the fourth time as a speaker, needed no introduction to older members, but newcomers would like to know that his studies included romantic literature as well as Johnson, that he had received six awards for distinguished university teaching, as well as an award from Leeds University for his bibliographical studies; but he himself said he was most proud of being a Vice-President of the Johnson Society of London.

It has often been observed that the number of people capable of doing genuinely valuable and lasting work in literary criticism in any period is invariably small, and that, indeed, a great critic is the rarest of all literary geniuses. Across the years it has been remarked that perhaps the only critic in English who deserves the epithet "great critic" is Samuel Johnson. Johnson's critical writings, which achieve a very impressive apex in Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets, or, as they are better known, The Lives of the English Poets, have inspired for many decades diligence of study, if not always unanimity of opinion; and the vast body of his criticism has long been a major subject of English literary history.

Johnson's criticism has, of course, been variously interpreted, particularly those passages that are best known. The emphasis that Boswell's renowned biography places upon conversational give-and-take, from persiflage to authoritarian pronouncement, seems pervasive in the view of Johnson as acerbic, arbitrary, dogmatic, at times even ill-tempered in his indictments of the literary accomplishments of others. These qualities of both temperament and judgment assert themselves significantly in Johnson the critic, as do, occasionally, elements of rascality and short-sightedness. But always underscoring Johnson's criticism are belief, conviction, love of truth, which taken together encompass a redolent idealism. His critical position, more often than not, is the position of a critical idealist of lofty aim, expectation, and vision. And as his standards for serious writing in the established genres are based on a view of literary art that is pre-eminently lofty in its focus, so is criticism in its essential identity a form of art which Johnson believes has much to exact of itself. It is probably fair to say that Johnson expects no more of Gray or Cowley as poets than he expects of himself as critic. Or, to put it somewhat differently, he expects a

great deal from both poet and critic. If the philosopher Nietzsche "loves the great despisers, for they are the great adorers, longing for the distant shore," then perhaps Johnson may be said in some measure to fit the category "great adorer," but his "adoration" of the subjects of his literary criticism is often stinting and dearly bought. Johnson is not an easy critic. He is never easy upon himself, and he is seldom easy upon others.

Let us look first at Johnson's view of what criticism should be, at what it should do, and then see how these ideas are brought to bear upon three of the poets whom he saw fit to include in 1779 and 1781 as he wrote the biographical and critical prefaces for The Lives of the English Poets, widely agreed to be his critical masterpiece.

No fact emerges more clearly or more pertinently from a study of Johnson's view of criticism than the consistency of his belief that criticism should aim to inculcate a sound appreciation of literature. Criticism can accomplish this purpose best, he feels, by pointing to the truth which a work of literature closely approximates and by describing the nearness to life or the remoteness from life which it depicts. Johnson's comments on this subject posit his conviction that criticism, as an aid to learning, must always serve the cause of truth if it is to be of value. The elucidation which it provides promotes this cause.

One of Johnson's best-known expressions of this idea is found in The Rambler, No.3, in which he presents his allegory of Criticism and her torch: "Criticism...was the eldest daughter of Labour and of Truth: she was, at her birth, committed to the care of Justice, and brought up by her in the palace of Wisdom. Being soon distinguished by the celestials, for her uncommon qualities, she was appointed the governess of Fancy, and impowered to beat time to the chorus of the Muses, when they sung before the throne of Jupiter."¹ Johnson goes on to explain that when the Muses came to visit the lower world, Criticism came with them, bringing with her "an unextinguishable torch, manufactured by Labour, and lighted by Truth, of which it was the particular quality immediately to shew every thing in its true form, however it might be disguised to common eyes."² The torch was designed to expose all sophistries, absurdities, falsehood under the guise of splendid rhetoric, and disproportionate parts that a work might contain. But Criticism soon found herself degraded by Flattery and Malevolence and ultimately withdrew from among men, leaving final judgment to Time. Although Johnson was not favourably disposed, as a rule, toward allegorical composition, he was nevertheless able to employ allegory quite effectively in this Rambler to delineate the task of literary criticism.

In two later Rambler essays, Nos.92 and 93, Johnson defines the task of criticism in language somewhat more direct and considerably more

typical of his writing. In No.92, he remarks:

It is, however, the task of criticism to establish principles, to improve opinion into knowledge, and to distinguish those means of pleasing which depend upon known causes and rational deduction, from the nameless and inexplicable elegancies which appeal wholly to the fancy, from which we feel delight, but know not how they produce it, and which may well be termed the enchantresses of the soul. Criticism reduces those regions of literature under the dominion of science, which have hitherto known only the anarchy of ignorance, the caprices of fancy, and the tyranny of prescription.³

And in No.93, he observes that "the duty of criticism is neither to depreciate, nor dignify by partial representations, but to hold out the light of reason, whatever it may discover; and to promulgate the determinations of truth, whatever she shall dictate."⁴ It is significant to note that in all three of these descriptions of the legitimate end of criticism, Johnson stresses the revelation and the communication of truth. Criticism in its basic nature is elevated by the loftiness of its legitimate end, and the light of the idealist shines.

Johnson was not content, however, to examine the nature and function of criticism in general terms only. Hence he turned to satire, through which he could ridicule the shallow and hackneyed criticism of his day and, as it were, hold up the negative example for the disapprobation of the world. His choice of an opening sentence for his satiric Idler, No.60, foreshadows the prevalent tone of the essay: "Criticism is a study by which men grow important and formidable at very small expence."⁵ He illustrates this contention by a sprightly satirical account of Dick Minim, who, after being apprenticed to a brewer, attained distinction as a critic. The two keynotes to Minim's character are shown to be falseness and total superficiality. About all that Minim can do is to parrot the trite and nebulous terms of criticism which he has heard the frequenters of the coffee-houses expound upon, but he does this parroting so impressively that he becomes recognized as a literary authority and is admitted to rehearsals so that playwrights and actors alike can benefit from his wisdom and unending suggestions. He recommends the establishment of an academy of criticism and presides over a critical society of his own. As a detailed and scathing satire of contemporary criticism, this sketch is a vivid revelation of Johnson's position. He had no use for the trite theories current in his day, and he had no patience with anyone who affected the possession of great learning and critical acumen but who obviously had mastered only the "husk", if that. Johnson's satirical lash is directed against the inane judgments and the profuse critical humbug of his time. In criticism, as elsewhere, his aim was "to clear the mind of cant." Again, the idealism is there, expressed through negative portraiture and definition.

Johnson's examination of the plight of criticism is further revealed in his many pronouncements, not of satirical intent, on the different breeds of false critics. Among these he readily identifies the malevolent, the flattering, the carping, the fault-finding, the microscopic, the telescopic, the vain, the roaring, the whispering, and the dictatorial. He finds the majority to be missionaries of aspersion and ill will, the eclipsers rather than the promoters of truth. His arraignment of the critics and their false methods is altogether a shrewd performance, dramatically illustrative of his good sense and power of analysis. His idealistic expectation encountered the disappointments of reality on numerous occasions and across many years of his "life of writing."

But as the earlier cited passages on the task of criticism indicate, Johnson by no means worked solely from the negative point of view in his attempts to characterize the foundations from which critical activities should emanate. He endeavored to establish criticism in terms of sound principles likely to appeal to reasonable minds. His references to the torch of Criticism lighted by Truth; to "known causes and rational deduction"; to "the light of reason"; and to "the determinations of truth" describe what is, for him, the basic aspect of the responsible duty of criticism, the assignment of values on rational grounds as opposed to literary judgments grounded on "the anarchy of ignorance, the caprices of fancy, and the tyranny of prescription."⁶ Reason and life are the two standards by which he felt all literature must be tried; these criteria best display truth and most effectively unmask falsehood and hypocrisy. Thus the values that inform his character and that mold his view of literary art fuse with and, indeed, guide his critical expectation; and all of these - human life itself, the literary work, and serious criticism - fall short of the ideal more often than they attain it.

Although reason and life are, for Johnson, the primary criteria in the formation of literary judgments, he suggests also the importance of historical considerations. He defends Shakespeare's use of the witches in Macbeth, for example, on the ground that "in order to make a true estimate of the abilities and merit of a writer, it is always necessary to examine the genius of his age, and the opinions of his contemporaries." In the Preface of 1765 he underscores the value to be derived from an historical method of approach, and in the Life of Dryden he observes that "[t]o judge rightly of an author we must transport ourselves to his time and examine what were the wants of his contemporaries, and what were his means of supplying them."⁸ In addition, he insists on the need for judging a literary work as a whole, for "[i]t is not by comparing line with line that the merit of great works is to be estimated, but by their general effects and ultimate result."⁹

Despite the censure of numerous self-authorized critical legislators, Shakespeare continues his reign as master of the drama because he helps his readers either to enjoy life or to endure it. His general effect is one of "pleasing captivity," and his ultimate result is the communication of truth.

These, then, are the guidelines which can assist the critic in arriving at literary judgments in which the reader can place his faith. To be sure, there are others as well; but rationality of approach, truthfulness to life and general nature, the historical method, and consideration of general effect are central to Johnson's critical attitude. The critic who examines a literary work in the light of these four guidelines and who pays no need to Flattery and Malevolence and the numerous other "siren strains" with which criticism is plagued, can expect to view the work in its relation to truth. What Johnson seems to wish most to stress in this connection is the idea that truthful criticism can lead to the recognition, appreciation, and inculcation of that larger truth which literature communicates; and it is this idea that stands behind his view that criticism itself, though "to be ranked among the subordinate and instrumental arts,"¹⁰ entails a precious responsibility.

The immediacy of effect and the longevity of influence which a literary work can experience are, in Johnson's opinion, the mutual responsibility of the author and the reader. He once observed in The Rambler:

The task of an author is, either to teach what is not known, or to recommend known truths, by his manner of adorning them; either to let new light in upon the mind, and open new scenes to the prospect, or to vary the dress and situation of common objects, so as to give them fresh grace and more powerful attractions, to spread such flowers over the regions through which the intellect has already made its progress, as may tempt it to return, and take a second view of things hastily passed over, or negligently regarded.

Either of these labours is very difficult, because, that they may not be fruitless, men must not only be persuaded of their errors, but reconciled to their guide; they must not only confess their ignorance, but, what is still less pleasing, must allow that he from whom they are to learn is more knowing than themselves.¹¹

Throughout his writings Johnson acknowledges the problems which the responsibilities of authorship entail; and he is adamant in his idealistic conviction that an author of talent, dedication, and moral

earnestness can triumph. Johnson sees the various literary genres as potential sources of power which can bring man to a recognition and application of truth within the framework of his own experience; and he believes that when an author's abilities are great enough and his knowledge is deep enough, man will willingly confess his ignorance and look upon works of literature with a tolerant receptivity. Then literature will make itself felt positively in the world. Anachronism aside, had Johnson been asked to state a preference for DeQuincey's literature of knowledge or literature of power, he undoubtedly would have chosen the latter. His chief interest, as a critic and man of letters, was literature as power - as moral power - from which it behooves man to glean the hope of self-fulfillment and unlimited achievement. Thus his expectation of authorship made its demands on both small and large talents alike, not to mention on genius itself, and among even those authors now considered great or "immortal," was seldom fulfilled.

In his book The Literary Critics, George Watson has pointed out that with Johnson "English criticism achieves greatness on a scale that any reader can instantly recognize. The Lives of the Poets stand[s] four-square as the foundation stone of our critical tradition, and...need[s] no concessive defence of a 'historical' kind."¹² John Hardy has indicated in his recent critical study that the Lives is "perhaps the most widely read" of all of Johnson's works. Its statements of critical expectation are of the highest order. Hardy adds that "like his Shakespeare, it not only reflects assumptions [Johnson] shared with his age, but has, nevertheless, a personally realized quality that represents a vivid response to different kinds of poetry."¹³ As examples of Johnson's critical expectation and idealism, several of the individual lives are very nearly perfect. Though there are others that would serve equally well, three have been chosen for the purposes of this paper: the "Life of Cowley", the "Life of Dryden", and the "Life of Gray". Each of these lives is a statement within itself of how particular ideals have, or have not, been realized.

Of the fifty-two lives, the "Life of Cowley" is justifiably among the best-known. Frequently anthologized in whole or in part, it is one of two lives of poets who flourished prior to the Restoration and whose major work is not a part of the Restoration poetic mode (Cowley lived until 1667 and Milton until 1674); and also, it contains Johnson's famous analysis of metaphysical poetry, an analysis that has assumed its place among some of the most prominent critical pieces in English literary history. Further, Johnson considered the "Life of Cowley" to be his best in this long series.

Among the ideals which Johnson espouses for literature across the wide spectrum of his critical writings are (1) the "grandeur of generality," or a general representativeness or universality of

application and (2) the "stability of truth." Both of these ideals are compromised in the work of Cowley and the other metaphysical poets. Johnson is careful to enumerate other kinds of merit in Cowley's writings, however, such as his statement that The Cutter of Colman Street is a play which "has, in a very great degree, the power of fixing attention and exciting merriment,"¹⁴ or that the Pindaric odes are a "bold and vigorous attempt to recover"¹⁵ this form of writing. The Mistress, on the other hand, is mentioned as having "no power of seduction," for these are love poems without sincere emotion: "The compositions are such as might have been written for penance by a hermit, or for hire by a philosophical rhymist who had only heard of another sex..."¹⁶ Johnson compliments the learning of Cowley, as well as his originality and parts of his versification. But the relative merit and demerit of Cowley's work as a poet seem subsumed by Johnson's concern with the metaphysical school and its stylistic and imagistic aberrations. Of Cowley in relation to this school, Johnson says: "Cowley, like other poets who have written with narrow views, and instead of tracing intellectual pleasure to its natural sources in the mind of man, paid their court to temporary prejudices, has been at one time too much praised, and too much neglected at another."¹⁷

Johnson's reference to "other poets who have written with narrow views" is an anticipation of his account of the metaphysical poets, whose "narrow views" kept them from achieving the "grandeur of generality" which Johnson lauds as integral to literary art. The frustration of his expectations is well represented by a few select excerpts, particularly effective when examined together:

The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour; but unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry they only wrote verses, and very often such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear, for the modulation was so imperfect that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables....

Here are "narrow views" of meter, versification, and poetic language. Then,

...Their thoughts are often new but seldom natural; they are not obvious, but neither are they just; and the reader, far from wondering that he missed them, wonders more frequently by what perverseness of industry they were ever found. ...The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons and allusions; their learning instructs and their subtlety surprises, but the reader commonly thinks his

improvement dearly bought, and though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.

Here are "narrow views" of what is "natural" and "just" by way of poetic concept. Thus the metaphysical poets have led themselves away from the deeper possibilities of affecting their audience in any lasting way. On this facet of their failure, Johnson remarks:

...[I]t will be readily inferred that they were not successful in representing or moving the affections. As they were wholly employed on something unexpected and surprising, they had no regard to that uniformity of sentiment which enables us to conceive and to excite the pains and the pleasures of other minds: they never inquired what, on any occasions, they should have said or done, but wrote rather as beholders than partakers of human nature, as beings looking upon good and evil impassive and at leisure... Their courtship was void of fondness and their lamentation of sorrow. Their wish was only to say what they hoped had been never said before.

Nor was the sublime more within their reach than the pathetic, for they never attempted that comprehension and expanse of thought which at once fills the whole mind, and of which the first effect is sudden astonishment, and the second rational admiration.

And at this juncture, Johnson gives what is now one of the most frequently quoted passages of criticism from his entire canon:

Sublimity is produced by aggregation, and littleness by dispersion. Great thoughts are always general, and consist in positions not limited by exceptions, and in descriptions not descending to minuteness... Those writers who lay on the watch for novelty could have little hope of greatness, for great things have not escaped former observation.¹⁸

Thus it is that Cowley, and Donne, and Cleveland, and some others of the metaphysical group are brought to task by the greatest critic of the eighteenth century. Yet, his analysis is not completely devoid of praise, as already seen. His appreciation of the powers of mind of these writers comes forward prior to a lengthy section of close analysis of individual passages as examples of both failure and success, and is also quite well known:

Yet great labour directed by great abilities is never wholly lost, if they frequently threw away their wit upon false

conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth; if their conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage. To write on their plan it was at least necessary to read and think.¹⁹

Whether or not one agrees with all of Johnson's judgments of Cowley and his contemporary poets, one can nevertheless see that for Johnson certain poetic ideals have gone begging. Johnson's indictments do not comprise an excoriation, but rather a reasoned judgment that is solidly based on his concept of literary art. The indictments here are suitably tempered, as well, by a very subtle, possibly unintentional humorous sense. Our agreeing or not agreeing seems essentially unimportant, and particularly in view of the fact that readers return again and again to the "Life of Cowley" to experience the challenge and the excitement of Johnson's critical intelligence. The ideals are vividly there.

In the "Life of Dryden," Johnson's ideals receive an even fuller play. Johnson had had a lifelong ambition to write a life of this pre-eminent Restoration figure; and as John Hardy has reminded us, Johnson measured Dryden, in his review of the poetry, against his seventeenth-century predecessors, as follows: "He had more music than Waller, more vigour than Denham, and more nature than Cowley."²⁰ Thus, as a poet, Dryden possesses three qualities - music, vigour, and nature - which Johnson considers particularly impressive, and made more so when viewed beside the general admiration that he feels for Dryden as one whose mind was "very widely acquainted both with art and nature, and in full possession of great stores of intellectual wealth."²¹

Almost twice the length of the "Life of Cowley," the "Life of Dryden" is by many critics regarded as the best of The Lives of the English Poets. Here, to be sure, Johnson subjects the complexities of a long and active professional career to close scrutiny, offering in the critical section an extended analysis of Dryden's career as a dramatist, as a poet, and as a critic and translator. And Johnson's praise of the quality of mind which Dryden brought to his creative tasks seems both generous and just. After indicating that Dryden's literary performances are "not always free from ostentation," that they are sometimes "obvious" and "superficial," and that they could be both "erroneous" and "hastily collected," he goes on to delineate the nature of Dryden's literary genius as applied to his works generally:

Yet it cannot be said that his genius is ever unprovided of matter, or that his fancy languishes in penury of ideas. His works abound with knowledge, and sparkle with illustrations. There is scarcely any science or faculty that does not supply him with occasional images and lucky similitudes.

And as mentioned earlier,

[e]very page discovers a mind very widely acquainted both with art and nature, and in full possession of great stores of intellectual wealth.

If "intellectual wealth" of a kind, at least the ability "to read and think," is singled out as a special attribute of the metaphysical poets, in the "Life of Dryden" it is mentioned not only as the man's wonted reservoir of resource and power but also as distinguishing his approach to his writing. Johnson goes on:

Of him that knows much it is natural to suppose that he has read with diligence; yet I rather believe that the knowledge of Dryden was gleaned from accidental intelligence and various conversation by a quick apprehension, a judicious selection, and a happy memory, a keen appetite of knowledge and a powerful digestion, by vigilance that permitted nothing to pass without notice, and a habit of reflection that suffered nothing useful to be lost.²²

Thus Dryden's work can be said to epitomize the culture of the era in which he thrived and to assimilate unto itself the culture of both past and present. If Johnson finds various kinds of faults and weaknesses among Dryden's legacy, he finds also much to admire.

Perhaps the best known single section of criticism in Johnson's "Life of Dryden" is the section dealing with occasional poetry, initially of seeming ambivalence which however works round to praise of the accomplishment. Johnson remarks that almost all of Dryden's poems were occasional, and then he speaks of the perils of this sub-genre. He writes:

In an occasional performance no height of excellence can be expected from any mind, however fertile in itself, and however stored with acquisitions. He whose work is general and arbitrary has the choice of his matter, and takes that which his inclination and his studies have best qualified him to display and decorate. He is at liberty to delay his publication till he has satisfied his friends and himself, till he has reformed his first thoughts by subsequent examination, and polished away those faults which the precipitance of ardent composition is likely to leave behind it.

Thus, we are to understand that the demands of occasional subject matter are restrictive by nature. They reduce the possibilities of various

modes of proceeding, and they inhibit the "grandeur of generality" which is intrinsic to great writing. Johnson continues:

The occasional poet is circumscribed by the narrowness of his subject. Whatever can happen to man has happened so often that little remains for fancy or invention. We have been all born, we have most of us been married, and so many have died before us that our deaths can supply but few materials for a poet.

The constraint of time, or timeliness, must also be faced; and it, too, is inhibiting:

Not only matter but time is wanting. The poem must not be delayed till the occasion is forgotten. The lucky moments of animated imagination cannot be attended: elegances and illustrations cannot be multiplied by gradual accumulation; the composition must be dispatched while conversation is yet busy and admiration fresh, and haste is to be made lest some other event should lay hold upon mankind.

In his analyses of several of Dryden's major occasional poems, such as "Heroic Stanzas," Annus Mirabilis, and Absalom and Achitophel, Johnson is quick to point out the powers of mind which the poet brought to these works, and though he finds fault with particular images or lines, he consistently commends the intellectual treasure-house of detail and subject matter with which the poems teem. There is the strong implication at least that Johnson regrets Dryden's not having brought his strong intellectual gifts to bear upon matter less bound to specific events (since "great thoughts are always general"); yet, Dryden's accomplishments in occasional verse secure for him a strong position as poet, despite the limitations of the genre itself:

Occasional compositions may however secure to a writer the praise both of learning and facility, for they cannot be the effect of long study, and must be furnished immediately from the treasures of the mind.²³

Dryden, then, was often inspired to write "by some personal regard" and therefore rarely wrote on general topics. His intellectual nature and his intellectual industry serve him well in his occasional poems.

In other areas, Dryden falls short of Johnson's conceptual ideals, including the obligation of the literary artist to inculcate moral wisdom, and area in which Johnson finds Shakespeare, too, lacking. As Johnson surveys the totality of Dryden's contribution to art, he ventures that

[h]is works afford too many examples of dissolute licentiousness and abject adulation... Of the mind that can trade in corruption, and can deliberately pollute itself with ideal wickedness for the sake of spreading the contagion in society, I wish not to conceal or excuse the depravity. Such degradation of the dignity of genius, such abuse of superlative abilities, cannot be contemplated but with grief and indignation. What consolation can be had Dryden has afforded by living to repent, and to testify his repentance.²⁴

Dryden has also made very frequent use of mythology and has not always bothered to make clear where fable ends and religion begins. He has suffered, too, from faults of affectation and has been negligent from time to time in executing the details of correct versification, an area in which he did not really aim at perfection. Yet,

[t]he new versification, as it was called, may be considered as owing its establishment to Dryden, from whose time it is apparent that English poetry has had no tendency to relapse to its former savageness.²⁵

In the area of portraying the human heart, human feelings, Dryden's understanding was not keen. Johnson points out that

[w]e do not always know our own motives. I am not certain whether it was not rather the difficulty which he found in exhibiting the genuine operations of the heart than a servile submission to an injudicious audience, that filled his plays with false magnificence.²⁶

Johnson finds in Dryden a writer possessing "variety of excellence" an appreciation of nature and beauty, and a love of truth, though unfortunately, however, "simplicity gave him no pleasure,"²⁷ and his genius was in part wasted upon ephemeral materials unworthy of it. Johnson's disappointment in various aspects of Dryden's performance leads not at all to abrogation of his admiration, though several of the critic's ideals have not been achieved.

Long before he wrote the "Life of Gray," Johnson had stated rather firm opinions of the poet indicating that Gray had left unfulfilled his strong intellectual and poetic gifts. On Saturday, 25 June 1763, hardly one month after his introduction to Boswell in Russell Street, Covent Garden, Johnson remarked to the young Scotsman:

"Sir, I do not think Gray a first-rate poet. He has not a bold imagination, nor much command of words. The obscurity

in which he has involved himself will not persuade us that he is sublime. His Elegy in a Church-yard has a happy selection of images, but I don't like what are called his great things."²⁸

The "great things" to which Johnson refers include the two Pindaric odes of 1757. "The Progress of Poetry" and "The Bard," for neither of which did he care. For him they were literary curiosities for which some readers affected an understanding, and they were abrupt, remote, divorced from the kinds of reality which speak directly and lastingly to readers.

Years later, for Tuesday, 28 March 1775, Boswell reports still another conversation in which Gray comes under Johnson's rigorous scrutiny. It was apparently at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Thrale that Johnson referred to Gray as "a dull fellow":

BOSWELL. "I understand he was reserved, and might appear dull in company; but surely he was not dull in poetry."
JOHNSON. "Sir, he was dull in company, dull in his closet, dull every where. He was dull in a new way, and that made many people think him GREAT. He was a mechanical poet."²⁹

Still later, in the "Life of Gray," Johnson tempers his criticism of Gray somewhat:

What has occurred to me, from the slight inspection of his letters in which my undertaking has engaged me, is that his mind had a large grasp, that his curiosity was unlimited and his judgment cultivated, that he was a man likely to love much where he loved at all, but that he was fastidious and hard to please. His contempt however is often employed where I hope it will be approved, upon scepticism and infidelity.³⁰

It is worthwhile to note that Johnson finds Gray's judgment cultivated and the quality of his mind not unlike that of both Cowley and Dryden. But if it can be said that Johnson was approvingly engaged by the letters, he was seldom engaged by the poetry. The poetic imagination lacked boldness, and the language was frequently careless and inexact. The subject matter was too often obscure, relying as some of it did on Scandinavian mythology and fable; or the imagery was at times even puerile. Johnson deemed Mark Akenside, now little read, a poet superior to Gray.

And perhaps, at times, a hint of unfair play creeps into Johnson's assessment as part of his repartee with Boswell, as for example in this conversation of Thursday, 11 April 1776:

BOSWELL. "Does not Gray's poetry, Sir, tower above the common mark?" JOHNSON. "Yes, Sir, but we must attend to the difference between what men in general cannot do if they would, and what every man may do if he would. Sixteen-string Jack towered above the common mark." BOSWELL. "Then, Sir, what is poetry?" JOHNSON. "Why, Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all know what light is; but it is not easy to tell what it is."³¹

We can see what is here. With Gray's cultivation, with his "large grasp," with his intellectual nature and individual poetic sense, he ought to have towered higher above the common mark. Fastidiousness and nicety are not to excuse him, as are not reticence and personal remoteness. Gray perhaps ought to have done more, and what he did do he ought to have done better. He had the gifts. And as for Sixteen-string Jack, the noted highwayman who was after several acquittals at last hanged, the analogy seems unfair despite the truth of its implication of all attainments being relative; and it is here, of course, that once again cheerfulness breaks in, if at a significant cost to Gray.

Of all of Gray's poems, Johnson apparently really liked only the Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard; and his criticism even of this poem, now one of the most beloved in English, is measured. Nevertheless, he once remarked to Boswell on its "happy selection of images" and in his life of the poet Thomas Parnell, was to find, in contrasting the Elegy with Parnell's shorter "A Night-Piece on Death," that "Gray has the advantage in dignity, variety, and originality of sentiment."³² It is with a paragraph of unusually appreciative criticism of the Elegy that Johnson closes his account of Gray's life and work:

In the character of his Elegy I rejoice to concur with the common reader, for by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtlety and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honours. The Churchyard abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. The four stanzas beginning 'Yet even these bones' are to me original: I have never seen the notions in any other place; yet he that reads them here persuades himself that he has always felt them. Had Gray written often thus, it had been vain to blame, and useless to praise him.³³

Among Johnson's references to other poems of Gray, there are no critical compliments at this level. The language of the "Ode on Spring" is "poetical" but "too luxuriant, and the thoughts have nothing new." The poem about Walpole's cat "is not a happy trifle":

Selima, the Cat, is called a nymph with some violence
both to language and sense; but there is good use made
of it when it is done, for of the two lines,

What female heart can gold despise?
What cat's averse to fish?

the first relates merely to the nymph, and the second only
to the cat. The sixth stanza contains a melancholy truth,
that 'a favourite has no friend', but the last ends in a
pointed sentence of no relation to the purpose: if 'what
glistened' had been 'gold', the cat would not have gone
into the water; and if she had, would not less have been
drowned.³⁴

Johnson is particularly severe on what he perceives as the
extravagances of Gray's poetic diction. But if Gray the poet is ever
great, he is great in select stanzas on the Elegy; and Johnson's
concluding tribute to that poem has long ago become one of the most
celebrated passages in The Lives of the English Poets. One cannot help
pondering what Gray would have thought of Johnson's assessment of him -
how Gray would have perceived Johnson's critical ideals in application to
himself.

John Wain has reminded us, in his masterful Introduction to the
anthology Johnson as Critic, that "[i]n approaching Samuel Johnson as a
literary critic, the first thing to grasp is that literary criticism,
though an important part of his work and a lifelong interest, was at no
time his exclusive concern."³⁵ This reality, in view of Johnson's
achievement in this area of humane letters, becomes a bracing tonic,
perhaps even an inspiration, for the modern reader. Further, one thinks
of the indubitable honor conferred upon the fifty-two writers chosen by
Johnson for inclusion in the series of Lives; for none who is included
lacks Johnson's praise and esteem, though at times these angles of his
critiques seem eclipsed by an expectation which few are able to satisfy.
Given the credit that is due to the fifty-two who were chosen, there is
not one whose place in literary history has not been made more secure, in
some cases more illustrious even, than in all likelihood would have
occurred otherwise. As a young university undergraduate once expressed
his own desire, the lives of these poets will perhaps "be immortal for
quite a long time." Without Johnson, some few would already have sunk
into total obscurity; but all, all, enjoy the possibility of a "longer
immortality" because of his recognition of them. And let it be said,
finally, that as with Johnson's friend Oliver Edwards, who once remarked
that he could not be a philosopher because "cheerfulness was always
breaking in,"³⁶ so it is with Johnson. Of the three poets examined here,
admittedly more cheerfulness breaks into the examinations of Cowley and

Gray; for with Johnson, Dryden was among the greatest of all the literary artists he attempts to present in the series and therefore Dryden's unfulfilled potential is all the more poignant to the critic. But regularly, cheerfulness breaks into Johnson's criticism of both life and art in a style almost surprising; and in the later realm, it can take the form of an idealism too often overlooked.

Notes

- 1 W.J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, eds., The Rambler, No.3. by Samuel Johnson, vol.3 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale UP, 1969) 16. Hereafter cited as Yale Edition.
- 2 The Rambler, No.3, 16.
- 3 The Rambler. No.92, vol.4 of Yale Edition, 122.
- 4 The Rambler, No.93, vol.4 of Yale Edition, 134.
- 5 W.J. Bate, John M. Bullitt and L.F. Powell, eds., The Idler, No.60, by Samuel Johnson, vol.2 of Yale Edition (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963) 184.
- 6 The Rambler, No.92, 122.
- 7 Arthur Sherbo, ed., "Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth" by Samuel Johnson, in Johnson on Shakespeare, vol.7 of Yale Edition (New Haven: Yale UP, 1968) 3.
- 8 J.P. Hardy, ed., "Life of Dryden," by Samuel Johnson, in Johnson's Lives of the Poets: A Selection (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) 161. Hereafter cited as Lives.
- 9 "Life of Dryden," Lives 190-191.
- 10 The Rambler, No.208, vol.5 of Yale Edition, 319.
- 11 The Rambler, No.3, 14-15.
- 12 George Watson, The Literary Critics (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962) 81.
- 13 J.P. Hardy, Samuel Johnson: A Critical Study (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1979) 184.

- 14 "Life of Cowley," Lives 9.
- 15 "Life of Cowley," Lives 31.
- 16 "Life of Cowley," Lives 31.
- 17 "Life of Cowley," Lives 11.
- 18 "Life of Cowley," Lives 11-13.
- 19 "Life of Cowley," Lives 13.
- 20 Hardy 188.
- 21 "Life of Dryden," Lives 164.
- 22 "Life of Dryden," Lives 164.
- 23 "Life of Dryden," Lives 168-169.
- 24 "Life of Dryden," Lives 153.
- 25 "Life of Dryden," Lives 167.
- 26 "Life of Dryden," Lives 193.
- 27 "Life of Dryden," Lives 193.
- 28 G.B. Hill, ed., as revised and enlarged by L.F. Powell, Boswell's Life of Johnson, vol.1, 1709-65 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934) 402-403. Hereafter cited as Boswell.
- 29 Boswell, vol.2, 1766-76, 327.
- 30 "Life of Gray," Lives 335-336.
- 31 Boswell, vol.3, 1776-80, 38.
- 32 Arthur Waugh, introd., "Life of Parnell," by Samuel Johnson, in Lives of the English Poets by Samuel Johnson, vol.1 (London: Oxford UP, 1959) 382.
- 33 "Life of Gray," Lives 340-341.
- 34 "Life of Gray," Lives 336-337.
- 35 John Wain, ed., Johnson as Critic (London: Routledge and Kegan

Paul, 1973) 1.
36 Boswell, vol.3, 1776-80, 305.

"BOTTLING NIAGARA", SPEAKERS AND REPORTERS IN THE LATE 18TH CENTURY
HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Reid

Department of English, Queen Mary College - 15th February 1986

Chairman: Trevor Russell-Cob, BA BSc(Ecom)

Introducing Dr. Chris Reid as teaching English at Queen Mary College, the Chairman said he was an expert on Burke, and had recently written a book on him - Edmund Burke and the Practice of Political Writing, published by the St. Martin's Press. Today he would speak on Speakers and Reporters in the Late 18th C House of Commons, a subject new to the Society, with the intriguing title "Bottling Niagara."

At the start of his talk the speaker explained his title by a reference to Boswell's anecdote of someone describing Sir Henry Cavendish, Member for Lostwithiel, "taking down while Burke foamed like Niagara." "Cavendish bottling up", Boswell called it. Cavendish had learned Gurney's shorthand and produced the most accurate of the 18th century reports of Parliamentary debates, and the oratory of Burke and other speakers. Boswell had wished for shorthand to record Johnson, and the image of Bottling Niagara also applied to him, and was a part of his biographical art; it crystallised the relationship between speaker and reporter in the 18th century House of Commons. This small chamber - 60 by 30 feet - had once been St. Stephen's Chapel, and the layout of altar and choir stalls had determined the layout of Speaker's Chair and the Members' benches on either side, the old antechapel becoming the lobby. Sometimes very crowded and sometime unruly, it often deterred members from speaking, and a series of regulations for conducting business were developed - Parliamentary procedure. Among the more important were the obligation for all remarks to be addressed to the Speaker, and not to another member, and for members not to refer to one another by name, but to use some periphrasis, such as "the honourable gentleman under the gallery". The conduct of speakers in debate was the subject of certain conventions, which seemed to have included one that forbade the reading of speeches from manuscript, while undue reliance upon notes was unparliamentary. Speeches even of two or three hours were delivered impromptu, as proper to a debating chamber which called for a conversational style rather than for formal oratory.

Preparation was needed, but when the older mode of learning a set speech by heart for delivery fell out of fashion, the practice advocated by "Single-speech Hamilton" of giving a premeditated passage an air of spontaneity by various rhetorical devices might not have been followed universally. Nevertheless some of the greatest orators used drafts extensively. Burke's were definitely literary and used not only to determine strategy but to perfect his art of persuasion. As delivered, his speeches seemed to have been the result of a creative interaction between the impromptu and the premeditated, the spoken and the written.

The parliamentary speech was a kind of theatrical performance analogous to the play. Outside the text it developed its full potential in performance before a collective and public audience. Parliament was often described as a dramatic spectacle. Seats would be occupied hours before an important occasion, such as the impeachment of Warren Hastings, and speakers played to the gallery. Burke certainly was aware of the possibilities, and speaking on the Aliens' Bill of 1792 made great and historic play with a dagger, which he threw on the floor. Such speeches were critically assessed for their cultural aspects, often with little regard to their political content.

This audience was small, for strangers were often excluded from the galleries when a member desired it. Parliamentary reporting was unofficial, hence Johnson's references to Lilliput. Though important advances came under George III, not until 1783 was the taking of notes in the gallery allowed. Standards of reporting generally were low, and reporters relied on memory or on information from members. The language of the speeches reported was often that of the reporters. Cavendish, an MP himself, had an advantage in not being excluded with other strangers, and his Parliamentary Diary was a useful source of published speeches. Though copious by eighteenth century standards they were by no means complete, yet without him Burke's famous speech on American Taxation could never have been published.

The modern Hansard editors and reporters were now officials of Parliament in an accepted and respectable profession, but the issues of parliamentary reporting were not perhaps closed - in 1982, during the emergency debate on the Falklands, a member raised the desirability of "spying strangers", and the attitude of both Houses to broadcasting suggested a "closed" institution in some ways still. In different historical circumstances and under the impact of new technologies the argument turned on principles of access and accountability. Perhaps even now Niagara was still unbottled.

An interested discussion followed, concluded by Dr. Grundy, who said that perhaps bottling Niagara was a good image for all studies of the past, and that all ages must have thought themselves no less on a

knife edge. On behalf of members she thanked Dr. Reid for his instructive and amusing paper.

JOHNSON AND SWIFT

Dr. David Nokes

King's College, London - 15th March 1986

Chairman: Cecil Farthing, OBE FSA

The Chairman introduced Dr. David Nokes as no stranger to the Society, since he had earlier given two papers. He was a lecturer in English at King's College, London, a reviewer of books and a broadcaster. His recently published biography of Swift, subtitled "A Hypocrite Reversed", had been well received, and Johnson and Swift was his subject today.

Both Johnson and Swift, said Dr. Nokes, were formidable and positive characters. Most people viewing Swift fell into opposite camps of the "pro" and the "anti". The "antis" considered him unpleasant, but the "pros" found in him fun and irony, and an Irish patriot. Johnson's Life was not among the more generous or sympathetic portraits of writers that he produced. He stressed meanness and avarice, and suggested that in later years a combination of parsimony and rudeness drove people away from him. Johnson also deplored his "innate love of grossness and vulgarity", and his arrogant and tyrannical manner, particularly evident in his alleged treatment of Stella. He was grudging also in his comments on Swift's writings, The Tale of a Tub showing either "want of knowledge or want of integrity", his political writings for Harley being unequal to the papers with which Addison opposed them. Finally he found him "querulous, fastidious, arrogant and malignant". This, for Johnson, showed a particular intensity and lack of balance.

Dr. Nokes suggested that the reason might be that Johnson sensed some unacknowledged and perhaps unconscious affinity in himself with Swift's underlying attitudes and preoccupations. It was important for him to test his own behaviour and beliefs against Swift's. They shared a notion of a radical restlessness of spirit common to men, a radical perversity of the human mind, and both dreaded madness for themselves.

Both differed in their attitude to charity. Johnson was hostile to Swift's scheme for loans to help poor shopkeepers, which demanded exact dates of repayment, and brought a satiric touch to it: there was no charity for the undeserving poor, and moral principles came before compassion, whereas Johnson put compassion first.

They differed too in their attitude to the English language. Swift thought it could be fixed, words given an absolute meaning. Johnson thought this was impossible: sounds were too volatile and usage was the final arbiter of meaning.

In their writing, Swift used irony, not Johnson's medium. Johnson went for antithesis and balance, measured contrasts; he was not like Swift a master of "the thing that is not", a dealer in paradoxes. Swift liked to appear worse than he was. He was kindly and charitable, but could not express himself as such, he distrusted people who spoke kindly to him and did not want people to warm to him.

An appreciative discussion followed the paper, and Canon Winnett thanked Dr. Nokes for a splendid paper that had increased understanding and appreciation of both great men.

BOSWELL WITHOUT JOHNSON: THE YEARS AFTER

Irma S. Lustig Ph.D
Research Associate in English, University of Pennsylvania - 19th April
1986
Chairman: J. H. Leicester MA

In introducing the Society's member Dr. Irma Lustig, Mr. Leicester wished to add his own appreciation of her qualities, and said there could be no better person to entrust Boswell to. She was Research Associate in English at the University of Pennsylvania, after holding a number of College and University Appointments. She had to her credit a long list of publications in 18th century studies, she was a member of the Editorial Committee of the Yale Boswell Editions and a former managing editor, and joint editor with Professor Pottle of Boswell: The Applause of the Jury (1782 - 88) (1981) and Boswell: The English Experiment (1785 - 89) to be published later in 1986. In August she was to be inaugurated as the next Honorary President of the Auchinlech Boswell Society.

Dr. Lustig said that the effect of Johnson's death on Boswell was profound and enduring, bringing an irrecoverable intellectual loss. Johnson had given Boswell fundamental philosophical and emotional support, an ideal substitute father, authoritative but loving and reassuring. In February 1785 Boswell had a dream about Johnson which made a deep impression on him and led to his acceptance of Johnson's death, still seeing him as his protector. Six weeks later a second dream

assured him of Johnson's affection and respect; Johnson's regard was essential to his self esteem, and in writing the Life Boswell was comforting himself in accumulated memories.

The second dream occurred while Boswell was on his way to London to complete his terms at the Inner Temple and work on the Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, which was more readily adaptable to publication than the Life, for which he had already begun to collect materials. He was supported by an intensifying friendship with three men - Reynolds, Malone and Courtney, who were sociable and generous and intellectually compatible, but did little to discourage him from those pleasure-seeking habits which led him to neglect his family after he had brought them to London in 1786 - Malone, indeed encouraged and fortified Boswell's resolution to persist at the English Bar.

Although admitted to the English Bar, Boswell was ignorant of English law and took no trouble to rectify this. He was hoping to create a career and supplement his income either from practising English law or in Parliament, but failed in both. He was for a time taken up by the Earl of Lonsdale, who made him Counsel to the Mayor of Carlisle, and obtained for him the Recordership of Carlisle, but admitted in 1790 that he had never intended to bring him into Parliament.

Boswell could control neither his conduct nor his conscience, although Margaret Boswell's health was seriously deteriorating after coming to London. She had long known of his affairs with other women, but was deeply wounded by his long liaisons with the notorious courtesan Margaret Caroline Rudd. Although he promised amendment, she never really trusted him again, and family life was troubled. Boswell's 'English Experiment' had clearly failed and Margaret's illness would have been a face-saving excuse for returning to Scotland. He did not take her home until May 1788, but in the autumn returned to London for another eight months. In April 1789 he returned to Auchinlech to be with her but spent his time in a whirl of social and political activities, finally returning to London at the behest of Lonsdale to defend the Corporation of Carlisle in a legal action. During Margaret's final illness he delayed his return and arrived too late, afterwards suffering torments of remorse and guilt. His personal life after her death was increasingly erratic, lonely and dissolute.

The speaker asked what it meant to Boswell to "re-live each scene over" with Johnson as he meant the reader to do? The Life was a Herculean labour involving painstaking research and organisation. After 1763 the most substantial and appealing part of the biography was drawn from leaves removed from Boswell's Journal or from expanded notes recorded at the time of the event. If Johnson's other friends had recorded his conversation as conscientiously, they would have preserved him entire.

In converting the Journal, Boswell edited the pages in order to shift the emphasis from himself to Johnson. He was confident of his ability as a writer, he had practised in many genres, and had brought to his Journal the techniques of playwriting; he had learned to structure a scene, maintain suspense, create dialogue.

"Surely" said Dr. Lustig, "Boswell was elevated by applying his craft to a great project, turning the materials of a life into a work of art. Though he thought of himself as a gentleman and a "noble baron" he was a thoroughly serious and professional writer, determined to do credit to Johnson and himself. The biography was an act of homage and love, and, in the midst of despair, an affirmation of life."

Dr. Lustig was very warmly thanked for such an excellent talk presenting so clear a portrait of Boswell without Johnson.

SOCIETY VISITS

During the period under review two visits took place. The first, to Bath on 14th September 1985, was planned by the Honorary Secretary, Miss Pigrome. The second, to Streatham on 13th September 1986, was organised by Mr. Donald Cook and was joined by members of the Streatham Society.

Accounts of the visits, by Robert Graecen and Donald Cook respectively, have been incorporated in the Society's records.

THE WREATH-LAYING 1985

The wreath-laying ceremony took place in Westminster Abbey on Saturday, 14th December 1985.

Bishop Edward Knapp-Fisher, Archdeacon of Westminster, conducted the service in a manner which everyone felt worthily continued the tradition established by Dean Carpenter.

Professor Christopher Ricks, Professor of English, Christ's College, Cambridge, delivered the allocution and took as his theme Johnson and Commemoration, and began by quoting Johnson on the artistic gifts of Sir Joshua Reynolds, shown "in diffusing friendship, in reviewing tenderness, in quickening the affections of the absent, and continuing the presence of the dead: He then reviewed Johnson's definitions of such words as "Commemorable" - "deserving to be mentioned with honour"; "Commemorate" - by a public act solemnly; "Commemoration" - public celebration, solemnization of the memory of anything; "Commemorative" - tendency to preserve the memory; and referred to "the happiness of there being no

negative counterpart of these terms - no verb for to remember with execration." Regarding commemoration as a solemnity, Johnson was offended by the lines on Gay's monument:

"Life is a jest and all things show it,
I thought so once and now I know it."

which he declared "impious in the mouth of a Christian, and nonsense in that of an atheist." Boswell reported that Johnson seemed pleased when told that he would doubtless be buried in the Abbey, and said this was very natural to any man of imagination who had no family sepulchre in which he could be laid with his fathers. Charles Burney Jnr. had observed that there was no special service performed over Johnson "but merely what is read over every old woman that is buried by the Parish" - a circumstance which Professor Ricks thought Johnson would be very happy to share.

The annual Christmas Luncheon followed, as in previous years, at the Vitello d'Oro Restaurant: the arrangements were in Mrs. Dowdeswell's competent and experienced hands.

BOOK REVIEWS

Lyle Larsen, Dr. Johnson's Household. Archon Books [Shoe String Press, Inc. Camden, Connecticut], 1985. Pp.xiii + 155. £0.00.

In this volume Professor Larsen of Santa Monica College, California, reviews the lives of the various persons who made up Johnson's household after the death of his wife in 1752: Anna Williams and her father Zachariah, Frank Barber, 'Dr.' Robert Levet, all receive fairly sull treatment; the obscurer inhabitants of his home, Mary 'Poll' Carmichael, Mrs. Elizabeth Desmoulins (nee Swywnfen), and 'Mrs. White' his housekeeper, are inevitably presented in less detail.

The author has drawn together pretty well all that is at present known of these minor characters, and has presented a readable and informative account of them. He has investigated archives in Jamaica, traced and published Anna Williams's will, pursued the uncategorical Miss Carmichael's lawsuit, and made use of unpublished letters in the Hyde Collection. His inescapable dependence upon the earlier researches of A.L. Reade's Johnsonian Gleanings, and upon Boswell, Hawkins and Mrs. Piozzi, means that much of the work will be familiar to those already acquainted with such standard sources, but on the whole Larsen has woven it into a pleasing and readable narrative.

It is perhaps surprising to find that a professional teacher of English literature should contribute to the perpetuation of the view of Johnson as a great character rather than as a writer, but Larsen is evidently more of a historian than a literary critic. His observation that Johnson's edition of Shakespeare (1765) 'would never rank among Johnson's greatest productions (except for the preface' (p.51), is extraordinary when it is considered that even today it is hardly possible to find an annotated edition of Shakespeare without finding Johnson's notes adopted, overtly or covertly, by modern editors. If 'length of duration and continuance of esteem' remain as part of the measure of literary significance, then Johnson's Shakespeare stands among his major achievements. It is also noticeable that Larsen has preferred Boswell's corrupt version of the elegy on the death of Levet (pp.94-5) with its manifestly inferior reading of line 28, "His single talent...", to the version published, almost certainly directly from Johnson himself, in the Gentleman's Magazine for August 1783, which reads, 'The single talent...'.
The author has drawn together a great deal of material and has presented a readable and informative account of them. He has investigated sources in London, Cambridge and Oxford. His edition is a valuable addition to the literature of Johnson.

A few other details have eluded him: there is an account of Frank Barber's wife in Notes & Queries, ccxxix (March 1984), 8-9 which was too recent for him to consult, and 'a woman named Prowse' (p.110), was Elizabeth (1712-80) to whom Johnson addressed several letters. The illustrations are a little disappointing: Mr. Arthur A. Houghton of New York owns a fine portrait of Frank Barber (though there is always some controversy over pictures of Frank and others of Omai); the original of the miniature of Johnson aged 28 is in the Hyde Collection, as is a fine oil portrait of 'Tetty'. The engraved versions of Boswell and Mrs. Thrale are undistinguished and might have been supplanted by reproductions of original paintings, though since neither was a member of the household, neither need have been pictured at all. But these are cavils. The book contains enough new material, though small in quantity, to deserve a place on the Jonsonian bookshelf.

J. D. Fleeman

Blue Guide. Literary Britain and Ireland. Compiled by Ian Ousby. A & C Black, Ltd. London. W. W. Norton & Co. Inc. New York. Pp. 424 with illustrations and maps. Price: £9.95 paperback.

This is the most recent of the additions to the famous and valuable Blue Guide series, and it must stand its trial with the others. The series itself is of course, a topographical one, whereas Ousby's volume is a literary one. There is from the first therefore something a little odd about it. It certainly strikes one as strange that geography and its

maps should be arranged under the somewhat accidental system of biography and chaps, but Ousby has made a shot at it, and in some ways it works quite well.

The first section treats of Dickens, Hardy, Joyce, the Lake Poets, and Shakespeare. Each of these sections covers a good deal of ground in some detail, and devotees will not find it difficult to arrange pilgrimages with little risk of missing anything of interest. The second part, by far the larger, is less happy. Some 180 authors are listed and under each name there is a brief and informative review of places and associations. The trouble is that as a Guide the book might reasonably be expected to be of some use to the traveller, so what when one reaches some particular place, one looks it up and is directed to locations of literary interest. This is not so easy when the arrangement of the information is by author, and consequently the index of places has to do quite a lot of work. The trouble is that using indexes means shifting to and fro in the book, and if one found oneself in Dublin or Edinburgh one would have 75 and 31 entries to deal with, leading to 103 and 45 references respectively. It is churlish to complain of a book that it is not another book, but I am bound to say that a topographical rather than a literary arrangement would have been more practical. This is a book to consult in winter evenings when planning future holidays, rather than one to slip into the pocket for use when on one's travels.

The selection of authors is bound to be arbitrary, and every reader will experience his own particular shock when he finds that a favourite has been omitted. Nevertheless there remain many English writers who are strongly associated with places who are not represented in Ousby's selection. His Introductory comments offer as defence that he has sought to include writers of 'imaginative literature - a definition that omits essayists, political economists, theologians, philosophers, monarchs with a penchant for diaries or pamphlets, and all the other various folk who sometimes find shelter under that large umbrella which the universities call "English Literature" (p.10). Perhaps my italics indicate some overreaction to Ousby's bluff appeal to the common reader, but surely he is faking? Without the umbrella he disparages who would accept his excursions in pursuit of the 'Gawain poet' (pp.252-2), for example? On the whole Scottish literature does not do well by Ousby's Guide: no mentions of Thomas Campbell (Mull), S.R. Crockett (Lothians), Drummond of Hawthornden, Robert Fergusson (St. Andrews and Edinburgh), John Galt, King James I (Windsor Castle for the 'Kingis Quair' and Perth), James 'Ossian' Macpherson, Edwin Muir (Orkney), Neil Munro (Glasgow), and nothing at all about the Gaelic poets of the Highlands and Islands some of whom, perhaps most obviously Duncan Ban Macintyre, wrote powerfully and feelingly about places. Nor are native Irish or Welsh writers represented in a Guide to 'Literary Britain'.

Perhaps the acceptable canon of English Literature (outside the universities) no longer includes some whom Ousby excludes, but it seems a pity that Suffolk should lose Robert Bloomfield's 'Farmer's Boy', Oxford: Edward Bradley's 'Mr. Verdant Green' and J.R.R. Tolkien and his 'Hobbits', the Isle of Man; Hall Caine, Cookham Deane: Kenneth Graham, East Yorkshire: Winifred Holtby, Dublin: Thomas Moore, Cornwall: A. Quiller-Couch, the Lake District: Arthur Ransome and Hugh Walpole, Knoles: the various Sackvilles from Thomas 'Gorboduc' to Buckhurst (Dryden's 'Eugenius') to 'Vita' Sackville-West, Brecon and the Usk valley: Henry Vaughan the 'Silurist', Shropshire: Mary Webb, or Welwyn: Edward ('Night Thoughts') Young.

The section of Samuel Johnson is adequate for the Midlands, but cursory for the Scottish and Welsh tours. Reading this book reminds one of Johnson's own comment on Thomas Sheridan's conversation and even in these days a shilling short of £10 is a lot to lay out. The Oxford Literary Guide published in 1977, is available in paperback at half the price and covers many more places and many more writers, so that one can make not only oneself but someone else happy for the same price.

J.D. Fleeman.

Other titles received for review:

Johnson's Juvenal - London and The Vanity of Human Wishes. Edited by Niall Rudd: Bristol Classical Press 1981.

Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare. Edited by P.J. Smallwood: Bristol Classical Press 1985.

A NOTE ON THE ROBIN HOOD SOCIETY

Ross Wilson, MA, Th L, Hon.Schol. Trinity College, Melbourne

Boswell, be it remembered, ranks only second to The Doctor himself in the hierarchy adopted by Johnsonians worldwide. Details of his life, including excessive drinking and whoreing, are all fascinating in themselves, even to the extent of his multitudinous London and Scottish connections and friends.

We must all recall, and can easily check, that Boswell and others had dinner with Johnson on Easter Day, 15 April 1781, at which Boswell tried to draw Johnson out on the subject of resurrection prior to attending a meeting that evening of the Robin Hood Society when the subject to be discussed was on a general resurrection, based on a scriptural text.

In the event, as Boswell recorded under that date, 15 April 1781, he 'stole away to Coachmakers'- hall, and heard the difficulty on which we had talked discussed with great decency, and some intelligence, by several speakers. There was a difference of opinion as to the appearance of ghosts in modern times....' He gives no reference to his own contribution, if any, to the debate, lacking somewhat the direct opinion of Johnson himself to quote.

This was not Boswell's first attendance at the Robin Hood Society. The earliest of which we have record was, according to Boswell's own Journals, on 25 July 1763, then located at a public house in Butcher Row, in the City of London, and described as an artisans' and tradesmen's debating society. So, even in the years between 1763 and 1781 it has moved a little up the social scale, as it was later to do. Its origins are of interest in themselves, going back to the preceding century.

The Society later moved towards its origins and settled in the third quarter of the last century at the London Stone tavern, in Cannon Street, in the City, where the Stone is still to be seen embedded in the wall. This tavern claims - not quite correctly - to have been the oldest in London. But here was formed the original Robin Hood Society - the exact name was a later addition - by Sir Hugh Myddelton, of New River fame.

That Myddelton deserves a note. Born about 1560 he became a successful London goldsmith who made money by commercial ventures preying on Spanish shipping, being associated with Sir Walter Raleigh. In 1609 he took over from the Corporation of London the projected scheme for supplying the city with water from the springs near Ware, in Hertfordshire. In this scheme, he had made a canal almost ten feet wide and four feet deep and over 38 miles long, which fed its waters into a reservoir at Islington, called the New River Head. He was forced in 1612 to get financial assistance from James VI & I. The work was finished the next year and Myddelton was made the first governor of the company, which, however, did not make a profit until after his death, in 1631. He had been made a baronet in 1622. His active interests included working lead and silver mines in Cardiganshire and reclaiming a piece of the Isle of Wight from the sea. After his death on 10 December 1631, he was buried in St. Matthew's church, Friday Street, in the City of London. He had a family of ten sons and six daughters, most of whom went on to make a mark of sorts in English political and social history.

While Myddelton may, as noticed, have had some sort of social welfare at heart, it would seem unlikely that he would found a social society of the name of the Robin Hood Society for debates by artisans and tradesmen. It is just possible that the name was adopted after its own, self-propagating formation.

But its history, published in 1716, asserts that it was founded by Sir Hugh. The history's assertion that the future Charles II was introduced into the Society, disguised, by Sir Hugh, rings false, as also the assertion that Charles II 'liked it so well that he came thrice afterwards.' Sir Hugh Myddelton died when Charles was under the age of ten years.

It is possible that the original Sir Hugh left a son or grandson of the same name, for the official 1716 narrative goes on: 'He had a piece of black silk over his left cheek, which almost covered it; and his eyebrows, which were quite black, he had, by some artifice or other, converted a light brown, or rather flaxen colour; and had otherwise disguised himself so effectually in his apparel and his looks, that nobody knew him but Sir Hugh, by whom he was introduced.'

I do not believe it, or that the Sir Hugh named was, as boasted, the Myddelton of New River memory.

After which preamble we can get back to Boswell's 1763 visit and speech as recorded in his own Journal. I quote:

'Mr. President' We have had the prejudice against excise represented to us as an enormous giant; and this gentleman, like the valiant Jack the Giant-Killer, has stood forth to combat this giant. But, Sir, I wish he had been an abler antagonist, for although he has put himself a good deal in a heat and a good deal out of breath, the giant seems to me to be as strong and in as good health as when he began with him.'

'Sir, the gentleman says he is a friend to excise upon principle. I don't know, indeed, how the gentleman's principles may be founded. A great many philosophers have considered self-interest as a very strong principle. I can see how a number of my countrymen may be friends to excise upon that principle, when there so many excisemen's posts to be given away. Far be it from me to suspect that the honorable gentleman is actuated by any such views.'

As all Tories were natural enemies of excise, a form of taxation introduced by the republican rebels against Charles I in 1643 in order to help finance their rebellion, so Boswell felt no need to expatiate in his would-be private Journal on the subject, and he then sums up:

'I then gave them the commonplace arguments against excise, and when I sat down they gave me a thunder of applause.'

That, be it remembered, was to a society of artisans and tradesmen formed of the usual regulars to a public house whose drink on these occasions was no doubt ale, beer or porter. Such a meeting, such an assembled gathering of artisans and tradesmen says much for their intelligence, as does the Easter Day 1781 which Boswell left Johnson to attend when the subject was a mass resurrection. A Robin Hood Society meeting, and with the original Robin Hood in mind, quite a sidelight on the intelligence of working men in the late eighteenth century.

A NOTE ON JOHNSON'S USE OF TWO RESTORATION POEMS IN HIS
'DRURY-LANE' PROLOGUE (1747)

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Literary history has not encouraged us to see Marvell and Johnson as being in any way associated with each other. Yet Johnson was probably drawing on the last lines of Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress" in his "Drury-Lane" Prologue, which he wrote to inaugurate Garrick's manager-ship of Drury-Lane commencing on Tuesday, 15 September 1747, and which Garrick recited on the stage.¹ Marvell's poem ends:

Thus, though we cannot make our Sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.²

In the "Drury-Lane" Prologue Johnson wrote of Shakespeare:

Existence saw him spurn her bounded Reign,
And panting Time toil'd after him in vain.

(5-6)

It is true that the first aspect of verse to which we look for evidence of allusiveness is the auditory, and that this is nonexistent in Johnson's passage. He does not sound like Marvell. In fact Bennet Langton's suggestion, recorded by Boswell and noted in the standard editions of Johnson's poems, that Johnson may have been thinking of lines from *The Tempest* ('She will outstop all praise/And make it halt behind her'), looks more convincing.³ Yet the pressure of Marvell's lines behind Johnson's becomes plausible when one considers that both writers are describing a triumph over time, and that Johnson associates Shakespeare's triumph with the passionate, immediate effect his drama has on the reader:

His pow'rful Strokes presiding Truth impress'd,
And unresisted Passion storm'd the Breast.

(7-8)

Marvell, of course, wrote: 'Let us...tear our Pleasures with rough strife, Thorough the iron gates of Life' (41-4). Johnson's thought is strikingly similar to Marvell's, and the collocation, in both writers, of persuasive art, passionate response, and time as subject to the dominance of the artist, suggests that Johnson was remembering Marvell's poem, although this process entailed an adaptation of the 'idea' he found in Marvell for his own poetic purposes.⁴

What those purposes are can be clarified by examining the other notable example in the Prologue of Johnson's use of an earlier poet. When he described the self-centred indulgence and false wit of the Restoration and early eighteenth-century dramatists Johnson seemed deliberately to be sounding off against, and ironically imitating Dryden's praise of Congreve as the epitome of the 'present Age of Wit', uniting strength and beauty. In 'To my Dear Friend Mr. Congreve' Dryden wrote:

Well then; the promis'd hour is come at last;
The present Age of Wit obscures the past:
Strong were our Syres; and as they Fought they Writ,
Conqu'ring with force of Arms, and dint of Wit;...

(1-4)

To which Johnson responded:

The Wits of Charles found easier Ways to Fame,
Not wish'd for Johnson's Art, or Shakespeare's Flame;
Themseves they studied, as they felt they writ,
Intrigue was Plot, Obscenity was Wit.

(17-20)

Because Johnson and Dryden write more or less within the same poetic idiom (more so, anyway, than Johnson and Marvell), Johnson's lines sound imitative of Dryden's; yet their thoughts are different. Whereas Dryden celebrates Congreve's assimilation of many of the finest qualities of 'our Syres', the 'Gyant Race, before the Flood', Johnson argues that the Restoration dramatists repudiated them. Dryden's praise of Congreve is complex, subtly recognising a historical shift in values as the one age attempts (and partially fails) to capture what it admired in its ancestors ('what we gain'd in skill we lost in strength,' line 12). Johnson's more critical and more morally strident tone (he sounds more like Pope here than he does like Dryden⁵) appears to eliminate the generosity of Dryden's historical perspective: he records that 'Passion' was 'crush'd by Rules, and weaken'd as refin'd' (lines 29-32).

Dryden's plays would have been included in Johnson's censure in the Prologue.⁶ Much of Johnson's praise of Shakespeare in the 'Preface of Shakespeare' is based on a running contrast between Shakespeare and Restoration and early eighteenth-century drama:

It will not easily be imagined how much Shakespeare excels in accommodating his sentiments to real life, but by comparing him with other authours....The theatre, when it is under any other direction, is peopled by such characters as were never seen, conversing in a language which was never heard, upon topics which will never arise in the commerce of mankind.⁷

The Lives of the Poets reveal a similar low, or at least ambiguous opinion of Restoration drama in general, and Congreve's in particular, as Johnson expresses in the Prologue. Johnson admired Otway's and Rowe's pathos,⁸ Dryden's exuberant imaginative energy,⁹ Addison's rhetoric and learning,¹⁰ and Congreve's precosity and originality,¹¹ yet he nevertheless felt that Congreve's 'scenes exhibit not much humour, imagery, or passion' (para.33), and that his characters - in a phrase which seems to sum up his general view of Restoration drama - 'are commonly fictitious and artificial, with very little of nature, and not much of life' (para.33).¹²

However, Johnson's Prologue shares something of Dryden's vision of artistic continuity in 'To Mr. Congreve'. Dryden is aware that Congreve represents, at best, a qualified and partial redemption of the fortunes of modern literature under William III; yet it is to Congreve, as bearer of the flame of true wit, that Dryden entrusts the protection of his vision and his name against the winds of Fortune:

Already I am worn with Cares and Age;
And just abandoning th' Ungrateful Stage:
Unprofitably kept at Heav'ns expence,
I live a Rent-charge on his Providence:
But You, whom ev'ry Muse and Grace adorn,
Whom I foresee to better Fortune born,
Be kind to my Remains; and oh defend,
Against Your Judgment, Your departed Friend.

(66-73)

In the Prologue Johnson also traces the progress of drama from Shakespeare down to the present, and, like Dryden, stresses the uncertainty of the present and of Fortune:

Hard is his lot, that here by Fortune plac'd,
Must watch the wild Vicissitudes of Taste;
With ev'ry Meteor of Caprice must play,
And chase the new-blown Bubbles of the Day.

(47-50)

This is both a warning and an encouragement to Garrick, as custodian of one of the great London theatres, and, in his capacity as actor, as one of the leading interpreters of drama in the eighteenth century.¹³ Just as Dryden traced a discrepancy between drama of the early seventeenth century and the Restoration ('The second Temple was not like the first...', line 14), so Johnson distinguishes between the false wit and taste of the Restoration drama ('...the Pow'r of Tragedy declin'd; /... Nature fled', lines 30-4), and the possibility of regeneration in the present, when both Garrick and the Drury-Lane audience have it in their power to influence taste for the better:

Then prompt no more the Follies you decry,
As Tyrants doom their Tools of Guilt to die;
'Tis yours this Night to bid the Reign commence
Of rescu'd Nature, and reviving Sense;
To chase the Charms of Sound, the Pomp of Show,
For useful Mirth, and salutary Woe;
Bid scenic Virtue form the rising Age,
And Truth diffuse her Radiance from the Stage.

(55-62)

Johnson's Prologue may conduct an intricate argument with Dryden's 'To Mr. Congreve', but his assimilation of the poem suggests that he took Dryden's version of literary history seriously, and that their manner of relating the past, the present, and the future to each other was not altogether different. Boswell reported of the year 1747:

This year his old pupil and friend, David Garrick, having become joint patentee and manager of Drury-Lane theatre, Johnson honoured his opening of it with a Prologue, which for just and manly dramatick criticism, on the whole range of the English stage, as well as for poetical excellence, is unrivalled. Like the celebrated Epilogue to the 'Distressed Mother,' it was, during the season, often called for by the audience.¹⁴

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NOTES

- 1 Johnson said, 'The whole number [of lines] was composed before I threw a single couplet on paper', 'Anecdotes by George Steevens', Johnsonian Miscellanies, ed. G.B. Hill, 2 vols (1897), ii, pp. 313-4.
- 2 The Poems of Andrew Marvell, ed. Hugh Macdonald (1972), p.22.
- 3 See The Poems of Samuel Johnson, ed. D.N. Smith & E.L. McAdam, Jr (1974), p.107. All quotations from the Prologue are from this edition.
- 4 For Johnson's understanding of poetic recollection see G. J. Clingham, ' "The inequalities of memory": Johnson's Epitaphs on Hogarth', English 35 (1986), 221-232. Marvell's works would not have been inaccessible to Johnson. His poems appeared in the 1703, 1704 and 1705 volumes of Poems on Affairs of State, as well as in the 1716 and 1727 editions of Dryden's Miscellanies published by Tonson. Moreover, two editions of Marvell's poems were published in Johnson's life-time: a 1726 edition in 2 volumes (16mo) by Thomas Cooke (published by Curll), and the 3 volume quarto edition by Edward Thompson in 1776, which Johnson himself possessed and which appeared as item 285 in the Sale Catalogue of his library (The Sale Catalogue of Samuel Johnson's Library: A Facsimile Edition, ed. J.D. Fleeman (1975), p.39).
- 5 Compare, for example, Johnson's lines 55-62 (quoted below) with lines 191-204 of Pope's 'Epistle to Burlington'.
- 6 See 'Life of Dryden', Lives of the English Poets, ed. G.B. Hill, 3 vols (1905), i, pp.335-68 (paras. 11-92), 447-62 (paras. 321-4).
- 7 Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. Arthur Sherbo, introduction by Bertrand H. Bronson, 2 vols (1968), i, p.63; see also pp.62, 64.
- 8 See 'Life of Otway', Lives, i, pp.245 (paras. 10, 12), 248 (para 15), and 'Life of Rowe', ii, pp.66-70 (paras.4-16), 75-6 (paras.30-2).
- 9 See note 6.
- 10 See 'Life of Addison', Lives, ii, pp.132-44 (paras. 136-54).
- 11 See 'Life of Congreve', Lives, ii, pp.213-9 (paras. 5-17), 228-30 (paras. 33-35).

- 12 Johnson, of course, singled out one passage in The Mourning Bride as exemplifying nature, 'Life of Congreve', paras. 34-5.
- 13 For all Johnson's irony and humour at the expense of Garrick's acting he is also recorded as speaking very warmly about Garrick's professional abilities: 'Garrick, Madam, was no declaimer; there was not one of his own scene-shifters who could not have spoken To be, or not to be, better than he did; yet he was the only actor I ever saw whom I could call a master both in tragedy and comedy; though I liked him best in comedy. A true conception of character, and natural expression of it, were his distinguishing excellencies....Garrick's great distinction is his universality.... He can represent all modes of life, but that of an easy, fine-bred gentleman.' (Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. G.B. Hill, revised and enlarged by L.F. Powell, 6 vols (1934), iv, p.243 and n.6).
- 14 Boswell, Life, i, pp.181-2.

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