

THE NEW RAMBLER



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THE NEW RAMBLER

Journal of The Johnson Society of London

Editor: David Parker BLitt, MA
10 Beaumont Buildings, Oxford

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From the Editor

This issue marks our Diamond Jubilee and members will already know that we have been assisted in its celebration by two very generous donations: one from Lloyds of London who themselves celebrated their tercentenary in 1988 and one from National Westminster Bank plc. The latter arose through our Treasurer's connection with the Bank. To both of these distinguished institutions we express our gratitude.

Another event which occurred in the year 1988/9 was the 200th anniversary of the death of Joseph Baretti; and we are fortunate to be able to mark the occasion by publishing a paper written for us by Dr. Leslie Martin, who worked on this subject for some years.

But the year has also been marked by losses. The death occurred of Canon Robert Winnett who was a Vice-President of the Society and a good friend to many of its members. He last read a paper to us as recently as May 1988 (reported in the 1987/8 issue of The New Rambler). Two tributes to him will be found elsewhere in this issue. He will be very much missed, and to his family we extend our sympathy. We have also to record the deaths of three other members. E. Ross Wilson (a member since 1971) was known to many of us for the papers he read to the Society on the more social aspects of the eighteenth century, clubs, coffee houses, taverns, wines. Though his last years were saddened by illness he long maintained his links with us. Frank Staff joined us more recently (1987) but his Streatham connection soon made him a well-known figure. Richard Clements, who lived in Birmingham, had been a member since 1972.

There has been a change in the composition of the Committee: The Rev. F.M. Hodgess Roper resigned in the course of the year. For many years he held office in the Society but, living as he does in Stratford-upon-Avon, he feels that it is no longer possible for him to play an active part in our affairs. We extend to him both our thanks and our good wishes.

Two new periodical publications have appeared in the course of the year: a Membership List and The New Idler. Our thanks for them are due to Mr. Tom Davis and Dr. Isobel Grundy respectively.

We should like to congratulate Mr. Ernest Heberden (a member since 1987) on the appearance of his study of his ancestor William Heberden, one of Johnson's doctors. Members will recall Mr. Heberden's paper on this subject in November 1987, reported in the 1987/8 issue of The New Rambler. A descriptive leaflet accompanies the present issue, and it is hoped that the book will be reviewed in the next.

The proposed introduction of a Notes and Queries section in The New Rambler is being delayed until 1989/90. This is due mainly, I regret, to procrastination on my part: but perhaps I should add that there has in fact been no response to my request, in the last issue, for material.

Members may like to be reminded of the existence of The British Society for Eighteenth Century Studies, which publishes a Journal and a Bulletin and holds regular conferences. We understand that information on this Society can be obtained from Dr. John Dunkley, Department of French, Aberdeen University AB9 2UB.

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A JOHNSONIAN QUIZ: AND PEG WOFFINGTON

15 October 1988

Chairman: Trevor Russell-Cobb BA, BSc(Econ)

At this first meeting of the 1988/9 session it was hoped that Oenone Williams would perform her own one-woman play THRALLIANA, based on the diaries of Hester Thrale. Owing to indisposition, however, this had to be cancelled - or, rather, postponed as she had promised to come next year: and, the notice being too short to arrange a substitute speaker, the Chairman improvised a 20-question quiz on Johnsonian subjects. This was followed by readings, by the Honorary Secretary, from an essay by Austin Dobson on Peg Woffington in keeping with the intended theatrical flavour of the greater part of this session's programme.

DR JOHNSON IN WESLEY'S LETTERS AND JOURNALS

The Revd. Douglas Wollen, Historian of Wesley's Chapel - 19 November 1988

Chairman: David Parker

The Chairman recalled that Mr. Wollen had, on an earlier occasion, welcomed members of the Society most hospitably on a visit to Wesley's Chapel in City Road: and it seemed most appropriate that he should be speaking to us this year, the 250th anniversary of Wesley's conversion. The following is a precis of his paper, provided by the speaker himself.

I must begin with a confession of failure!

I found so many references to Johnson in the indexes of my volumes of Wesley's Journal and Letters that I thought I could give a lecture on Johnson in Wesley's writings, only to discover that nearly all the references were not to Wesley's comments on Johnson, but to various books about him. However, I hoped, not altogether in vain, that some interesting information might after all emerge. So here goes!

They both visited Edinburgh and made similar comments - Johnson describes the streets as "pretty perilous and a good deal odiferous." I found that Wesley, who did not share the Doctor's anti-Scottish prejudice, went even further: "How long shall the capital city of Scotland and the chief streets of it stink worse than a common sewer? Will no lover of his city, or of decency, and common sense, find a remedy for this?" Johnson couldn't have gone further than this!

Wesley's Edinburgh passage is typical of his straightforward style. I think he was the best prose writer in 18th century England, but he never gets into the English literature books, only into the religious ones! But his style had a "modern" directness not equalled even by Johnson. One example is his comment on female education: "You are not to send your daughters to boarding schools, they exist to turn women into ladies, which is the last thing we desire" - or to a "posh" lady. "Madam, put off the gentlewoman, yours is a higher character." I think both our heroes would have agreed on many matters. I suppose the Anglican

arrogance (forgive me) of Oxford and Cambridge excluded Wesley from keeping Johnson company in his down-to-earth point of view!

I found they both read the same books, so it is interesting to compare their judgments. Here they differed as Wesley was more easily and charitably deceived. They both read "that wonderful poem Fingal". Wesley was inclined to think it genuine, "an amazing proof of a genius in those barbarous times; little inferior to Homer or Virgil." Johnson denied its genuineness, and when a Scottish critic threatened him with physical chastisement, declared "I shall never be deterred from declaring what I think a cheat and imposture by the menaces of a ruffian." Here we see the difference between these two great men. Wesley was easily won over - he was naturally on the side of the lower classes, even if they were as fraudulent as some upper class literary figures.

Another remarkable example of the difference between Johnson and Wesley is their differing attitudes to a spiritualist young woman who claimed to be visited by the spirits of the dead. Wesley was impressed (and deceived?) while Johnson was incredulous. He discussed the case with Boswell, who wished to have an interview with Wesley about it in Edinburgh. He had a letter of introduction from Johnson to Wesley, who could not persuade Boswell of the girl's genuineness.

I must confess that in this matter I side with Johnson and Boswell, even though Wesley asserted that "the giving up of witchcraft is, in effect, giving up the Bible of course. If there is anything in psychic experiences, their Deism, Atheism and Materialism falls to the ground" - an argument Johnson would not have accepted. For my part I have a foot in both camps, as a member of both Johnson and Wesley societies!

Wesley's comment on Johnson's Tour to the Hebrides is interesting - "It is a very curious book, wrote with admirable sense, and, I think, great fidelity; although in some respects he is thought to bear hard on the nation, which I am satisfied he never intended."

In their comments on Scottish church services the two men were on the same wave-length, rather critical. Both men were torn by the American Revolution, and anxious to calm both sides down, or America would be bound to be a separate non-English nation. Wesley's Calm Address to the English Colonies used Johnson's arguments, indeed was accused of being lifted from Johnson's writings, though Johnson never complained.

On December 18th, 1783, Wesley writes "I spent two hours with that great man, Dr. Johnson, who is sinking into the grave by a gentle decay" - they had a last dinner together.

And every time I take my parties of visitors to Wesley's tomb I am reminded of Johnson, as the only woman's name on the tomb is Martha Hall, Wesley's sister, who was to have stayed in Johnson's house; but he died before she could move in, so her brother looked after her (her husband was an Anglican clergyman who was a

polygamous scoundrel!) and when she died four months after him she was interred in his vault behind the chapel. So here too I am reminded of the humanity of my two heroes! So I am led, by my stupid misunderstanding of those indexes, to unexpected information about the two great men.

LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU, "A SISTER OF THE QUILL"

Dr. Isobel Grundy, Reader in English at Queen Mary College,
University of London - 21 January 1989

Chairman: C. Tom Davis BA, MA.

In introducing Dr. Grundy the Chairman recalled her various activities on behalf of the Society, not least her work as Commemoration Secretary in 1984 and her regular suggestions regarding speakers at the monthly meetings. He also referred to her earlier publications on the subject of today's paper. That paper is reproduced in full.

Lady Mary was born 300 years ago this year, twenty years before Johnson. I spoke to you about her poetry more than fifteen years ago. (1) My title then was "A Moon of Literature", alluding to the idea of her shining with reflected light. Since then I've done a great deal more work on women writers generally, and my whole outlook has changed. The phrase "a sister of the quill" is Lady Mary's own (used to a sympathetic male literary friend). It was adapted as a title (Sisters of the Quill, 1978), by Alice Anderson Hufstader, the American author of a slapdash but readable account of Lady Mary, Mary Delany, Elizabeth Montagu (no relation, though the two husbands were cousins), and Fanny Burney.

The moon image now seems to me a dreadful mistake. Women writers DO reflect the light of dominant male writers, fair enough. But so do male writers reflect each other. (Johnson couldn't have written that wonderful line in The Vanity of Human Wishes, "Gain and Grandeur load the tainted gales," without Pope in An Essay on Man ("hound sagacious on the tainted green"); much more vitally. Johnson couldn't have written his two great poems, the imitations of Juvenal, if Pope hadn't been imitating Horace first. (Nor, of course, without Juvenal!) Then too, male writers reflect the light of female writers. Pope's "die of a rose in aromatic pain" echoes Anne Finch, Lady Winchilsea. (2) The Romantic poets wouldn't have been what they were without the novels of Ann Radcliffe. And besides, the moon metaphor is a controlling one, designed not just to describe a parallel but to prescribe one: Pope at the end of "An Epistle to a Lady, Of the Characters of Women", says Martha Blunt shines softly and reflectingly like a moon, and will continue to please - to please the other sex, that is - when the glare and aggressiveness of the sun gets tiring and "declines". And who, did he imply, was the sun? Why, in all probability, Lady Mary, who wasn't content only to reflect the light of others, but was set on producing some rays of her own. Not exclusively or primarily a reflector, though not, any more than Johnson or Pope, wholly independent of other lights. And those lights are what I want to look at today.

(Johnson, I'm glad to say, doesn't use the reflected-light image. His views of women in contexts of religion or of marriage were extremely conservative; but

about education for women, and writing by women, he was entirely forward-looking. Sir John Hawkins got all grumpy about Johnson's elaborate ceremonies, like a pagan ritual, to honour the birth of Charlotte Lennox's first literary child (her first novel, Harriet Stuart, which Lady Mary was soon to read in Italy). Many women found Johnson useful not only in subscribing for their books but in roping in his friends to subscribe too, not only in reading their work but in criticising it in detail and not pulling his punches about what might be improved, not only in uttering words of encouragement but in writing to publishers. (3)

Johnson felt he had witnessed a revolution in his own lifetime, as reading changed from something that ladies didn't do to something that they did. (4) What he didn't know was how strong the tradition of women's writing was even before his own time. Lady Mary, being female, knew a great deal more about that than he did.

When I was doing research for Robert Halsband on his edition of Lady Mary's letters, before I started working on her on my own account, we were striving to identify the verse quotations which she scatters throughout her prose. I spent hours scanning likely works of poetry, running my eye down the rhyme-words only (an extraordinary, almost hallucinatory process). I went through that with many works that deserved a better hearing, like Matthew Prior's Alma, which Johnson much admired. Of the quotations I didn't uncover by that method during those years, several turn out to have been written by women. The works of Anne Wharton, Susanna Centlivre, even Aphra Behn, were, I have since found, well known to Lady Mary, but were not well known enough to literary scholars during the 1960s for us to have thought of searching them.

Lady Mary Pierrepont, b. 1689 into the highest layer of English society, was also very well placed for developing the kind of feminist consciousness that would make her feel an outsider. Like many women, she often gets defined through the eminence of her male relations: daughter of a duke, wife of one of the richest men in England, mother-in-law of the nation's most unpopular Prime Minister so far. She was also well placed to observe the way male power bypasses women: she was the eldest child, but her brother was to succeed and inherit; amidst all this wealth, she observed truly that she had "nothing of my own". Again, she had a grandstand view of the oppressiveness of sexual relations as such: her father was a rake, her mother a long-suffering rake's wife; she herself seems to have married her husband chiefly in order to avoid being forcibly married by her father to somebody much worse; her favourite sister was married against her will to one of her father's generation; her husband judged her own daughter's suitors, she said apologetically, according to his "foible of loving money". (5)

As a writer, she discovered very early how women who wrote were vilified for it; as medical innovator (inoculation for smallpox) she then discovered how the patriarchal system defends itself against outsiders; and later still she learned how a woman who was in any way unconventional was assumed to be sexually promiscuous. (She acquired her terrible reputation well before the single love-affair which has been dug up and documented.)

In time, therefore, Lady Mary developed something like a feminist consciousness. Her poetic consciousness came far sooner. In her two surviving books of teenage poems she calls herself first Strephon, then Clarinda; she produced a 39-word epitome of the humble apologetic female preface; she experimented with a whole gallery of dramatic voices both female and male (love-lorn maiden, two-timing man, man renouncing love for ever, famous lovers of history, etc). I suspect that her authentic 14-year-old voice may be heard no more than once in these volumes - in an untitled stanza:

I owe I trefslpass'd wickedly in Rhime
But oh my Punishment exceeds my crime,
My Folies tho' on parchment writt
I soon might burn and then forget
But if I Now both burn and blot
(By mee) the[y] cannot bee forgot.

What had happened? Whatever it was, it must have been a harsh reminder of the rule that girls are not supposed to write poetry. (6)

Looking back later at this part of her life, she uses what was one day to become feminist vocabulary and imagery. She told Joseph Spence she "stole" the Latin language (patriarchal property) in her father's library when everyone thought she was reading [feminine] romances; and when reporting to a friend the fate of Delariviere Manley (who'd been jailed for writing private-eye-like scandal about people in power), she said that this punishment made Manley into a "scarecrow" to warn off other would-be writers. (7) (Clearly the scarecrow she means isn't a dummy human but the dead body of an actual crow. Gamekeepers did for centuries think that living, thieving crows would be deterred by seeing the corpse of one of their number nailed up, exactly as the law and the government of Lady Mary's day believed that human thieves would be deterred by public execution of other criminals.)

So self-education for a girl, and public writing for an adult woman, were serious infringements (Manley was also trespassing wickedly in politics, and would have been in trouble even if she'd been a man; but her steamy reputation was entirely due to her gender). But more needs to be said about the felony in the library. Fourteen years or so after his eldest daughter had defied him by eloping, her father had that splendid library catalogued, and 20 copies of the catalogue privately printed in a pompous folio. (8) Most of it is clearly classifiable as "masculine" property: those classical authors; history, theology, genealogy, political pamphlets. But there are many other titles - in English and French - that might have been especially chosen to educate a girl. For the paternal library was also the family library: I suspect that some of the books were there because of Lady Mary's grandmother Elizabeth (Evelyn) Pierrepont, or her aunt Gertrude (Pierrepont) Cheyne, friend of the feminist Mary Astell.

But such education for a girl would still be controversial. These books include the two by Delariviere Manley which prompted the scarecrow remark

(probably the copies which Lady Mary herself mentions ordering, two years before she married). Many others deal with the lives of women the opposite of Manley - exemplary women - but they are still slightly surprising, because at this date there were fewer pundits prescribing female self-improvement (even the moral, not intellectual kind) than there had been during the Renaissance and would be again during the later eighteenth century. Those Christian, conservative-feminist women who had recently argued for better teaching for girls - Bathsua Makin, Damaris Masham, Elizabeth Burnet, Mary Astell, and in Holland Anna Maria van Schurman - were a small minority: but between them they clock up a number of rather tenuous links with the young Lady Mary.

The library contained such improving works as lives of famous women, mostly saints or queens: St Elizabeth of Hungary, St Theresa, St Frideswide in Latin (was that for male readers, or some female predecessor who had also stolen a language?), St Dorothea in MS (who wrote it?), Queen Adelaide of Burgundy, Queen Christina of Sweden (one who falls into the subversive not the moral category), most importantly Queen Elizabeth. (She is represented by masses of material including Camden's famous history, which Lady Mary cited in a letter when she was nearly 70. We know from that that she took due note of the queen as a writer; if Horace Walpole doesn't give her her due in his book on royal and noble authors, she says, "all the Women should tear him to pieces for abusing the Glory of their Sex.") (9) In the library the individual biographies were backed up by collections - like Walpole's, but of female virtue not literary achievement - such as The General History of Women by Thomas Heywood, 1657. Then there are poems to and funeral sermons on British queens: James I's wife Anne, the queen Anne and her sister Mary: also an account of the trial of Anne Boleyn. All in all a rich supply of possible role-models, though Anne Boleyn of course is more of a scarecrow.

Then there were the French seventeenth-century romances, not yet despised as they were later to become, but regarded as cultivated leisure reading. The library had several titles by the immensely popular Madeleine de Scudéry, for one of which Lady Mary later wrote a kind of brief sequel. They had, as it were, only gradually entered the female tradition for they were at first published, not quite anonymously, but under the name of Madeleine de Scudéry's brother Georges. Dorothy Osborne, for instance, had believed these works were written by a man whose sister lived with him as a maid and helped him with "little Story's" while he "only Contrives the maine designe". (10) But Mlle de Scudéry had cracked the fame barrier well before Lady Mary's birth, honoured by the French Academy in 1671 for essay on Glory (later englished by Elizabeth Elstob, who remarked in her preface that Scudéry might have reached even more glorious heights if she'd had the luck to write under a female monarch like Queen Anne). Even making do with the Sun King, Scudéry was a more glorious role model for a potential literary trespasser than the Christian martyrs, perhaps even more so than Queen Elizabeth, in whom the queen, it must be admitted, does eclipse the writer.

The library also includes subversive, challenging female works. There are several by Marie-Catherine D'Aulnoy, who was a predecessor of Manley in fictionalising court scandal; but being of a higher social class and not so

close to home she enjoyed a less shocking reputation. The young Lady Mary might have known her as an early writer of fairy tales (of which she was later to write two of her own, both in French) as much as a risqué memoirist; but the library contains the memoirs, not the fairy stories. More radical in terms of both sexual and mainstream politics is the fighting autobiographical pamphlet Malice Defeated, by Elizabeth Cellier. She was a Roman Catholic midwife who ten years before Lady Mary's birth had political prisoners in Newgate among her clients; she was recruited by the prominent Catholic Lady Powys (herself the author of a couple of powerful political ballads) to act as a channel for ransom money and also to compile a kind of Amnesty International dossier on treatment of jailed Catholics; and she then found herself implicated in the Meal-Tub plot, or sham plot (so-called because incriminating documents were found in a tub of meal in her kitchen). She was tried and sentenced to prison and to standing in the pillory (the alternative would have been a fine of £1000). She took it bravely (of the stones thrown at her, she gathered up the ones that fell close enough and put them in her pockets to keep as souvenirs, or as evidence); she wrote it all up afterwards in this major pamphlet, and with the pamphlet she included a shorter one satirically attacking her accuser.

So well before Lady Mary was embroiled in pamphlet warfare herself, she had the opportunity to read about a woman involved in the same game in a generation that played for even higher stakes. (Mind you, whichever Pierrepont bought Cellier's work was more likely an enemy than a supporter of hers; they were "old Whigs" as Lady Mary later was herself; the library also includes one of the many virulent pamphlet attacks on Cellier's work.) It lacks, alas, those of Cellier's later pamphlets which might have been of even greater interest to Lady Mary. Cellier campaigned to set up a College of Midwives, a proper professional body which if it had gone through would have been just as revolutionary and just as beneficial to medicine as Lady Mary's own launching of inoculation. (11)

Other political pamphlets in the library have special interest for women: on a witchcraft case, 1662 - also Joseph Glanvill's great work on the same subject, which Lady Mary in old age put to satirical use in letters - on an inheritance case, reported in MS, which turned on the principle "that Women are capable of Dignities", on a divorce case and trials for rape. L'Egalité des deux Sexes, by the French male feminist Poulain de La Barre, is not in the library, but a misogynist riposte to it is. This is especially interesting since Lady Mary has been often suspected of being the anonymous female "Person of Quality" who as "Sophia" published two important feminist pamphlets, in 1739 and 1740, which make a good deal of use of Poulain de la Barre. (A facsimile reprint of 1975, done for International Women's Year, actually bears Lady Mary's name, but unfortunately I don't think she really was Sophia, for various reasons.) I should like to be sure that she knew L'Egalité des deux Sexes: in several places in her authentic writings she uses phrases which recall it. (12) I could almost wonder if she took it away from her father's library and left the insulting reply to it behind on its own. It would be quite likely, as her father gradually forgave her after her marriage, that she might have taken away any books she particularly cared for. This would account for other gaps in the library. But it's a train of thought which a scholar who needs evidence cannot afford to

embark on. If the presence of certain books interestingly tells us that Lady Mary probably read them, we can't then argue that the absence of others suggests that she read those too!

It is notable, though, that there are important literary gaps among this very striking accumulation of women's-studies materials. The very first woman writer is there all right: Sappho (with commentary, for good measure, by Anne Dacier). French women are prominent (Dacier, Scudéry, D'Aulnoy, the Duchess of Mazarin). In English there are the highly professional and somewhat disreputable Manley, and the aristocratic poets Margaret Duchess of Newcastle and Mary Monck. But among past poets there is no Countess of Pembroke (though her brother Sir Philip Sidney, and John Donne, whom she influenced, are both there in several volumes), no Lady Mary Wroth, the niece of the Countess and Sir Philip (no wonder, though, since she was forced to withdraw her *Urania*, 1621, soon after publication), no Aemilia Lanyer or Anne Bradstreet. Of the moderns there is no Katherine Philips, or Anne Finch Lady Winchelsea, Aphra Behn, Anne Wharton, Mary Astell, or Susanne Centlivre, all of whom (poets, dramatists, novelists) Lady Mary did undoubtedly know well.

This is a warning not to build too much on scanty evidence. Yet it's clear that Lady Mary was an inheritor of two traditions. The tradition, the male one, is there, from Homer to Virgil to Chaucer to Milton to Dryden; the foremothers begin with Sappho and stretch to Margaret of Newcastle, but even in this remarkably bisexual collection of books there are gaps in their ranks which have no equivalent among the men. It's not surprising; what is surprising is how many women are represented.

Mary Monck and Margaret Newcastle on one hand, Delariviere Manley on the other, represent the two extremes of writing women. The former were noblewomen whose writing and publishing were enabled by an admiring father and husband respectively; the latter was a hard-pressed career-woman writing for her keep in a man's world, a gentlewoman who had fallen right out of the safety-net of respectability when she discovered that the older cousin who had married her (she was an orphan) was married already. She then embraced the bohemian life with gusto, wrote gory heroic tragedies, fictionalised scandal, and political polemics, lived with a lover, and became a scarecrow. (13) Years later Pope wrote of "furious Sappho" that you might be "P-x'd by her love, or libelled by her hate"; Lady Mary felt quite justifiably that this was a vile attack on herself, since "the Town...generally suppose Pope means me whenever he mentions that name." But when she complained to a mutual friend Pope protested that Sappho didn't mean Lady Mary at all; it meant, for instance, "fower remarkable poetesses and scribblers, Mrs. Centlivre, Mrs. Haywood, Mrs. Manly and Mrs. Been. Ladies famous indeed in their generation, and some of them Esteemed to have given very unfortunate favours to their Friends". In this campaign of innuendo, Manley and the others are a kind of cannon fodder: there can't be any question of defending their reputations (though there's no shadow of proof that any one of them had a sexual disease; what each one had was what we should call a failed marriage). Next in line comes Sappho: Lady Mary, who as a child in the library probably dreamed of emulating Sappho, and who had later been dubbed Sappho as flattery from Pope himself and others, as every woman writing poetry was, is now constrained to deny her - "there is nothing I ever heard in our characters or circumstances to make a parallel." (14) Sisterhood - or

daughterhood - in these circumstances was too costly to maintain.

One might expect Lady Mary to feel some kinship with the recent noblewomen-authors in the library (a niece of Mary Monck was later her close friend: "three ultra-sized volumes" by Margaret Newcastle were among the few books that her grand-daughter could still remember seventy-five years later as among the books which she retained to bring home from her exile). (15) But her early poems are chiefly imbued with - even more than with Cowley or Ovid or Horace - the spirit of Katherine Philips (country retirement, passionate female friendship, renunciation of fame) and of Aphra Behn (not her plays or novels, but her poetry, and especially a verse-and-prose romance. A Voyage to the Island of Love of which the young Mary Pierrepont wrote a fairly close imitation). Her own and Behn's romances are full of (male) idealistic passion and subsequent disillusionment; her close literary involvement must have given her a pang years later when "Behn" became virtually a dirty word.

Those of Lady Mary's literary alliances which are documented are, of course, those with men. I have written about them myself: that with Alexander Pope and John Gay, cemented by summer 1715, which contributed to the growth and flourishing of the town eclogue genre; that with her young second cousin Henry Fielding, and that with her friend Lord Hervey, each of whom produced verse attacks on her previous ally and present inveterate enemy, Pope. (16) Her MSS show traces of a writing alliance, presumably during her European years (1739-61), which may have been with men or women or both, and which produced original and translated animal fables in verse and prose (Italian, English, French).

Lady Mary also became active in the sisterhood of the quill which she had discovered in the library. She later owned and annotated, or wrote home for copies of, many works by women: fiction-writers Jane Barker, Jane Collier, Mary Davys, Sarah Fielding, Anna Meades, Sarah Scott, Susan Smythies, and Johnson's friends Frances Brooke and Charlotte Lennox, as well as the scarecrows Haywood, Manley, and Charlotte Charke and Teresia Constantia Phillips (both, like Manley, authors of scandal-autobiographies). (17) She took a keen, possibly self-protective, interest in the question of just who Haywood was quoting under the name "The English Sappho". She drew regularly on the female tradition. Her powerful verse epistle from a repudiated wife to her husband, protesting against the sexual double standard, bases much of its argument squarely on Astell's Reflections upon Marriage, 1700. The memoir of her own times, which Lady Mary in Italy amused herself with writing bit by bit and then burning, was probably designed to follow the genre of D'Aulnoy and Manley. (18) If this is the case, then Lady Mary voluntarily associated herself (at a careful distance) with the tradition of rebellion and disrepute as well as with that of high-minded moralising.

Her "Letter from the other world to a Lady from her former Husband" is related in her Essays and Poems to a work by Tom Brown, 1702; I now suspect a more likely model is Elizabeth Rowe's hugely popular Friendship in Death, in... Letters from the Dead to the Living 1728, even though Lady Mary transforms Rowe's piety into levity and satire. Lady Mary used the same genre (it does

include letters to the dead as well) in her "Letter to Mademoiselle ---", which (we didn't know this when we edited her Essays and Poems) is almost certainly addressed to the Dutch Christian feminist and educator Anna Maria von Schurman. Lady Mary re-evaluates Schurman's famous book englished as The Learned Maid, or Whether a Maid may be a Scholar, finds it stiff like the clothes of a century ago, not sufficiently political, yet still invaluable. (19) Lady Mary in her solitude says she envies van Schurman her delightful academy or coterie in the next world; since she claims to be answering a letter from Schurman, I think it likely that she was nicknaming an actual friend after Schurman: just as Pope re-used and blackened the name of Sappho, Lady Mary may have been re-using for honorific purposes the name of an illustrious forebear, and constructing her own coterie of two like (female) minds, for the purpose of criticising and advancing feminist thought.

She also fed the tradition. Within a couple of years of her marriage she wrote a Spectator essay as from the President of a club of widows, comically defending the reputation of these stock butts of misogynist satire (the nature of the husbands they had buried, she wrote, sufficiently explained their freedom from grief). Although her authorship of this essay would not be known, it fed into the repertoire of daughters of the Spectator, who included Lady Mary herself, Eliza Haywood, and Frances Brooke (who was to quote Lady Mary admiringly in her History of Emily Montague). (20)

So Lady Mary fed into the tradition, providing a valuable authorial model for later women. I haven't time to mention more than a few. While mainstream literary history reviled her because of the quarrel with Pope, others felt differently. An anonymous lady dedicated to her in 1733 a poem called The Neuter, or A Modest Satire on the Poets of the Age. The poem strongly criticises male poets ("Even Pope with Scandal, has defil'd his Lays"); the dedication praises Lady Mary for those literary qualities which the age needs. This distinguishes her carefully from the "wrong" female tradition of Haywood and Manley: they have to be disposed of before Lady Mary can be praised. Lady Mary's trenchant comments on male sexuality and the institutions of gallantry, courtship, and marriage, appealed to female poets and prose writers alike, notably Astell herself, with whom she exchanged verse. A probably pseudonymous "Mary Seymour Montague" published in 1771 a remarkable poem called An Original Essay on Woman, to counter the standard accusations against women. She too praises Lady Mary, who "alone could cope / With our arch Enemy, satyric Pope", linking the private quarrel to a broader analysis of gender relations.

Lady Mary's achievement as non-literary heroine was also sometimes remembered. Elizabeth Dawbarn, an obscure East Anglian trained nurse and social commentator, advising on the upbringing of children, brackets Lady Mary and Edward Jenner, both medical pioneers, as role models for girls or boys: (21) such recognition makes Lady Mary a successor of the saints and the queens, and might have pleased her even more than literary laurels.

Notes

1. New Rambler, 1973.
2. Vanity of Human Wishes, line 56; An Essay on Man, i, 214, 200 (Anne Finch wrote "Now the jonquil o'ercomes the feeble brain. / We faint beneath the aromatic pain").
3. Hawkins. The Life of Samuel Johnson, L.L.D., ed. and abridged by Bertram H. Davis, 1962, pp.121-2: see Isobel Grundy. "Samuel Johnson as Patron of Women" in The Age of Johnson, i.1987, pp.59-77.
4. Lives of the English Poets, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 1905, i.143, ii.146; Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. G.B. Hill and L.F. Powell, 1934, iii.3, 333.
5. Lady Mary, Complete Letters, ed. Robert Halsband, 1965-7, iii.133, 90; Halsband. Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1956, p.151.
6. Harrowby MSS Trust vols.251, 252; see Grundy. "'The Entire Works of Clarinda': Unpublished Juvenile Verse by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu" (Yearbook of English Studies, 7, 1977).
7. Joseph Spence. Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men, ed. J. . Osborn, 1966, i.303; Letters, i.18.
8. Catalogus Bibliothecae Kingstoniae, n.d.; see Anthony Lister in The Book Collector, 34, 1985.
9. Letters, iii. 185; William Camden. Annales Rerum . . . Regnante Elizabetha, 1625.
10. Letters, ed. G.C. Moore Smith, 1928, repr. 1947, pp.82-3: she had also heard that Mlle de Scudéry was "the most ilfavoured Creatur that ever was borne".
11. Cellier, Malice Defeated, 1680, Augustan Reprint 1988; A Scheme for the Foundation of a Royal Hospital . . ., 1687; To Dr ---- an Answer to his Queries, concerning the Colledg of Midwives, 1688.
12. Letters, iii. 157, 189; De l'Excellence des hommes contre l'Egalité des sexes, 1675 [Francois Poulain de La Barre, L'Egalité des deux sexes, 1673]; "Sophia", Woman Not Inferior to Man, 1739 (repr. 1985), and Woman's Superior Excellence over Man, 1740.
13. See Fidelis Morgan, A Woman of No Character. The Autobiography of Mrs Manley, 1986; Manley, The Adventures of Rivella, 1714 (repr. 1976, and in Novels, ed. Patricia Koster, 1971).
14. Letters, ii. 97, 99-101.

15. Letters, iii. 204 and n.3; Lady Louisa Stuart, "Biographical Anecdotes" in Lady Mary, Essays and Poems, with Simplicity. A Comedy, ed. Halsband and Grundy, 1977, p.53.
16. See Halsband, Life, pp. 48-144 passim; Halsband, "Pope, Lady Mary, and the Court Poems (1716)" (PMLA, 68, 1953); Grundy, "New Verse by Henry Fielding" (PMLA, 87, 1972); Grundy, "Verses Address'd to the Imitator of Horace: A Skirmish between Pope and Some Persons of Rank and Fortune" (Studies in Bibliography, 30, 1977).
17. Annotated books at Sandon, Staffs., and National Library of Scotland; see Letters, i.15-17, ii.360, iii.9, 66-67, 88-9, 125.
18. "Epistle from Mrs. Ylongel to her Husband 1724" (Essays and Poems, pp.230-2); Grundy, "Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce: An Unpublished Poem by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu" (Review of English Studies, 1972): Letters, iii.18-19.
19. "Letter from the other world ...". "Letter to Mademoiselle" (Essays and Poems, pp.75-6, 165-7); Anna Maria van Schurman. De Ingenii muliebris ... 1641, translated by Clement Barkodale as The Learned Maid: or, Whether a Maid may be a Scholar? 1659.
20. Spectator no.573 (Essays and Poems, p.69-74); Lady Mary, The Nonsense of Common-Sense 1738-9 (ed. Halsband, 1947; repr. Essays and Poems, p.109 ff.); Eliza Haywood, The Female Spectator. 1744-6 (part repr. 1929); Frances Brooke, The Old Maid by Mary Singleton, 1755-6, coll. 1764. The History of Emily Montague. 1769. ed. Mary Jane Edwards. 1985.
21. Elizabeth Dawbarn. The Rights of Infants, or A Letter from a Mother to a Daughter, relative to the Nursing of Infants, 1805, p.iv.

JOHNSON AS STORYTELLER

Dr Ken Edward Smith, Senior Lecturer in Literature
University of Bradford - 18 February 1989
Chairman: Anthea Hopkins MA

The Chairman introduced Dr Smith as a member of the Society, who had published articles and reviews on a range of 18th century topics, including Johnson. His main interest lay in philosophical themes in literature. At present he was Editorial advisor (English) of the British Journal for 18th Century Studies, and a member of the Executive Council of the British Society for 18th century studies. His paper today is reproduced in full.

By the standards of some modern literary theory which stresses the fictiveness of all discourse and therefore attributes a central role to avowedly fictional narrative - novels, plays and so on - it would appear that Johnson

reserved for fiction a distinct and limited role. Whether or not he actually wrote Book IX, Chapter XI of Charlotte Lennox's The Female Quixote we can hardly doubt his approval of the rolling Johnsonian condemnation of absurd romance, of "Scribblers, not only of Fictions, but of senseless Fictions; which at once vitiate the Mind and pervert the Understanding; and which if they are at any Time read with safety, owe their Innocence only to their absurdity". (1)

This attitude to romance was certainly of a piece with his larger conception of fiction's proper nature and role. Put at its simplest, Johnson believed that fiction should both be true to nature and productive of moral instruction. It was apparently on the first criterion of truth to nature that he based his well-known preference of Richardson over Fielding as recounted by Boswell: "In comparing these two writers, he used this expression; 'that there was as great a difference between them as between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial-plate.'" (2) Yet this may not be as straightforward as it seems. If we consider Rambler 4, with its acknowledgement of the rise of realistic fiction, then we encounter the view that the author's own values are crucial in the differentiation of healthy and unhealthy realism. We need not doubt that Johnson really admired Richardson's psychological finesse but his general reflections on realism remind us that he could afford to admire Richardson because he was so sure about the soundness of the novelist's moral values and discriminations:

It is justly considered as the greatest excellency of art, to imitate nature; but it is necessary to distinguish those parts of nature, which are most proper for imitation: greater care is still required in representing life, which is so often discoloured by passion, or deformed by wickedness. If the world be promiscuously described, I cannot see of what use it can be to read the account; or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind, as upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination. (3)

As often with Johnson, though, we find that an apparent narrowness of aesthetic canons goes along with a remarkable responsiveness to literature and drama. Reverting to the subject of romance, one does not have to be too Freudian to imagine the attraction which the daydreams of fiction might have for Johnson in his more troubled moments. More seriously, when it comes to the realistic authors he admires his response can be both extraordinarily insightful and personally painful. Johnson could never share the comfortable assurance that "It's only a story after all". If he can sound illiberal in his worries over fiction's circulation it is because he so much believes fiction to be about real life and death. His reaction to Shakespeare, whom he sees as a supreme realist, often leads him to reflect directly on life itself. Of

Thou hast nor youth, nor age;
But as it were an after-dinner's sleep,
Dreaming on both.

Johnson is moved to write:

This is exquisitely imagined. When we are young we busy ourselves in forming schemes for succeeding time, and miss the gratifications that are before us; when we are old we amuse the languour of age with the recollection of youthful pleasures or performances; so that our life, of which no part is filled with the business of the present time resembles our dreams after dinner, when the events of the morning are mingled with the designs of the evening. (4)

This is the man who found the death of Cordelia prevented him from re-reading the play until he had to, and who could go beyond all his own moral ideals to hymn "Falstaff, unimitated, unimitable Falstaff". (5)

In Johnson's criticism, then, we find a productive tension between neo-Classical standards and very specific aperçus. Unlike Imlac's poet, Johnson is as prone to number the streaks of Shakespeare's tulips as he is to make general judgements on him. That, you may say, is the nature of annotation: but then Johnson did not have to be so thorough, or so good, an annotator as he was. May it not be that, in Johnson's own surprisingly extensive fictional enterprises, we find a similar balancing of neo-Classical universalising with particular insight? If so, then we shall once more find Johnson triumphantly escaping the categorisations which we so anxiously impose upon him.

While examining the fictionalised essays in The Rambler and The Idler and the oriental tale Rasselas I shall home in on three main aspects. First, I shall argue for the thematic significance of the fiction, its concentration on a number of important master-themes. Second, I shall draw attention to the presence of universalising neo-Classical elements. And third, I shall attempt to show how many rich and rewarding psychological and ethical particulars can be found in these works. In the first two areas I freely acknowledge my concurrence with many of the points put forward by Carey McIntosh in his The Choice of Life: Samuel Johnson and the World of Fiction. In the third area, the most important for my purposes, I depart from McIntosh and indeed question his implication that Johnson's fiction remains restricted by a neo-Classical heritage. Most positively I shall claim that Johnson's fiction could touch on aspects of life which his great contemporaries could not handle in the same depth. In what follows, The Rambler, The Idler and Rasselas will successively be considered in relation to these three aspects.

Undoubtedly the theme of the secular choice of life plays a great part in The Rambler. In a world where, for almost the first time on a large scale, one has a range of careers open to the middle orders and above, what is the wisest use of one's talents that one can make? Often, of course, it is the perfectly understandable decision to do what one is best at which is followed, as one becomes, say, a writer or a wit. But the vanity of human wishes is as manifest here as in the case of Charles-XII of Sweden. Inordinate ambition may not be involved in these cases but the clash between naive hope and an indifferent or malevolent society certainly is present. Almost all the fictionalised Ramblers - mostly letters from imaginary correspondents but occasionally third-person narratives - describe the progress from hopeful travelling to painful arrival.

In fact, as Carey McIntosh notes, we can discover two large classes among the scores of disillusioned letter-writers to Mr. Rambler, those who make complaints and those who make confessions. The complainants are distinguished by the fact that, although naive, they are not obviously culpable; their only fault, if it can be called a fault in a young and inexperienced person, is that they do not know the world where few people bother to read a writer's books, that a reputation for it must be sustained on every occasion, that the innocent display of one's abilities can cause malignant envy, that friends fall away, and so on:

The scene of unpleasant and disillusioning experience in most of Johnson's stories is London. This is where Zosima, of Rambler 12 initiated into "the world", as she searches in vain for employment in a series of agonizing interviews. Eubulus ("well-advised, prudent" - an ironical misnomer) of Rambler 26, 27 embarks for London as the proper stage on which to display his genius, and ends up the pawn of patrons. Pertinax as a matter of course proceeds from the university to London, to put the final polish on his powers of argument; on arrival he recognizes London "as the place where every one catches the contagion of vanity" (Rambler 95). Passion, in London, has ample scope, success is intoxicating, failure convincing, opportunity everywhere and every extreme of life represented. (6)

On the other hand, there is the large class of correspondents whose names, like Cupidus, convict them of an initial moral fault. Yet these obstinate, vain, snobbish or mercenary individuals have often been bred up to their faults - Johnson's Lockean side comes out here - so that the distinction between them and the innocent complainants is not a completely clear-cut one. It is, after all, the world they all encounter, with its merciless struggle of all against all, which attracts authorial scorn. The naive beauties who flood the world each season need to be aware of the predatory aspects of this society:

He surely is an useful monitor, who inculcates to these thoughtless strangers, that the "majority are wicked"; who informs them, that the train which wealth and beauty draw after them, is lured only by the scent of prey; and that, perhaps, among all those who croud about them with professions and flatteries, there is not one who does not hope for some opportunity to devour or betray them, to glut himself by their destruction, or to share their spoils with a stronger savage. (7)

Looking over the range of stories in The Rambler we can perhaps agree with Carey McIntosh that their range is limited, their general outlines predictable. Neo-Classical formulas of both social typology and narrative structure loom large and "Johnson's protagonists are not allowed to feel affection, lust, jealousy, hatred, and anger, so that they may make their choice of life uninterrupted and undistracted". (8) In structuring, it is true that the contrast between knowledge and imagination is certainly repeated to an obsessive degree: "I know nothing more pleasant or more instructive than to compare experience with expectation, or to register from time to time the difference between Idea and Reality."

But McIntosh largely misses the extent to which, within this fixed framework, Johnson develops a fictional capacity that can surprise and delight with its precision. When he compares one of Johnson's young women characters with Pamela, McIntosh does indeed display the generalising aspect of the former compared with Richardson's heroine. Yet the statement that "We are not often interested in Johnson's characters as real people, or as free experience; they have been tampered with to enhance their moral relevance" (9) is only sometimes true. In Johnson's ability to mimic his characters' unconscious self-irony we find the seeds of Jane Austen's techniques. It is hard to resist the teenage assertiveness of Myrtylla in Rambler 85 who is threatened with a breaking of her spirit by her aunt: "These menaces, Mr. Rambler, sometimes make me quite angry; for I have been sixteen these ten weeks, and think myself exempted from the dominion of a governess, who has no more pretensions to sense or knowledge than myself. I am resolved, since I am as tall and as wise as other women, to be no longer treated like a girl ... P.S. Remember I am past sixteen." (10) Equally striking can be the circumstantial precision which makes us identify with the protagonist's situation as in the description of the hapless wit who finds himself expected to give preprandial entertainment, and then worse:

From the uneasiness of this situation, I was relieved by the dinner, and as every attention was taken up by the business of the hour, I sunk quietly to a level with the rest of the company. But no sooner were the dishes removed, than instead of cheerful confidence and familiar prattle, a universal silence again shewed their expectation of some unusual performance. My friend endeavoured to rouse them by healths and questions, but they answered him with great brevity; and immediately relapsed into their former taciturnity. (11)

Psychologically, Johnson in The Rambler shows himself to be subtle master of two areas of human experience not much touched on by eighteenth century novelists, so far as I am aware. The first is the nexus of self-consciousness, embarrassment, shame and mortification. As the previous example shows this greatest of talkers knew all too well the potential abysses of social intercourse and he is positively Sartrean in his sense of the other's look as a crushing psychological instrument. A further instance of this occurs in Rambler 157 where the young Verecundulus returns home triumphantly from university to dazzle local society:

I felt no sense of my own insufficiency till going upstairs to the dining room, I heard the mingled roar of obstreperous merriment. I was however, disgusted rather than terrified, and went forward without dejection. The whole company rose at my entrance; but when I saw so many eyes fixed upon me, I was blasted with a sudden imbecility, I was quelled by some nameless power which I found impossible to be resisted. My sight was dazzled, my cheeks glowed, my perceptions were confounded; I was harrassed by the multitude of eager salutations, and returned the common civilities with hesitation and impropriety; the sense of my own blunders increased my confusion, and before the exchange of ceremonies allowed me to sit down, I was ready to sink under the oppression of surprize; my voice grew weak, and my knees trembled. (12)

The other equally "modern" psychological area which arouses subtle analysis is the protagonist's attempt to achieve a happiness which excludes anxiety, as in the late oriental tale of Seged (Ramblers 204-205). Here happiness is gradually overwhelmed by negative thoughts, which in their turn are replaced by soothing daydreams only for these too to be succeeded by regret at so much fruitless waste of time. The anticipation of Rasselas is obvious, and I shall return to this problem of happiness later on. At this point, though, it is worth considering the place of such insights in The Rambler series as a whole. It is my strong impression, though I would not claim statistical proof, that such moments of fictional intensity and liberation tend to become more frequent as the periodical goes on. Certainly most of the examples that have come to mind are later rather than earlier, and in particular one wonders if even the intrepid Johnson would have risked the extended empathy with Misella the prostitute earlier in the sequence than nos. 170-171. If there is a Ramblerian dignity in some of Misella's language may this not be appropriate to her need to stress her own self-worth? Certainly, the stress on the financial aspects of prostitution as a way out of starvation and the blistering reality of the social observation are unprecedented in male writing at least before Shaw:

Thus driven again into the streets, I lived upon the least that could support me, and at night accommodated myself under pent-houses as well as I could. At length I became absolutely penniless; and having strolled all day without sustenance, was at the close of evening accosted by an elderly gentleman with an invitation to a tavern. I refused him with hesitation; he seized me by the hand, and drew me into a neighbouring house, where when he saw my face pale with hunger, and my eyes swelling with tears, he spurned me from him, and bad me cant and whine in some other place; he for his part would take care of his pockets.

I still continued to stand in the way, having scarcely strength to walk further, when another addressed me in the same manner. When he saw the tokens of calamity, he considered that I might be obtained at a cheap rate, and therefore quickly made overtures, which I had no longer firmness to reject. By this man I was maintained four months in penurious wickedness, and then abandoned to my former condition, from which I was delivered by another keeper. (13)

Here, surely, we find "free experience" speaking for itself.

Turning to The Idler we find ourselves traversing most of the seventeen fifties and Johnson's own forties. Once again there is thematic cohesion, though of a different sort, for we have now moved from the difficult choice of life to the equal difficulty of filling and organising that life. In the simplest sense, idleness can be detected as a direct theme, relevant no doubt to Johnson's own procrastination on the Shakespeare edition. But idleness represents something broader than the avoidance of labour; it rather stands proxy for the myriad subterfuges by which people pass the time, being busy doing nothing. May not this Idler itself be an all too welcome distraction from the great task in hand?

This theme of self-deception, of trying to see one's life as meaningful while perhaps avoiding the deeper questions, is inherently more subtle and amorphous than the choice-of-life theme. We should not therefore be surprised to find Johnson moving away from the still-formal bipartite structures of the Rambler narratives towards a more open texture of narrative. Of course, this is not the only reason for a change of style since we know that Johnson deliberately aimed for a lighter, more newsy vein than in The Rambler. Nevertheless, without getting into chicken-versus-egg arguments we can surely also claim that new interests called on a new style as much as vice versa.

Before characterising this distinct approach in detail it may be worth stressing that it is something Johnsonian and that comparisons with Addison and Steele may be misleading. True, the moral tolerance, the introduction of eccentric characters with English names, and more conversational tone do recall the Spectator. And one can quite happily admit that there is at times a feeling of Johnson-and-water as opposed to the pure wine of The Rambler. But at its best the style and stance of The Idler is a Johnsonian triumph of a new kind. Anticipating Rasselas, it shows that tolerant acceptance of life need not be like that of the smiling, poised Mr. Spectator. Rather it can be that of the stern moralist and self-critic who has come through. If Johnson still lacerates himself with moral judgement at this stage he has certainly come to accept the foibles of others and has begun even to accept himself at times.

All this might seem a far cry from the early part of The Idler where we encounter characters such as Sukey Savecharges who are less real than some of the Latinate characters from The Rambler. But we soon arrive at a level of uninhibited comic realism that is new in the character of Jack Whirler who is an early workaholic and hardly sits down to taste his meals. Again, the account of Betty Broom's successive misfortunes as a servant and eventual turning village schoolmistress has a relaxed proliferation of relevant detail on the servant's lot. But it is with the portrait of Sober in no.31 that a new psychological depth enters. We are speaking only of a few paragraphs but in them we already seem half-way from The Rambler towards Jane Austen:

There are others to whom idleness dictates another expedient, by which life may be passed unprofitably away without the tediousness of many vacant hours. The art is, to fill the day with petty business, to have always something in hand which may raise curiosity, but not solicitude, and keep the mind in a state of action, but not of labour.

This art has for many years been practised by my old friend Sober, with wonderful success. Sober is a man of strong desires and quick imagination, so exactly balanced by the love of ease, that they can seldom stimulate him to any difficult undertaking; they have, however, so much power, that they will not suffer him to lie quite at rest, and though they do not make him sufficiently useful to others, they make him at least weary of himself.

Mr. Sober's chief pleasure is conversation; there is no end of his talk or his attention; to speak or to hear is equally pleasing; for he

still fancies that he is teaching or learning something, and is free for the time from his own reproaches.

But there is one time at night when he must go home, that his friends may sleep; and another time in the morning, when all the world agrees to shut out interruption. These are the moments of which poor Sober trembles at the thought. But the misery of these tiresome intervals, he has many means of alleviating. He has persuaded himself that the manual arts are undeservedly overlooked; he has observed in many trades the effects of close thought, and just ratiocination. From speculation he proceeded to practice, and supplied himself with the tools of a carpenter, with which he mended his coal-box very successfully, and which he still continues to employ, as he finds occasion.

He has attempted at other times the crafts of the shoemaker, tinman, plumber, and potter; in all these arts he has failed, and resolved to qualify himself for them by better information. But his daily amusement is chemistry. He has a small furnace, which he employs in distillation, and which has long been the solace of his life. He draws oils and waters, and essences and spirits, which he knows to be of no use; sits and counts the drops as they come from his retort, and forgets that, while a drop is falling, a moment flies away.

Poor Sober! I have often teased him with reproof, and he has often promised reformation; for no man is so much open to conviction as the idler, but there is none on whom it operates so little. What will be the effect of this paper I know not; perhaps he will read it and laugh, and light the fire in his furnace; but my hope is that he will quit his trifles, and betake himself to rational and useful diligence. (14)

It is not difficult, or illegitimate, to use this passage to illustrate Johnson's mental conflicts of the time and the powerful resources he brought to bear upon them. Yet this should not make us forget the greater novelistic confidence manifest in giving us such a measured near-self-portrait nor detract from that ironic skill of writing which must surely have given Johnson relief for a time from the vacuity which tormented Sober. The passage is simultaneously a triumph of psychological insight and of narrative style.

Along with more orthodox tales, such as that of Deborah Ginger, wife of the shopkeeper turned tragic poet, we have an increasing number of subtle portraits which are allowed to do more of their speaking for themselves. In Idler 46 Molly Quick recounts her mistress's habit of using coded speech to establish superiority over her servant, a recondite species of mental cruelty which I think Johnson the first to notice:

This day, however, she has conquered my sagacity. When she went out of her dressing-room, she said nothing, but, "Molly, you know," and hastened to her chariot. What I am to know is yet a secret; but if I do not know, before she comes back, what I yet have no means of discovering, she will make my dullness a pretence for a fortnight's ill humour, treat me

as a creature devoid of the faculties necessary to the common duties of life, and perhaps give the next gown to the house-keeper. (15)

Johnson's gift for mimicry is employed for comic yet telling effect in the very different accents of the Cambridge don, whose Pooteresque diary exactly captures the self-importance to its supposed author:

[Tuesday], Two In the common-room. Dr. Dry gave us an instance of a gentleman who kept the gout out of his stomach by drinking old Madeira. Conversation chiefly on the expeditions. Company broke up at four. Dr. Dry and myself played at back gammon for a brace of snipes. Won.

Ditto, Five. At the coffee-house. Met Mr.H. there. Could not get a sight of the Monitor.

Ditto, Seven. Returned home, and stirred my fire. Went to the common-room and supped on the snipes with Dr.Dry.

Ditto, Eight. Began the evening in the common-room. Dr.Dry told several stories. Were very merry. Our new Fellow, that studies physic, very talkative toward twelve. Pretends he will bring the youngest Miss--- to drink tea with me soon. Impertinent blockhead! (16)

If limitations of time and space force us to by-pass the amazing journeys of Will Marvel, we must attend to the portrait of Dick Minim, arguably the most rounded in either series of essays. Here it is not any particular detail that satisfies so much as the delicate flickering between exposition of views which Johnson himself might have shared and an ironic undertone which suggests that for Minim, unlike Johnson, these opinions are but second-hand counters. Nothing could contrast more with the force of Johnson's generalisations than Minim's echoing of them:

He now grew conscious of his abilities, and began to talk of the present state of dramattick poetry; wondered what was become of the comick genius which supplied our ancestors with wit and pleasantry, and why no writer could be found that durst now venture beyond a farce. He saw no reason for thinking that the vein of humour was exhausted, since we live in a country where liberty suffers every character to spread itself to its utmost bulk, and which therefore produces more originals than all the rest of the world together. Of tragedy he concluded business to be the soul, and yet often hinted that love predominates too much upon the modern stage. (17)

Equally effective are those passages where Minim deviates from his creator. Johnson, we know, was sceptical of literal onomatopoeia so it is not surprising to find him parodying it: but he parodies it with such precision as to offer us the option of believing Minim if we will:

Honour is like the glassy bubble,
Which costs philosophers such trouble
Where one part crack'd, the whole does fly
And wits are crack'd to find out why.

In these verses, says Minim, we have two striking accommodations of the sound to the sense. It is impossible to utter the two lines emphatically without an act like that which they describe; "bubble" and "trouble" causing a momentary inflation of the cheeks by the retention of the breath, which is afterwards forcibly emitted, as in the practice of "blowing bubbles". But the greatest excellence is in the third line, which is "crack'd" in the middle to express a crack, and then shivers into monosyllables. Yet has this diamond lain neglected with common stones, and among the innumerable admirers of Hudibras the observation of this superlative passage has been reserved for the sagacity of Minim. (18)

Our last sight of Minim sees him pompously but harmlessly instructing "a youth of promising parts". The tone is poised between irony and affection, the final vision peculiarly critical and accepting at the same time as "Minim feasts upon his own beneficence till another day brings another pupil". (19) When we consider the self-accusations of these years for Johnson we can hardly doubt that the creation of Minim gave him another period, however brief, of poised relief.

The idea of creation as relief brings us, of course, to Rasselas written in early 1759, while Johnson's mother was dying, in order to raise money for her illness or, as it turned out, her funeral. Here, in the longer narrative, we find the familiar elements, although much complexified. The thesis is hope and ambition, the antithesis disillusion and loss, and the synthesis viable and continuable activity in an imperfect world. Yet there is a fluidity in the structure which allows for a variety of episodes and for extended episodes such as the marriage debate: correspondingly, the psychological exploration is deepened, so that with the astronomer's loss of reason the themes of the choice of life and ambition of controlling that life return in a deepened, more disturbing form.

Let us look, then, at the three stages of Rasselas, on this occasion mingling together structural and psychological analysis. The Happy Valley, in which Rasselas begins his adventures, may in itself be an orthodox Garden of Eden, but even in this apparently uncomplicated initial setting of the story it begets a complex of unsatisfied feeling:

'That I want nothing, said the prince, or that I know not what I want, is the cause of my complaint: if I had any known want, I should have a certain wish; that wish would excite endeavour, and I should not then repine to see the sun move so slowly towards the western mountain, or lament when the day breaks and sleep will no longer hide me from myself. When I see the kids and the lambs chasing one another, I fancy that I should be happy if I had something to pursue. But, possessing all that I can want, I find one day and one hour exactly

like another, except that the latter is still more tedious than the former. Let your experience inform me how the day may now seem as short as in my childhood, while nature was yet fresh, and every moment shewed me what I never had observed before. I have already enjoyed too much; give me something to desire.' (20)

As Imlac indicates only miseries can make us appreciate happiness. So the journey through the world begins, certain of finding misery but less certain of finding true happiness at the end of it all.

Indeed it is arguable that the long central section of the book, the antithesis as I have called it, can best be made sense of as a demonstration that happiness cannot be achieved by seeking it. Successively and amusingly, we find the drawbacks of being learned, of being rich, of being poor, of practising stoicism, of advocating a life lived according to nature. Yet, as with the Vedantic philosopher, the point of saying "not this, not this" is not to end up in negation but in facing life as it is. Early marriage has drawbacks in rivalry between parents and children: late marriage results in conflictual distance between parents and children. But not to choose, to try and split the difference is to risk losing all, as Nekayah suggests:

'Every hour, answered the princess, confirms my prejudice in favour of the position so often uttered by the mouth of Imlac, "That nature sets her gifts on the right hand and on the left." Those conditions, which flatter hope and attract desire, are so constituted, that, as we approach one, we recede from another. There are goods so opposed that we cannot seize both, but, by too much prudence, may pass between them at too great a distance to reach either. This is often the fate of long consideration; he does nothing who endeavours to do more than is allowed to humanity. Flatter not yourself with contrarieties of pleasure. Of the blessings set before you make your choice, and be content. No man can taste the fruits of autumn while he is delighting his scent with the flowers of the spring: no man can, at the same time, fill his cup from the source and from the mouth of the Nile. (21)

The end of all our explorations may be to come to conclusions which are neither original nor indisputable but have just such weight as our experience is able to give them: "Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures." (22)

It is the lack of such modesty of formulation before experience that helps bring about the astronomer's derangement. Not that this lack points to some special defect in the astronomer: on the contrary, our sense of tragedy is heightened by his being a man not only of scientific dedication but also of moral idealism: "To man is permitted the contemplation of the skies, but the practice of virtue is commanded." (23) No, his belief that he can control the elements beneficially is the product of a hubris wholly selfless, a compound of idealism, reason and the canker of over-solitariness. Subtly, Johnson makes his conversation with Imlac a rational and reflective rather than a manic one. To Imlac's querying whether the rising of the Nile and the astronomer's wish might be coincidental his response is not implausible:

'Do not believe, said he with impatience, that such objections could escape me: I reasoned long against my own conviction, and laboured against truth with the utmost obstinacy. I sometimes suspected myself of madness, and should not have dared to impart this secret but to a man like you, capable of distinguishing the wonderful from the impossible, and the incredible from the false'. (24)

The disquisition which Imlac gives the prince and princess on "the uncertain continuance of reason" and the dangerous progress of unchecked daydreams and fantasy is intrinsically thought-provoking but more interesting is the conscious therapy undertaken, first by the princesses and then by Imlac. The young women gradually loosen the astronomer's belief in his private reality by exposing him to the various and lively intercourse of good society. But there is a subtler knot which only Imlac can help the astronomer untie. For the latter now feels guilty. Suppose he is now tricking himself into believing that his control of the elements was a delusion? Would not this be an abnegation of responsibility? To this Imlac's response is that of an acute psychotherapist or, which amounts to the same thing, of a Johnson who understands neurosis with a fine balance of inwardness and rationality:

'No disease of the imagination, answered Imlac, is so difficult of cure, as that which is complicated with the dread of guilt: fancy and conscience then act interchangeably upon us, and so often shift their places, that the illusions of one are not distinguished from the dictates of the other. If fancy presents images not moral or religious, the mind drives them away when they give it pain, but when melancholick notions take the form of duty, they lay hold on the faculties without opposition, because we are afraid to exclude or banish them. For this reason the superstitious are often melancholy, and the melancholy almost always superstitious.' (25)

To this interpretation of Imlac's (which has another complex paragraph to it) the astronomer replies with palpable relief. To use the jargon of modern therapy, the therapist has offered an interpretation at just the point where his client is ready to accept it and make it his own. The astronomer receives it as confirmation of emerging but previously unuttered thoughts in his own mind:

'All this, said the astronomer, I have often thought, but my reason has been so long subjugated by an uncontrollable and overwhelming idea, that it durst not confide in its own decision. I now see how fatally I betrayed my quiet, by suffering chimeras to prey upon me in secret; but melancholy shrinks from communication, and I never found a man before, to whom I could impart my troubles, though I had been certain of relief. I rejoice to find my own sentiments confirmed by yours, who are not easily deceived, and can have no motive or purpose to deceive. I hope that time and variety will dissipate the gloom that has so long surrounded me, and the latter part of my days will be spent in peace.'

So we come to the conclusion in which, though nothing is concluded, courses are set. The young people set themselves idealistic targets, the older ones are

content to drift along, but we all know that they will not achieve their set targets. Should we, in our assessment of Johnson's fiction, go beyond this throwaway ending which in its way is as significant as Voltaire's "Il faut cultiver notre jardin?" (27) I think not, in that Johnson as a fiction-writer has taken us here as far as he can. We have seen the manifold dangers and delusions of society for the unwary innocent: we have seen how those whose ideals are shattered can learn more viable, provisional goals; we have seen that reason itself can be lost and yet refound. We have, in short, the mental and spiritual equipment we need for further and deeper journeying. In this context Johnson is reticent about the ultimate metaphysical and religious aims we might seek. I say "in this context" because in his spiritual writings and elsewhere we see how central these concerns were for Johnson. But for him these matters were necessarily of an intensely private nature and of course beyond the scope of secular fiction as he conceived it: nevertheless, the secular fictions can put us in a position to order our perspectives so as to be open to such further dimensions. True, we may not be minded to follow Johnson into the domain of private spiritual wrestling: in which case he will serve us as one of the most acute, wide-ranging and insightful of guides to the sublunary world recounted in The Rambler, The Idler, and Rasselas.

Notes

1. Charlotte Lennox, The Female Quixote, edited by Margaret Dalziel (London, 1970), p.374.
2. James Boswell, Life of Johnson, edited by G.B.Hill (London, 1934-1950), II, 49.
3. The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, (New Haven, 1969), edited by W.J.Bate and Albrecht B.Shaws, III, 22 [Hereafter returned to as "Yale"].
4. Samuel Johnson, edited by Donald Greene, (Oxford, 1954), p.459.
5. Ibid, p.463.
6. Carey McIntosh, The Choice of Life: Samuel Johnson and the World of Fiction (New Haven, 1973) p.40.
7. Rambler 175: Yale, V, 161.
8. McIntosh, op.cit., p.61.
9. Ibid., p.68.
10. Yale, IV, 80-81.
11. Rambler 101: Yale IV, 177.
12. Yale, V, 72-73.
13. Yale V, 144.
14. Yale II (1963), pp.97-98.
15. Yale II, 145-146.
16. Yale, II, 103.
17. Idler 60: Yale, II, 187-188.
18. Yale II, 189.
19. Idler 61: Yale II, 193.
20. Samuel Johnson, The History of Rasselas Prince of Abissinia, edited by Geoffrey Tillotson and Brian Jenkins (London, 1971), p.8.
21. Rasselas, pp.78-79.
22. Rasselas, p.68.
23. Rasselas, p.108.

24. Rasselas, p.111.
25. Rasselas, p.124.
26. Rasselas, p.125.
27. Voltaire, Candide, edited by J.H. Brumfitt, (London, 1968), p.150.

THE SUCCESS OF JOHNSON'S IRENE

Laura A. Payne BA, MA, MA - 18 March 1989

Chairman: Mrs. A.G. Dowdeswell

In introducing the speaker, the Chairman said we were grateful that her recent indisposition had not prevented her from giving her paper as arranged. Mrs. Payne, a JSL member, had received an MA from Bucknell University, where she wrote on Defoe, and an MA from London University for a thesis on Johnson's Dictionary and his poetic diction. She was now writing a doctoral thesis on Johnson and the tragic and had recently published a review of Dr Grundy's book on Samuel Johnson and the Scale of Greatness. She was also the editor of a book on Toril Moi, the Norwegian Feminist, to be published in the autumn. Her paper is reproduced in full.

I

While discussing London and The Vanity of Human Wishes in his Life of Johnson, Boswell disagrees with Garrick's reflections on the two poems. He chides the actor for a lack of 'just discrimination' since Garrick believed that

When Johnson lived much with the Herveys, and saw a good deal of what was passing in life, he wrote his "London," which is lively and easy. When he became more retired, he gave us his "Vanity of Human Wishes," which is as hard as Greek. Had he gone on to imitate another satire, it would have been as hard as Hebrew. (Life, I. 194).

Boswell regards The Vanity of Human Wishes as poetry of the highest order in any language, evidenced by its pointed examples of failed earthly endeavor and its 'noble conclusion.' However much we may concur with this assessment of Johnson's imitation of the tenth satire of Juvenal, we should not, as Boswell did, dismiss too hastily Garrick's remarks.

Those who read The Vanity of Human Wishes acknowledge its indebtedness to the general theme of Ecclesiastes, that all in this life is vacuous. The wisdom-giver in Ecclesiastes whose name is Koheleth which means 'preacher,' 'teacher,' or 'spokesman in the assembly,' centers his argument for the awareness of the emptiness of human existence on three concerns: inequity, ignorance, and death. (1) Johnson consistently and conscientiously approaches these same concerns throughout his writings: for example, we see in London an extended study of inequity; in The Vanity of Human Wishes an exploration of the ignorance of the meaning of life and death. Boswell, usually so adept at seizing opportunities, misses a perfect one here, to take Garrick's comments and apply

them not only to the poems mentioned by Garrick, but also to what Boswell discusses next in the Life, which is Irene, produced in February 1749, one month after the publication of The Vanity of Human Wishes. We know that work on Irene was begun by Johnson at Edial, and that he had a draft of the play when he arrived in London with Garrick in 1737. Garrick's speculation about a nonexistent satire should not in any way diminish for us the possibility of finding in Johnson's work harsh realities of Hebraic thought. If we pursue what Boswell did not, we will discover in Johnson's little-read, little-appreciated play the hardness of Hebrew; that is, the totality of the tripartite concern of the book of Ecclesiastes.

The entire first act of Irene introduces a central concern of the biblical text, the realization that rewards often go to the oppressors. Demetrius' and Leontius' attempts to rationalize the fall of Greece, Demetrius delineating his country's vices and Leontius bemoaning a lack of omens from the natural world, fail to bring any understanding of the situation to the two young soldiers. Their insistence upon finding a cause for their downfall indicates an inability, at least at this point, to comprehend that the world does not work by tidy causes and effects, and attempts to reason out one's condition are vain.

In Ecclesiastes Koheleth recognizes both the irrationality of some men's superior position to others and the instability of hierarchies. Similarly, in Irene Johnson displays his awareness of the inconsistencies in the attainment and retainment of power by constantly altering our impressions of who's on top and who's not, politically speaking. Demetrius and Leontius, in order to gain power, must not only don the apparel of their oppressors but also must learn to trust one of them, Cali Bassa, who is himself in the precarious position of being a disenchanted 'highest slave,' one near to being toppled by the tyrant's 'arbitrary Pow'r.' Mahomet's authority is itself questioned by Mustapha, who fears his monarch's position will slip as he becomes more entangled with Irene. The supposed weakness Mahomet shows in his enamoured condition is echoed repeatedly in the younger men's dealings with Cali Bassa and his dealings with them. Though wily and knowledgeable in the affairs of state, Cali is scorned by those around him, in large part because of his age, which is seen as a sign of lack of masculinity and power. Cali, though, is always quick to counter any verbal attacks with barbs of his own: as he sees it, the young men are made as foolish and as powerless as women by their affairs of the heart.

The banter of the men regarding masculinity in no way diminishes the gravity and impetus of Johnson's approach to the powerlessness of women. Koheleth (and Cali and Mustapha, too) hold the traditional view that women, especially 'loose' women, cause the downfall of men. In marked contrast, Johnson brings forth the prowess, clearly intellectual, not political or social, of the women in his play. His dramatic delay until the second act to introduce Irene and Aspasia is expertly heightened by the intense scene in which we first meet these two women. In Act I Demetrius, though in love with Aspasia, has wished her dead, rather than see her virtue violated by the Turks; Cali has informed us of Irene's submissiveness and Mustapha has voiced a contemptuous fore-warning of her approaching apostasy. In Act II, scene 1, Aspasia is neither violated nor

dead, and Irene we find fighting for her virtue, her dignity, her self. She is willing, or appears willing, at this point, to be won by Aspasia's words, not Mahomet's wooing, and her struggle of the head over the heart seems real. What immediately sets the two women's views of the possible apart are their resoundingly differing ideas of women's capabilities. Irene has learned and has accepted without question that she is weak, unable to make her own decisions or to stand up for herself. She admires Aspasia's tough-mindedness but she thinks of this attribute as a part of Aspasia's personality, fused with knowledge, not as a quality that she can ever have.

Not all like thee can brave the Shocks of Fate
Thy Soul by Nature great, enlarged by Knowledge,
Soars unencumber'd with our idle Cares,
And all Aspasia but her Beauty's Man. (II.1.34-37)

Even Aspasia sees 'Each generous Sentiment' of hers as a product of her relationship with Demetrius. This attitude of Aspasia's should not be seen, though, in terms of a denial of her own abilities. Rather it should be regarded as evidence of an unegotistical love, not threatened by Demetrius' accomplishments and, more importantly, as firm evidence of her profound understanding of the power that men possess. This comprehension she makes explicit in the eighth scene of the third act when Irene begins to show definite signs of compliance with Mahomet and to imagine the good she will do at her attainment of power. Aspasia, ever-wary that power and benevolence be seen as partners, that 'Intention sanctify the Deed', warns Irene to

Dream not of Pow'r thou never can'st attain:
When social Laws first harmonis'd the World,
Superiour Man possess'd the Charge of Rule,
The Scale of Justice, and the Sword of Pow'r,
Nor left us aught but Flattery and State. (III.viii.69-73)

'The Charge of Rule,' 'the Scale of Justice,' 'the Sword of Power' are all seen by Aspasia as rewards given to the oppressors, the men; and she understands full well that nothing, certainly not women, or one woman, will encourage a man to relinquish, or even share, his superior position.

The tension between the two women increases with the clash of their differing views of ambition. To Aspasia, ambition is hell-like, and she wishes to remain 'Untouch'd' by its 'fierce' 'raging Fires'. Conversely, Irene believes that

Ambition is the Stamp impress'd by Heav'n
To mark the noblest Minds, with active Heat
Inform'd they mount the Precipice of Pow'r,
Grasp at Command, and tow'r in quest of Empire. (III.viii.111-114)

The language here denotes Irene's appropriation of male thought, male terminology, male imagery. She is now as far as possible away from Aspasia's thoughts, Aspasia's virtues, she so wanted to hold on to earlier in the play.

Questions arise in our minds here, though: Has Aspasia made a tactical error in dealing with Irene? Does Irene see in Aspasia what Johnson in his eleventh sermon calls 'harsh strictness and sour virtue'? It appears so, for Irene does refer to Aspasia's 'imperious Air of haughty Virtue' in Act V, scene ii. Does this then mean that the relationship between the two women proves that 'Virtue almost never produces friendship'? (2) Aspasia has all along seemed willing to 'impart [her] knowledge without fearing lest [she] should impair [her] own importance by the improvement of [her] hearer.' (3) What is apparently the difficulty, according to Aspasia, at least, is Irene's hiding in 'Labyrinths of Sound' and shrinking from 'Reason's powerful Voice.'

II

Johnson immediately offers an image at the opening of Irene, that of sounds, which signals a major theme of the play. He has already hinted at this imagery in his Prologue where the intent of his work is made clear: he wishes to spread 'wide [a] mighty Moral for Mankind', since all else would be 'empty sound.' In Leontius' and Demetrius' first comments both speak of the groaning Greeks, despairing of their plight. From this initial image of meaningful sounds come repetitions of sounds, with and without meaning, throughout the rest of the play. Imagined shrieks of violated Greek women, whispered plots of treason, silence in front of possible enemies, submission on the tongue of Irene, the 'empty noise' of Mahomet's court, 'the voice of Love,' 'silent wrath,' 'sighs,' 'intoxicating sounds,' 'the voice of Truth,' all these threaten to overwhelm us as our idea of what is meaningful and what is not is challenged by the text. In a pivotal scene, the seventh of Act IV, Mahomet, on stage alone and fully conscious of Cali's disloyalty and Irene's ambitiousness, ponders whether happiness is nothing but a 'Sound without a Meaning.' From then on meanings of sounds become more confused, from the atfirst unintelligible cry to Demetrius to throw down the poison cup to the 'Sultan's clam'rous Fury' not understood by Irene. Irene's final testing of her possible power, despite her danger, is the threatening of such torture to Caraza, the pain of which 'Language cannot utter.'

The meaningful sounds arise again, in the desperate pleas of Irene to be heard, her wish for 'hooting Infamy', but her meeting instead with 'the Yellings of Damnation.' Mahomet must ask Murza repeatedly about the delayed message from Irene. When finally he grasps the significance of the message, which shows Irene's loyalty to him, he sees coming toward him madness, where meaning does not exist. Without Irene conquest and success become to him 'empty Sounds,' sounds without meaning. yet painstakingly, he is urged to hear a meaningful sound, 'the Voice of Truth,' the truth of Abdalla's treachery.

Images of sounds lend an eefie beauty to those lines from The Mourning Bride, which Johnson so praises in his Life of Congreve:

Almeria.

It was a fancy'd noise; for all is hush'd.

Leonora.

It bore the accent of a human voice.

Almeria.

It was thy fear, or else some transient wind
Whistling thro' hollows of this vaulted isle:
We'll listen --

Leonora.

Hark!

Almeria.

No, all is hush'd, and still as death. -- 'Tis dreadful!
How reverend is the face of this tall pile;
Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads,
To bear aloft its arch'd and ponderous roof,
By its own weight made stedfast and immoveable,
Looking tranquillity! It strikes an awe
And terror on my aching sight; the tombs
And monumental caves of death look cold,
And shoot a chillness to my trembling heart.
Give me thy hand, and let me hear thy voice;
Nay, quickly speak to me, and let me hear
Thy voice -- my own affrights me with its echoes. (II,iii)

We do not know, of course, if Johnson had an early attraction to these lines and used the idea of sounds as he wrote Irene or whether his own implementation of this kind of imagery urged him almost four decades later to choose the Congreve passage as 'the most poetical paragraph' in the 'whole mass of English poetry'. Certainly the lines illustrate Congreve's skillful contrasting of the beauty of the language with the barbarousness of the action to follow, but Congreve does not, as Johnson does, use the image of sounds throughout his play. Johnson's repeated employment of this kind of imagery in his own work suggests far more than an admiration for particular lines in Congreve.

In his twelfth sermon, which illuminates Ecclesiastes 1:14 ('I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit') Johnson reminds us that life's necessities will be given us, though our pride is to be humbled by the one who is greater than we. Our acceptance of a subordinate position comes only after a confession of 'our imbecility'. (4) The definitions of 'imbecility' in Johnson's Dictionary, 'weakness, feebleness of mind or body' and the illustrative quotation from Woodward ('When man was fallen, and had abandoned his primitive innocence, a strange imbecility immediately seized and laid hold of him') together with Johnson's continued use of images of sounds, meaningful and meaningless in

Irene, point directly to Johnson's deep understanding of the words of Koheleth in Ecclesiastes 3:2:

He hath made every thing beautiful in his time:
also he hath set the world in their heart, so
that no man can find out the work that God maketh
from the beginning to the end.

There has been much speculation as to the appropriate definition of 'clam (world) in this biblical verse. It alternatively has been given the meanings 'world', 'eternity', 'ignorance'. (5) Koheleth in Ecclesiastes and Johnson in Sermon 12 urge us to see that God gives much, but not everything. What is withheld is the ultimate understanding of our existence. Just as Koheleth warns that we cannot comprehend all, that our wisdom is at best partial, so too does Johnson indicate in Irene through his imagery of sounds, meaningful and meaningless, our imperfect understanding. (6)

In his recent book, Samuel Johnson: An Analysis, Charles H. Hinnant places Johnson within the Newtonian tradition accepting theories of the void. (7) Johnson rejects on philosophical, religious, and moral grounds the doctrine of the plenum, the idea that the universe is completely full, and adopts instead the view that vacuity must exist along with plenitude, just as evil exists with good. Hinnant believes that this theory of negation, which not only allows for the possibility of the creation of artificial vacuums, but also suggests the unsettling notion of non-being, permeates Johnson's thought process, and his writings give evidence of his acceptance of (and, at times, despair over) the vacuities of life. (8) Hinnant does not make any connection between Johnson's attraction to this idea and the understanding of emptiness and ignorance that he gleans from Ecclesiastes, though commendably, he does see a relationship between Johnson's acceptance of the theory of vacuity and his views on language. (9) We should remind ourselves that Johnson thought words are like the men who use them:

...when they are not gaining strength, they are
generally losing it. Though art may sometimes
prolong their duration, it will rarely give them
perpetuity, and their changes will be almost always
informing us, that language is the work of man, of a
being from whom permanence and stability cannot be
derived. (10)

Johnson, the lexicographer, understands the instability of words; and Johnson, the playwright, captures in his drama their elusiveness, indirectly, by using images of sounds, meaningful and meaningless, and also by confronting shades of meanings of words directly. He seems particularly aware of the changes of meanings of words used orally, depicting the indistinctness of ordinary usage, as two examples from the text attest. When Demetrius tries in vain to persuade Irene to flee with the rest of the Greeks and she resists his entreaties, he grabs her hand, at which point she cries, 'Whence is this Violence?' Violence seems an excessively strong word to use for the mere act of seizing another's

hand. It is not probable that Irene, in the heat of argument, has thought of the secondary meanings of the word: 'outrage,' 'eagerness,' or 'infringement,' as Johnson's third, fourth and fifth Dictionary definitions state. Rather, I believe, she means 'force' or 'attack' or 'assault' (Johnson's first and second definitions.) Indeed, all too soon after this episode Irene is confronted by Hasan, who informs her of Mahomet's command that she die. She thinks of Aspasia and Demetrius now safely fled, and herself again amid 'the rapid Thunderbolts of War/That pour with sudden Violence on Kingdoms.' What she is now embroiled in is far more than a seizing of the hand: her repetition of the word violence underscores her new-found comprehension of the primary meanings of the word.

Recognition of the shades of the meanings of a word for us is deftly facilitated by Johnson as he infuses his text with Ecclesiastes. The submissiveness or 'confession of inferiority' (Johnson's Dictionary) of Irene that brings her ruin must be viewed apart from the acceptance of the existence of the vicissitudes of life. Koheleth urges us to act even though we are continually besieged by self-doubts about our actions and their unknowable consequences. (11) Similarly, Demetrius encourages Aspasia to see the necessity for all to be 'submissive though prepared.' These seemingly contrary notions must be reconciled for life to be lived. It is a lesson that Aspasia must learn, she who has had such questions about ends justifying means. Taken together, submissiveness and preparedness convey the ideas of the acceptance of the reality of partial knowledge and the understanding that one cannot wait to act until one knows all the answers, for that time will never come.

III

The uncertainty of acting with imperfect understanding and the absurdity of the inequities of life, social, political, sexual, are even more grim in the presence of death, that which levels us all. Koheleth questions in desperation the role of the wise man: what is the point of the accumulation of knowledge, imperfect knowledge at that, if the wise man and the fool die the same death? Johnson obviously asks the same desperate question in his play: note that the first to die is the wise man, the Greek Counsellor, Menodorus, and those to follow him in death are the ones who appear to us to have acted foolishly, Cali, Irene, Abdalla.

If all earthly endeavor is vain, if the end result of life for all is death, can there be any meaning in this empty existence? Demetrius certainly believes that life is an 'airy Bubble,' not worth anything unless used for patriotic fervor, virtue and love. Aspasia, in her attempts to turn Irene from apostasy, argues that life is a 'blessing,' that 'Derives its Value from its Use alone,' and that the goal of life is virtue. Like Koheleth, both Demetrius and Aspasia believe that life is something that is given. The idea of life as a gift seems as far away as possible from Irene's thinking until she is faced with death. Only then does she relinquish her schemes of power and wealth and plead for 'A little Life,' exactly the 'dull Obscurity' that she has spoken of so disdainfully to Aspasia.

What Irene has failed to see until too late, as she begs for 'one Hour,' 'a Moment,' is that 'vulgar Time' must always be thought of as Demetrius says, 'a sacred Treasure lent by Heav'n.' That time, that life are given is understood by Irene only as she is led to her death and she pleads

O, hear my Pray'rs! accept, all-pitying Heaven,
These Tears, these Pangs, these last Remains of Life. (V.ix.52-53)

These words are spoken with all the painful desperation of Koheleth, whose only apparent hope in this life comes from the belief that God has already accepted him, approved of him, been pleased with him. 'Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof', says Koheleth; better certainty than uncertainty.

At the end of the play, Johnson allows Aspasia, whose name means 'well-pleasing', to escape with her gift of life. He also has Mustapha voice the same thoughtless cause-and-effect world-view first expounded by Leontius and Demetrius earlier: heaven will reward the just and punish the guilty. We are, however, uncertain of Aspasia's future, and we are left with the hollow sense that Koheleth is right, that death is the only certainty in life: 'Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.'

IV

Johnson's Irene has most often been thought of as a shaky beginning and a definite end to his career as a dramatist. That he wrote no more plays is true, but clearly this one attempt at play-writing cannot be considered peripheral to Johnson's other works. It is apparent that the play's close relationship to Ecclesiastes, a work that interested and perhaps haunted Johnson, helps to set the play firmly along with his other writings already associated with this Old Testament book.

Boswell, though unable or unwilling to elaborate on Garrick's comments on London and The Vanity of Human Wishes, nevertheless agrees with Garrick's assessment that 'Johnson not only had not the faculty of producing the impressions of tragedy, but ... had not the sensibility to perceive them'. (12) Neither Garrick nor Boswell comprehended the very real possibility that Irene embodies a theory of tragedy in tune with Ecclesiastes, echoing Johnson's affirmation of a text that offers no real solutions to the questions of existence. (13)

Having done this preliminary work on Irene, I am intrigued by Boswell's account of Johnson walking out of the room while Irene was being read aloud. Asked later why he had left, his terse reply was, 'Sir, I thought it had been better.' It may not be so very hard for us to accept the uncertainty of our knowledge of exactly what Johnson was referring to in his answer, whether he meant the whole of the play, the language, the characterization. Far more

difficult to accept, though, is the thought that Johnson's words are bleak and desolate words, 'hard as Hebrew' words, expressing the anguish of the wise man who knows he is not wise.

Notes

1. See Wesley J. Fuerst, The Books of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Lamentations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.95, in a discussion of the structure of Ecclesiastes. An interesting and provocative companion to this is the little-known Johnson and Ecclesiastes. A Sermon Preached in Lichfield Cathedral by The Rev.H.C.Beeching, Canon of Westminster (for the bicentenary of Johnson's birth, Sept.18, 1709). (London: Hugh Rees Limited, 1909).
2. Boswell's Life of Johnson: Together with Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales, ed. G.B. Hill, revised edition, L.F. Powell (in six volumes). (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), Vol.IV, pp.530,280.
3. The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Volume XIV, eds. Jean H. Hagstrum and James Gray (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p.121.
4. Yale, Vol.XIV, p.132; see also Yale, Vol.XIV, 32 9n, where the association of the word with nature and natural is discussed.
5. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. The Anchor Bible, Vol.18, trans. and ed. R.B.Y. Scott (Garden City, 1965), p.70.
6. Cf. the motto of Rambler 29 chosen by Johnson a little over a year after the production of Irene:

Prudens futuri temporis exitum
Caliginosa nocte premit deus,
Ridetque si mortalis ultra
Fas trepidet ----

Horace, Odes, III. 29, 29-32,

to which Johnson adds Dryden's translation:

But God has wisely hid from human sight
The dark decrees of future fate,
And sown their seeds in depth of night;
He laughs at all the giddy turns of state,
When mortals search too soon, and fear too late.

Yale, Vol. III, eds. W.J. Bate and Albrecht Strauss (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), pp.157-8.

7. See Charles H. Hinnant, Samuel Johnson: An Analysis (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1988), pp. vii, viii.

8. Cf. Ariele Sachs, Passionate Intelligence: Imagination and Reason in the Work of Samuel Johnson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), Chap.1, pp.3-19, entitled 'The Vacuity of Life'. There is, however, an unfortunate sentence on p.11, 'Au fond, "vacuity of life" simply means a severe form of personal boredom'. This surely is an oversimplification of Sachs's own compelling argument. What both Sachs and Hinnant offer is the idea of vacuity as a potent threat with which Johnson wrestles on religious, philosophical and moral grounds.

9. Hinnant, CHap.5, pp.66-83.

10. Samuel Johnson, The Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language; Addressed to the Right Honourable Philip Dormer, Earl of Chesterfield; One of His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State (London: Printed for J. and P. Knapton, T. Longman and T. Shewell, C. Hitch, A. Millar, and R. Dodsley, 1747), p.18.

11. Fuerst, in his discussion of Ecclesiastes 7-11, 'Wisdom and folly compared', pp.128-148.

12. Life, Vol. I, pp.198-9. This opinion persists to the very present; see G.F. Parker, Johnson's Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.178: 'When it comes to what is tragic in Shakespeare, Johnson, that is to say, is out of his depth, and knows it'.

13. See The Letters of David Garrick, Vol. II, ed. David M. Little and George M. Kahrl (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p.788 (letter No.677) written to James Boswell on 2 March 1772:

...Speeches & mere poetry will no more make a Play, than planks & timbers in y^e dock-yard can be call'd a Ship -- It is Fable, passion & Action which constitute a Tragedy, & without them, we might as well exhibit one of Tillotsons Sermons....

Thus, over two decades after the production of Irene, Garrick is still opposed to tragedy where 'declamation roars and passion sleeps'. See also Garrick's comments on a tragedy by Reynolds' nephew (printed after a letter from Reynolds to Garrick dated 2 August 1774) in which Garrick criticizes Euphron's soliloquy in the fourth act as 'much too long and philosophical'. The Private Correspondence of David Garrick with the Most Celebrated Persons of his Time, Now First Published from the originals, and Illustrated with Notes, and A New Biographical Memoir of Garrick. Second edition, in two volumes. (London: published for Henry Colburn by R. Bentley, 1835), Vol. I, p.646.

DR JOHNSON AND THE THEATRE

Dr James Gray, Thomas McCullagh Professor Emeritus

Dalhousie University - 15th April 1989

Chairman: Major-General M H P Sayers OBE

The Chairman introduced Dr James Gray as Thomas McCullagh Professor of English Literature Emeritus of the University of Dalhousie, Nova Scotia. Born in Scotland, he had been educated at the universities of Aberdeen, Oxford and Montreal. A former English Department Chairman and Dean of Arts and Sciences he had taught and examined in a number of universities, including Oxford, Toronto and Dalhousie. His writings covered a wide range of literary topics, concentrating latterly on the 18th century, and especially on Dr Johnson and his circle. He was a member of the Yale Edition Editorial Board, and was joint Editor of the volume containing Johnson's sermons, now reprinted. Members would remember his excellent paper on Johnson at Oxford given to the Society in 1988, and published in The New Rambler. Volume D III. Today's paper is reproduced, at the speaker's request, in a summary provided by himself.

Boswell, deliberately or not, created an impression that Johnson was not, in any real sense, a man of the theatre. This paper argues that this is a misleading perception, which has been endorsed too often in later biographies and critical studies of Johnson. From the start of his professional career as a writer he was quite deeply involved in the theatre and his much-publicized criticism of the acting fraternity and sorority was much more technical than has been admitted. It is not true, for instance, that he failed to appreciate acting talent, or that he only grudgingly applauded the achievements of David Garrick and Sarah Siddons in enhancing the worth and the dignity of their profession. It is especially important to note that many of his oft-quoted cavils about actors and acting were voiced and endorsed by members of the profession themselves.

A study of Johnson's personal history reveals an early interest in theatre, in spite of the very limited opportunities he had to indulge it, at a time when professional performances were proscribed in schools and universities. Though the theatre world was still under the puritanical shadow of Jeremy Collier and the political frown of the Walpole administration, Johnson did manage, with the help of his worldly parson cousin, Cornelius Ford, to snatch an occasional glimpse of it through the theatre of the fairs, and, with the encouragement of his Lichfield patron, Gilbert Walmesley, to think in terms of becoming a playwright. It was under the friendly aegis of Walmesley, too, that ten-year-old David Garrick and seventeen-year-old Samuel Johnson collaborated, after a fashion, in amateur theatricals in the Bishop's Palace at Lichfield.

Later, when Johnson went down prematurely from Oxford and did some sporadic journalistic writing for Thomas Warren and the Birmingham Journal, he evidently became acquainted with some of the theatre personalities in the travelling companies, and even fell in love with one of the actresses. Nor was his marriage, at twenty-five, to "Tetty" Porter, without its theatrical overtones, in more ways than one. They read plays together, and Johnson thought she had a

better talent for comedy than for tragedy. Though the school they set up together at Edial Mount did not include modern drama in its curriculum, Johnson's star pupil, David Garrick, spent a good deal of his time working on scenes for a comedy he was writing, while his master produced the first draft of his tragedy, Irene. Following the failure of the Edial experiment, the two went off to London together, but thereafter their paths diverged somewhat. Nevertheless, they collaborated on a number of theatrical projects, including a performance of Macbeth in the 1743-4 season, the 1747 Drury Lane Prologue, and the staging of Johnson's play, now called Mahomet and Irene.

Meanwhile, Johnson's experience as a reporter for Edward Cave's Gentleman's Magazine was not entirely unrelated to theatre. By partly reconstructing and partly imagining parliamentary speeches, he was able to dramatise the rhetoric of leading political personalities of the day. Whether he also wrote reviews of theatre performances for that periodical is debatable, though several contemporary scholars, including Donald Greene and Arthur Sherbo, and more recently, Katherine H. Adams (in Fresh Reflections on Samuel Johnson, ed. Prem Nath, New York, 1987, pp.183-200), have endorsed this hypothesis. There is no doubt whatsoever that Johnson maintained his contacts with live theatre, through his friendship with Richard Savage as well as his continuing relationship with Garrick, even if their co-operation was fitful at times.

It would be true to say, then, that in the period following the production of Mahomet and Irene Johnson was one of those patrons of the theatre who, from his front box at Drury Lane, helped to fashion the drama's laws. He expressed some frank and quite detailed opinions of acting performances, frequently recited passages from plays both contemporary and classical, assisted, after a fashion, at some rehearsals of note, and actively supported such playwrights as Dodsley, Goldsmith, and Sheridan.

Finally, Johnson's written critiques of plays in his Lives of the Poets and elsewhere clearly establish him as an authority on both the theory and the practice of drama criticism. While he did indeed have some serious misgivings about the stage and its practitioners, he saw their faults from the perspective of an insider, and not, as Boswell and many of his successors have implied, from the lofty perch of an academic moralist.

IMAGINATIVE LICENTIOUSNESS: JOHNSON ON SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

Dr Michael Payne, John P. Crozier Professor of English

Bucknell University - 20th May 1989

Chairman: Dr I. M. Grundy

The Chairman introduced the speaker as a member of the Society. He had published articles and books on Shakespeare and on literary theory as well as on Blake, Virginia Woolf, the Bible and other subjects. His book on the American philosopher Stanley Cavell had just been released. His paper today is reproduced in full.

'Imagination, a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations, and impatient of restraint, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the inclosures of regularity'. (Rambler 125)

How one writer responds to another is of interest not least because of the ways the predecessor illuminates his critic. This is particularly true of readings of Shakespeare, because of Shakespeare's own repeated insistence that his is a reflective art in which the beholder sees his own face. As Theseus and Hippolyta watch the play of *Pyramus and Thisby*, Theseus observes that the performance must be amended by imagination, to which Hippolyta adds, 'It must be your imagination then, and not theirs' (V.i.212). The Prologue to *Henry V* confesses he lacks 'a Muse of fire' and all else that would make him equal to his great subject. Instead, all he and his fellow players can offer is 'a crooked figure'; and since they are performing within a 'wooden O', they can claim to be only 'ciphers' for the epic events of history, unless their performances can work upon the 'imaginary forces' of the audience:

For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
Turning th' accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass; for the which supply... (Irene: Prologue
28-31)

In the Sonnets the poet argues that his only hope for immortality lies in the participatory imagination of generations of readers. Not only is 'perspective...best painter's art' (24) and does the eye gild 'the object whereupon it gazeth' (20), but also the power of the poet's 'eternal lines' to give immortal life to his subject is active only 'So long as men can breathe or eyes can see' (18).

Johnson appears to have had little regard for the Sonnets, and in his annotations in his edition of Shakespeare he passes in silence over the passages just quoted. Johnson does keep returning, however, especially in his Preface to Shakespeare to Hamlet's address to the Players, through which Shakespeare seems to insist most strongly that drama has always existed to reflect the moral, temperamental, and historical features of audiences. The purpose of playing, Hamlet says, 'both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure' (III,ii.21ff). True Shakespearean that he is, Johnson is not content passively to accept Hamlet's (or Shakespeare's) word. Instead, he so thoroughly engages his imagination with this passage, selecting from it and adding his own emphasis, that he transforms it into nothing less than his own Shakespearean myth. At first Johnson simply turns Hamlet's words back on Shakespeare without explicitly referring to Hamlet or the Players at all: 'Shakespeare', Johnson writes, 'is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life'. (1) But as he expands on this idea, Johnson develops both a critical argument and an elaborate network of

metaphors that I will call his Shakespeare myth. The tensions between the argument and the myth are appropriately as revealing of Johnson as they are of Shakespeare.

There is little reason to doubt that in the original of Johnson's submerged quotation, when Hamlet uses the word nature, he means human nature; thus, the personifications: 'virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure'. When we look into the tragic mirror, we see a human face that is in some sense our own with its morality, temperament, and historical situation accentuated. Editors of Johnson have usually assumed when he calls Shakespeare 'the poet of nature' that he also means simply human nature. Johnson's definition of nature in his Dictionary does not, however, provide much support for this assumption. There he lists twelve definitions, only three of which imply human nature. He concludes his entry for this word by saying that it is a word used so frequently with significations so various and definitions so difficult to determine that Boyle's study of the term is worth 'epitomizing'. In his Free Enquiry into the Received Notion of Nature, Boyle lists eight distinct uses of the word, which Johnson carefully summarizes; all of them refer either directly or indirectly to the material or corporeal world. Similarly, Johnson's illustrative quotations, several taken from King Lear, speak unambiguously of the physical world, beginning with Edmund's radical biologism: 'Thou, nature, art my goddess'. Turning from the Dictionary of 1755 to the Preface of 1765, we should not be surprised to find Johnson praising Shakespeare as 'an exact surveyor of the inanimate world' (36). Whereas later poets only partly copy from nature, impressed as they are by the authority of books, Shakespeare (according to Johnson) 'shews plainly that he has seen with his own eyes; he gives the image which he receives, not weakened or distorted by the intervention of any other mind' (37).

This sense of Shakespeare as a poet of the inanimate, non-bookish world is fundamental to Johnson's Shakespeare myth. Like all myths, Johnson's is a story embodying a network of images that convey a value system and express desire or longing mixed with dread. Shakespeare, Johnson argues, has become an ancient. Although he may be for that reason dismissed - either by those who are unable to add to truth or by those whose only hope for praise and fame lies in the future - he may also be venerated simply out of a 'credulous confidence in the superior wisdom of past ages' (9). It is Shakespeare's antiquity, as well as his careless treatment of his own texts, that justifies producing a modern edition of his works. But Johnson's is a larger claim than that the plays require the benefits of scholarship to enable modern readers to understand them adequately. More than any other writer Shakespeare, in Johnson's view, is in touch with the undisplaced, elemental stuff of life itself. Not only is he a poet of nature and his perceptions therefore undistorted by other minds; it would also seem that he is the most ancient of all writers (except, perhaps, Homer).

Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and

innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend; in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolic of another; and many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design.

Out of this chaos of mingled purposes and casualties the ancient poets, according to the laws which custom had prescribed, selected some the crimes of men, and some their absurdities.... Thus rose the two modes of imitation, known by the names of tragedy and comedy... (14).

Johnson does not, of course, say here that Shakespeare comes chronologically before Sophocles and Aristophanes; rather, he implies Shakespeare's imaginative priority as a kind of pregeneric fecundity. This suggestion that Shakespeare was present before there was literary creation as we now know it enables Johnson to excuse Shakespeare's violation of critical rules. Along with his atavistic naturalism goes his intrinsic freedom. That his practice of mixing tragedy and comedy 'is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism will be readily allowed', Johnson admits; 'but there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature' (15).

Already in Johnson's myth questions of law and of history arise. As though he were bringing Shakespeare before the bar of criticism, Johnson levels a series of potentially damaging accusations: Shakespeare 'makes no just distribution of good and evil, nor is always careful to shew in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong'; his plots are as loose as his morality, suggesting that he does not fully 'comprehend his own design'; he is careless with endings and resorts to anachronisms 'without scruple'; he allows his characters 'contests of sarcasm' and gross pleasantries; his tragedies, with their 'effusions of passion' are much inferior to his comedies; his narrations and set speeches are wordy and weak; he allows himself to become entangled in 'unweildy' sentiments 'which he cannot well express'; his language is not always appropriate to his thought; he mixes emotions too quickly; and he cannot resist the seduction of puns (19-22). In a word, Shakespeare is licentious. But like that other keyword, nature, licentious has curiously ambivalent meanings and applications. In his Dictionary, Johnson associates the word with sexual license and natural power. To illustrate his first definition - 'unrestrained by law or morality' - Johnson quotes passages on 'licentious lust' from the Faerie Queene and from The Comedy of Errors; and to illustrate his second definition - 'presumptuous; unconfined' - he quotes a passage from Roscommon on 'licentious waves' flooding a field. In his Proposals of 1756 and in his Preface written nine years later, Johnson uses the word to describe Shakespeare's language (5,20), but he appears equally concerned with the possibility of his own licentious critical and editorial practice. This anxiety may have arisen from Johnson's reading Upton's Critical Observations on Shakespeare (1746), where rules of English grammar are derived from Shakespeare's works. Once these rules are known, Upton claims, readers and editors will be less likely to indulge 'the licentious spirit of criticism' (38). After referring explicitly to this passage (48), Johnson insists that in

proposing textual emendations in the notes to his edition, he has not 'licentiously indulged' in conjecture (53) but rather has 'confined' his 'imagination to the margin' (55). On the one hand, there is Shakespeare, poet of nature, spontaneous in perception, in tune with the undifferentiated *prima materia* of life, free and licentious; on the other hand, there are the laws of criticism, books that dull the senses; the selected abstractions of pure genres, and the rules of grammar and decorum.

Johnson does not simply ally himself with the rational laws of criticism against the imaginative powers of poetry. That he does not do so is particularly clear in his exuberant display of his own image-making powers in his final accusation against Shakespeare, which ends up hardly an accusation at all. The accuser is equally guilty of the licentious free-play of linguistic imagination:

A quibble is to Shakespeare, what luminous vapours
are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures,
it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him
in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and
its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity
or profundity of his disquisition, whether he be enlarging
knowledge or exalting affection, whether he be amusing
attention with incidents, or enchainning it in suspense, let
but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work
unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will
always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation.
A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight,
that he was content to purchase it, by the sacrifice of
reason, propriety and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal
Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose
it. (21-22)

When he turns to writing his notes for Antony and Cleopatra, which is one of the plays that seems to have preoccupied him throughout the writing of the Preface, Johnson continues to associate linguistic excess with Cleopatra; indeed, Johnson's imagination almost becomes licentious, which for him would mean leaving the margin and entering Shakespeare's text. In a note to IV.xii, when Antony calls Cleopatra 'Triple-turn'd whore!' Johnson writes:

Shall I mention what has dropped into my imagination, that
our authour might perhaps have written 'triple-tongued'? 'Double-
tongued' is a common term of reproach, which usage might improve
to 'triple-tongued.'

Shakespeare continually emphasizes Cleopatra's identification with the flooding Nile and with all forms of experience that over-flow measure. Her imaginative identification with an audience's point of view is so full that she chooses death in defiance of a boy actor's impersonation of her greatness. She embodies Johnson's two senses of licentiousness: unrestrained lust and unbounded natural power.

If we were to judge only from his notes to the play, we would have ample reason to believe that Johnson had little regard for Antony and Cleopatra; for he judges its language obscene, its jests low, its scenes of pathos ridiculous, its conceits far-fetched, and its characters not carefully discriminated. Nevertheless, the play had such a powerful hold on Johnson's imagination that it made him reassess his understanding of the principles of drama. The twenty-seven scene changes of Acts III and IV create the illusion of events occurring simultaneously in different places, as well as occurring in temporal succession. Johnson surprisingly defends Shakespeare against the charge of 'violation of those laws which have been instituted and established by the joint authority of poets and of critics' (22). Based on his own experience as a spectator of plays, Johnson rejects the unities of time and place. He sides with the beauty of variety (27) over the obedience to critical rules. That he cannot resist the Serpent of Old Nile in her 'infinite variety' seems almost to surprise Johnson himself. He confesses that he is 'frightened at my own temerity' and almost 'ready to sink down in reverential silence' (28) before the authorities who support the unities, but he does not. Again, his imagination goes out to Shakespeare in violation of reason, authority, and law. (Although Johnson wrote Irene according to the principles of regular drama, he begins to reject what he calls 'mechanical criticism' in support of the unities as early as 1751 in Rambler No. 156. Like Johnson, Lord Kames seems to have had the central acts of Antony and Cleopatra in mind when he wrote his influential argument against the unities in his Elements of Criticism of 1762. (II)

In the last five years several Marxist critics have written sometimes brilliant and sometimes outrageous critiques of Shakespeare studies in order to show that from Johnson to F.R. Leavis, Shakespeare has been appropriated to support bourgeois liberal humanism. (III) There is no doubt that Shakespeare, like the Bible, can be quoted to anyone's purpose, but it is rare indeed for critics to follow lines of thought in Shakespeare against their own ideological grain. Johnson does precisely this, putting in jeopardy his own commitments to critical judgment, the accumulated authority of books, and his skepticism about the progress of history. Despite his professed confidence in the progress of Shakespearean textual criticism, Johnson looks back to Dryden for conservative inspiration. Dryden, like the late eighteenth-century painter Fuseli, contemplated the greatness of the past with a sense of despair for the present:

Our Age was cultivated thus at length,
But what we gain'd in Skill we lost in Strength.
Our Builders were with Want of Genius curst;
The second Temple was not like the first.

The 'burden of the past', as Walter Jackson Bate calls it, fell like a debilitating weight, producing what Dryden says is a 'secret shame' in the poet who even thinks of Shakespeare's name. Shakespeare was of the age of Giants before the Flood; Dryden and Johnson think of theirs as an age of lesser men.

At the end of his Preface Johnson turns to Dryden, who has inspired his Shakespeare myth all along. Dryden, Johnson reminds us, wrote that 'the images of nature were still present' to Shakespeare; when he 'describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too'; he 'was naturally learned: he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature' (59). Johnson ends his quotation with the Latin verse from Virgil's First Eclogue concerning 'the cypresses among the bending osiers'. Much earlier in the Preface Johnson draws from this Virgilian quotation to complete his myth and to identify his own age. He is comparing Addison's Cato to Othello when he dismisses poets such as Addison who cultivate 'a garden accurately formed'. In contrast, Shakespeare 'is a forest in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air' (31). Johnson makes his English substitutions for Virgil's Italian cypresses. There may be weeds and brambles in Shakespeare's woods and meaner minerals among the diamonds in his mines; but the sublime, the delicate, and the beautiful are all there too. The biblical text that supplies first Dryden and then Johnson with their images of literary history locates the Giants, with whom Dryden associates Shakespeare, before the Flood and identifies imagination with the origin of evil that makes the deluge necessary. Shakespeare is a pre-historical Giant who allows Johnson not only his progressive Whig and conservative Tory historiography, (IV) but also his simultaneous celebration and distrust of the imagination. Throughout the Preface Johnson's visions of history continually cross each other. Shakespeare is the earliest poet in that he is closest to the origins of life, but he is also the product of a barbarous age by which his rudeness and occasional obscenity can be excused. Johnson ends his Preface by speculating that it was Shakespeare's 'superiority of mind' (59) that led him to be so careless of his 'own performances' as to give little attention to the preservation of his texts. Here Johnson imagines Shakespeare's comparing his creative 'powers' with what he actually produced, suggesting that the texts we have are merely gross displacements of original performances within Shakespeare's mind. After Shakespeare, the smaller men of lesser times compete with each other for fame as they work to restore and explain what Shakespeare has already transcended. When he at last places himself within the mythic vision he has created, Johnson allows the tragic potential in his story to win out. He admits that he is one of those 'candidates of inferiour fame' whose belatedness condemns him to wish for powers that he fears he lacks. Johnson thinks of himself, in comparison with Shakespeare, as a belated poet who must confine his imagination to the margin and, in comparison with Dryden, as a belated critic. In his Life of Dryden (1779) Johnson singles out Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare for special admiration: 'In a few lines is exhibited a character, so extensive in its comprehension, and so curious in its limitations, that nothing can be added, diminished, or reformed; nor can the editors and admirers of Shakespeare, in all their emulation of reverence, boast of much more than of having diffused and paraphrased this epitome of excellence, of having changed Dryden's gold for baser metal, of lower value though of greater bulk'.

Little if any of Dryden's influence as an encomiastic critic is manifest, however, in Johnson's Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth, which appeared twenty years before the Preface as a specimen of the edition to follow; nor are Johnson's imaginative engagements with Shakespeare's text and his dramatic sense of the effect of stage action on the audience distinguishing

features of this early exercise in his Shakespeare criticism. Although Johnson displays his astonishing command of the vast literature on witchcraft and enchantment, he continually resorts to the unfortunate expedient of altering the text when his powers of interpretation fail him. Several of his notes, especially on Macbeth's soliloquies, have never been surpassed. But when Johnson edited his own Observations to supply the notes on Macbeth for his edition, he suppresses much of his earlier work and argues with a great deal that he lets stand. Indeed, the notes on Macbeth display all of the worst features of editorial practice that Johnson enumerates in the Preface:

Particular passages are cleared by notes, but the general effect of the work is weakened. The mind is refrigerated by interruption; the thoughts are diverted from the principal subject; the reader is weary, he suspects not why; and at last throws away the book, which he has too diligently studied. (58)

For the stage direction to the opening scene of Macbeth, Johnson supplies a learned history of witchcraft, since a play depending on enchantment would lead to the dismissal of the work and the poet's banishment 'to the nursery...to write fairy tales instead of tragedies' (255) unless the reader were instructed in placing such a work in the context of the poet's contemporaries. Shakespeare's demonology is a manifestation of 'the darkness of ignorance' of his times, the imported effects of 'eastern expeditions', and the witchcraft laws enacted during the first year of James I's reign in response to his Daemonologie. 'This law was repealed in our own time', Johnson remarks proudly. In the notes that follow, Johnson attempts to mediate between Warburton and the editors who preceded him, but in most cases Johnson is too eager to emend the text and to override earlier editors' judgments, allowing his progressive sense of textual history to dominate. For example, in Macbeth's dagger soliloquy in Act II, Johnson rejects Pope's, Theobald's, and Warburton's understanding of Macbeth's descent into homicidal, rapacious bestiality:

...wither'd Murther
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, tow'rds his design
Moves like a ghost. (II.i.52-6)

In refusing to accept the verb 'strides' Johnson would read 'sides' - he not only elevates Macbeth but also keeps him from a powerful dramatic enactment of the imagery. It has become traditional for actors to adopt a stealthy pace and ravishing strides, moving first like a wolf and then like a ghost, as they speak these lines. In his notes as they were written for the Observations of 1745, Johnson fully identifies with what might be called Macbeth's moral conflicts and provides a superb paraphrase of 'If it were done, when 'tis done...'; but he is unwilling to think that it is Macbeth's imagination that is tainted with blood, even before he kills the King. Macbeth has carried out murders 'yet...fantastical' (I.iii.139) in his imagination apparently long before he takes Duncan's life.

There is a curious but fascinating tradition of Shakespearean criticism within brackets. A.C. Bradley, for example, advances his views of Hamlet's melancholia in two famous lectures in Shakespearean Tragedy and then undercuts them in a bold and candid bracketed sentence. Johnson seems to have begun this bracketing tradition in his notes on Macbeth. Although he lets stand his arguments from Observations for altering the text in Acts II and III, Johnson inserts bracketed arguments against his own earlier views (267, 268). In 1745 Johnson was ready to deny Macbeth's self-reflexive readiness 'to explain his own allusions to himself' (268). This is consistent with Johnson's note on 'strides' in that it reduces the multi-dimensionality of Macbeth's personality. But in response to his own temptation to alter the text when Macbeth speaks of his fears of Banquo -

There is none but he,
Whose being I do fear: and, under him,
My genius is rebuk'd; as, it is said,
Anthony's was by Caesar. (III.1.53) -

Johnson produces his own self-reflexive, multi-dimensional critical text. This dialogic character of Johnson's imagination is consistent with Fredric Bogel's perceptive study of Johnson and the role of authority. Bogel claims that 'for Johnson the assumption of authority was both necessary and necessarily guilt-ridden, and that he sought ways to assume and disclaim that authority in a single gesture'; he goes on to show that for Johnson authority is 'a matter not of personal unity and universal authoritativeness but of energies intrinsically divided by internal conflict and self-questioning'. (V) Although Johnson reprints his earlier authoritative judgment against self-division in Macbeth, he adds in brackets the comment beginning, 'This note was written before I was fully acquainted with Shakespeare's manner, and I do not now think it is of much weight...' (268). Rather than delete it, as he did with so many of his other early observations on Macbeth, Johnson prefers to have us overhear him arguing with himself.

Johnson's notes on King Lear are free of earlier published views of that play. In most of his notes Johnson echoes the major themes of the Preface: Shakespeare's language is 'licentious' (236); and Lear's behaviour reflects the vulgarity, 'barbarity', and 'ignorance of the age' (238). Johnson is, however, silent in his notes concerning those passages on nature that he uses as illustrative quotations in the Dictionary. In the Preface Johnson says that when he studies the emendations of other editors, a caution, like that of a morality play, was 'forced' upon him: 'I encountered in every page Wit struggling with its own sophistry, and Learning confused by the multiplicity of its views' (56). Johnson enacts this mini-drama himself in his attempts to justify the now notorious Tate version of Cordelia's retiring 'with victory and felicity' (240). In Tate's elaborate defense against Shakespearean tragedy, King Lear becomes a love story of Edgar and Cordelia. Since they never meet in either the 1608 or 1623 versions of the play, Edgar and Cordelia require much more text than Shakespeare provides. Most of Tate's additions lead up to the final rescue of Cordelia and her reunion with Edgar:

Cord: My Edgar, Oh!

Edg: My Dear Cordelia! Lucky was the Minute

Of our Approach, the Gods have weigh'd our

Suff'rings;

W' are past the Fire, and now must shine to Ages.

Johnson knows that these lines are not Shakespeare's, however shocking and unendurable the genuine ones are for him. Perhaps here more than anywhere else in his edition we might wish that Johnson had not confined his imaginative empathy to the margins. Although Garrick pared down the Tate version, the happy ending of King Lear survived until 1823.

When Johnson's Shakespeare appeared, it failed to measure up to the expectations Johnson had created with his Proposals and Observations. Although James Barclay, a young Oxford student, came to Johnson's defense, even he was forced to admit that

Upon the publication of Mr. Johnson's Shakespeare, the expectations of the generality...were greatly disappointed: They had been induced to expect from his avowed learning and ingenuity, a compleat commentary upon the works of their immortal bard; but through the concurring circumstances of inattention in the Editor, and sanguine expectation in the reader, the performance, I am afraid, has incurred the public censure. (VI)

Despite the vicious attacks of William Kenrick, Johnson's edition sold well, earning him an estimated £1,312.10s(VII) Far more damaging than the responses of his contemporaries were the judgments of the Romantics. Schlegel sees in Johnson's criticism merely the continuation of misunderstandings of Shakespeare's 'depth of purpose'; Coleridge dismisses Johnson as a 'dogmatic Critic and soporific Irenist'; and Hazlitt laments that 'Shakespear's bold and happy flights of imagination were equally thrown away upon our author'. (VIII) In these unperceptive attacks can be seen the emergence of the Romantic myth of Dr. Johnson as unimaginative, authoritarian, oppressor of poets. In the flourishing of this unfortunate myth, a clearer perception of Johnson was lost. In 1786 Robert Burrowes read two splendid papers on Johnson's style to the Royal Irish Academy. Burrowes observed that

Johnson's licentious constructions...are not to be conceived as flowing entirely from his passion for substantives. His endeavours to attain magnificence, by removing his stile from the vulgarity, removed it also from the simplicity of common diction, and taught him the abundant use of inversions and licentious constructions of every sort.Metaphorical expression is one of those arts of splendor which Johnson has most frequently employed; and while he has availed himself of all its advantages, he has escaped most of its concomitant faults. (IX)

Johnson's imaginative licentiousness is brilliantly manifest in his criticism of Shakespeare. When Johnson sees that aspect of himself reflected back to him when he looks into Shakespearean tragedy, he neither averts his eyes nor hides from his own readers what he has discovered of himself. (X)

Notes

I Selections from Johnson on Shakespeare. Ed. Bertrand H. Bronson and Jean M. O'Meara. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p.10. All references to Johnson's Shakespeare are taken from this edition.

II Cf. David Nichol Smith. Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), pp.71-75.

III See especially the fine essay by Christopher Norris, to which I am much indebted: 'Post-structuralist Shakespeare: text and ideology'. In Deconstruction and the Interests in Theory. (London: Pinter, 1988), pp.109-125.

IV Cf. Donald J. Greene's Introduction to Samuel Johnson Political Writings. The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Vol.X. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), esp. pp.xiii-xx.

V 'Johnson and the Role of Authority'. In The New 18th Century Ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown. (London: Methuen, 1987), p.205.

VI Johnson: The Critical Heritage Ed. James T. Boulton. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp.189-190.

VII Ibid., p.12.

VIII Ibid., pp.196,27,201.

IX Ibid., p.337.

X Recent studies of Johnson's Shakespeare criticism continue to ignore Johnson's imaginative response to the tragedies and the imaginative basis of his commentary. See, for example, G.F. Parker's Johnson's Shakespeare (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989), esp. Ch.4: 'Johnson on Tragedy'.

THE WREATH LAYING

The wreath laying took place in Westminster Abbey on 10 December 1988. The short service in Poets' Corner was conducted by Canon Sebastian Charles, Canon in Residence, and the wreath was laid by The Rt. Honble. The Earl of Shelburne. Lord Shelburne is a descendant of Admiral Lord Keith whom Queeney Thrale had married, as his second wife. His house Bowood, at Calne, contains the cabinet which Johnson gave to Queeney, and other memorabilia.

The following is the text of his address.

"We are gathered together as an act of remembrance to acknowledge and thank God for the boundless legacy which Dr. Johnson has bequeathed us and which has enriched successive generations for the past 204 years.

Amongst the Johnson manuscripts at Bowood there is a letter which he wrote to Queeney Thrale four months before his death. The message is clear and the advice truly sound. May I read it to you?

"Dear Madam,

Your last letter was received by me at this place, and being so remote from the other guardians that I could not consult them, I knew not what answer to make. I take it very kindly that you have written again, for I would not have you forget me, nor imagine that I forget you. Our kindness will last, I hope, longer than our lives. Whatever advice I can give you you may always require; for I love you, I loved your father, and I loved your mother as long as I could.

At present, I have nothing to impress but these two maxims, which I trust you never will dismiss from your mind.

In every purpose, and every action, let it be your first care to please God, that awful and just God before whom you must at last appear, and by whose sentence all Eternity will be determined. Think frequently on that state which shall never have an end.

In matters of human judgement, and prudential consideration, consider the publick voice of general opinion as always worthy of great attention; remember that such practices can very seldom be right, which all the world has concluded to be wrong.

Obey God.

Reverence Fame.

Thus you will go safely through this life, and pass happily to the next."

She did; marrying my ancestor Lord Keith in her 45th year, dying at the age of 89 in 1858 having lived a full and complete life."

Lord Shelburne concluded with an expression of his good wishes to the Society, and its members, in this Diamond Jubilee year.

THE DIAMOND JUBILEE LUNCHEON

Following the service in the Abbey members and guests made their way to the Vitello d'Oro Restaurant in Church House for the Diamond Jubilee Luncheon. The President, Dr Edward Carpenter, convalescent in hospital after an operation, was unfortunately not able to be present, but the Society was pleased to welcome Mrs. Carpenter. The Loyal Toast was proposed by the Chairman Mr. John Comyn, and the Immortal Memory of Samuel Johnson, proposed by Canon Winnett, was drunk by tradition in silence.

Dr. Carpenter was to have given an informal talk, based on notes, provided by the Honorary Secretary, on the history of the Society in the ten years since its Golden Jubilee. In his absence the talk was given by Mr. Comyn, and the notes are incorporated in that address, reproduced here.

"Ladies and Gentlemen: When I heard that it would fall to me to rehearse the Society's progress from Golden to Diamond Jubilee, my immediate reaction was to echo G. M. Trevelyan's quatrain - and I was interested that Canon Charles quoted G. M. Trevelyan in the Abbey this morning in quite a different context. What I remembered was:

"I dreamt last night that Shakespeare's ghost
Sat for a Civil Service Post.
The subject chosen for the year
Was taken from the play "King Lear" -
And Shakespeare did it very badly
Because he had not read his Bradley." -

because I would have no Bradley to guide me - but not a bit of it: our incomparable Honorary Secretary had prepared a synopsis of those ten years. On 5th October 1978 the Society celebrated its Golden Jubilee with a dinner, presided over by Dr. Carpenter, at the Ivanhoe Hotel; this was attended by 43 persons and a short history of the Society's 50 years was given. Today we look back at what has happened in the last ten years.

There has been no change of venue for meetings - we continue to enjoy the hospitality of the Rector and Churchwardens of S. Edmund the King, Lombard Street.

Six months before that dinner we sadly lost one of our Vice-Presidents, Professor James Clifford, but since then we have been fortunate to welcome among their number five other distinguished scholars: Professor W.J. Bate, Lady Eccles, Dr. J.D. Fleeman, Miss Mary Lascelles and Professor James Misenheimer. There has been one other great change: Jim Leicester, who for twenty years produced so many admirable issues of The New Rambler with the devoted assistance of Norah Leicester (and sometimes of the young Leicesters), and for twenty-five years resourcefully husbanded the finances of the Society, retired from these posts in 1985. We are grateful for all the work he did and we hope that, freed from these responsibilities, he will have more time to enjoy his music and other interests. His good work is now being carried on by Tom Davis as Treasurer and Membership Secretary, and by David Parker as Editor of The New Rambler. We wish them both continued success.

During the last ten years, summer outings have been made to Bromley, where Tetty Johnson is buried, to Wesley's Chapel, Home and Museum, to Scott's Grotto at Ware, which Johnson called "a fairy palace", to Westminster Abbey, to Bath - full of reminders of English history and literature, to Johnson's Streatham, to Lichfield and to the Theatre Museum in Covent Garden. One year some members joined in the Lichfield Society's Pilgrimage to Oxford.

No summer visit was made as such in 1984, since this was the year when the Bicentenary of Johnson's death was commemorated, and the Society participated in events arranged by other organisations as well as establishing its own programme.

In February several members attended a symposium on Samuel Johnson and 18th Century Medicine arranged jointly with the History Section of the Royal Society of Medicine under the heading "Vigorous Remedies", at which two members gave papers. In May a joint meeting with the Historical Association began at the former "Essex Head", home of Johnson's last Club. The party then made its way along Fleet Street to St. Paul's, viewing on the way places and sites associated with Johnson and noting the statue outside St. Clement Danes, cleaned earlier in the year under the Society's auspices as a result of an article in the Evening Standard. A paper on Johnson's London by Professor Michael Port rounded off the meeting.

On 7 July more than 40 persons joined a river trip to Greenwich, as Johnson and Boswell had once done, and were given a guided historical tour by members of the Greenwich and Lewisham Antiquarian Society.

The next day saw the start of the memorable Conference held at Pembroke College, Oxford, for five days, and continued at Lichfield under the aegis of the Johnson Society. 25 members and Vice-Presidents of our Society participated in these events.

Among the many commemorative exhibitions held during that year, we may perhaps recall with particular pleasure that put on by the Arts Council in Piccadilly, and the display of memorabilia at Bowood illustrating the friendship between Johnson and the Thrale family, an association which is particularly reinforced today.

December was very much commemoration month. Members of the Society were invited to the Private View of the exhibition held at The British Library, and later about twenty members and friends shared the Lichfield Society's Banquet at the House of Commons when our Vice-President Dr. Fleeman toasted the House of Commons and our President toasted the guests.

Saturday, 15 December, was the Society's own day. At 10.30 in the morning Robert Robinson, a Past President of the Lichfield Society unveiled (or endeavoured to do so, in conjunction with the Chairman of the Greater London Council) a plaque on the wall of Boswell's Coffee House in Russell Street, formerly Tom Davies' bookshop. Then came a special luncheon, attended by a record 150 persons in the upper room of this restaurant.

At 3.00 pm everyone adjourned to the Abbey for a Commemorative Evensong, at which the lessons were read by myself (an honour I hold in great esteem) and our Commemoration Secretary, Dr. Grundy. Dr. George Rylands read Johnson's Sermon No. 11, and the wreath was laid on Johnson's grave by Dr. Carpenter, preceded by Professor James Misenheimer's reading of a sonnet on Johnson by our member Helen Forsyth, and followed by the last lines of the Vanity of Human Wishes read by Dame Peggy Ashcroft.

On Sunday those who could attended Morning Service at St. Clement Danes, now the RAF Church, for a service with a strong Johnsonian flavour, bringing to an end the official Commemoration.

But we must not forget that during the year and since for as long as they lasted, specially commissioned souvenirs, were on sale in the form of medallions, pendants and paperweights, and postcards with Bewick vignettes illustrating quotations from Johnson. For these we are indebted to Dr. Grundy, who had been appointed Commemoration Secretary and to whom we owe so much of the success of Commemoration year.

We had one disappointment in the Post Office's refusal to issue a special postage stamp for Johnson (although they did one for Chillingham cattle); one or two franks were, however, issued.

On 18 January 1986 I, as your Chairman, with my young son who I hope will be among the next generation of Johnsonians, was present when Mr. Richard Thrale, who we are delighted is here today, unveiled a plaque in Streatham to mark the newly identified site of Streatham Villa.

During the ten years since the Golden Jubilee we have enjoyed 68 papers by a number of distinguished speakers, and it is gratifying that over half of these papers were given by our own members. The Society continues to flourish, with a current membership of 174. Let us hope that in 2028 it will be celebrating its Centenary!

Ladies and Gentlemen - at least two or three things bring us together today on this memorable occasion: First and foremost is our love of Samuel Johnson and his life and works, the second might be a contribution to scholarship and research and the third the accidents of association. Lord Shelburne, whom we were so pleased to welcome, with Lady Shelburne, to the Abbey and to our lunch today, comes within this purview, and so of course does Richard Thrale, whom I have already mentioned, and Ernest Heberden, and I am indeed in that category myself and am proud to be so."

This was followed by a presentation to Mrs. Spagnoli, inspired by Mrs. Dowdeswell's recollection of the Chairman's remarks at a previous Christmas lunch about the future of Church House with reference to the Vitello d'Oro specifically, of a copy of Bernard Levin's All Things Considered, containing the reference from The Times. Mrs. Dowdeswell then gave us some of her memories of the Society during her years of membership, since 1952.

ETNA ENRAG'D: GIUSEPPE BARETTI 1719-89

A paper by L.A. Martin BA, PhD on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Baretti's death

The name of Giuseppe Baretti is a familiar one to all readers of Boswell's Life, but in the bicentenary of his death - he died in London on 5 May 1789 - he deserves to be remembered in a wider context. For Baretti belongs equally to eighteenth century literary England and to Italy's Settecento. To Italians he remains an Italian, who delivered caustic - if sometimes eccentric - judgements on classical and contemporary Italian authors in a spirited, modern prose style, notably in his periodical publication La Frusta letteraria (1763-65).

And yet Baretti spent over thirty years in England, and was an intimate of Dr Johnson, through whose introduction he became a regular member of the Thrale household at Streatham, mingling with such guests as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Garrick, Burke, Goldsmith and the Burneys. Indeed, he must have been nearly indistinguishable from any contemporary English man of letters - Mrs Thrale remarking that it seldom occurred to the company that he was a foreigner, his command of the English language being "far beyond the power of nineteen in twenty natives. He had also a knowledge of the solemn language and the gay, could be sublime with Johnson, or blackguard with the groom; could dispute, could rally, could quibble in our language", (1)

Baretti had the highest regard for Johnson; in one number of the Frusta, after describing Voltaire as "the second writer of our century" (in spite of earlier strictures against him), he goes on to assert that the first is an Englishman, and although Johnson is not named, the reference to him is unmistakable. (2) There can be no doubt of Johnson's considerable influence upon Baretti, and sometimes Baretti's own previously held views seem to have been reinforced by Johnson's more solidly based convictions. And his first stay in England coincided with the appearance of Johnson's The Rambler (1750-52) and The Idler (1758-60) which he greatly admired and whose general form he would imitate in the Frusta. However, as Mrs Thrale contends, he was no pale reflection of the greater man. "Murphy thinks that Baretti means by his ferocity to imitate Johnson, but I am not of that opinion: Baretti's mind is not a servile one to imitate another, be that other who he will: Baretti was ferocious enough before he left Italy to have been shut out of some of its capitals..." (3)

In order to see Baretti whole, the time he spent outside England must be taken into account. (4) Four main periods can be distinguished in his life:

- 1719-51 - from his birth until his departure for England
- 1751-60 - his first stay in England, during which he met Johnson ca 1753
- 1760-66 - years spent in Italy
- 1766-89 - last years in England

1719-51 - Giuseppe Marc'Antonio Baretti was born in Turin on 25 April 1719, the eldest of four sons. His father was treasurer at the Turin Royal University. When he was sixteen his mother died, and his father remarried only a month later. Of Baretti's relationship with his mother nothing is known, but he had

little love for his father, who was something of a disciplinarian and who had intended him for the priesthood. For this he had no vocation, and it was thought he might become an architect, but the idea was given up on account of his extreme short-sightedness. The law was then mooted and he was made to study Latin; he was later to complain of the quality of the teaching, and lamented that his father had refused to let him learn Greek. Already he was voraciously reading Italian literature. Some dissension with his stepmother impelled him to leave home in his eighteenth year, and he made for Guastalla, south of Mantua, where his uncle lived, and obtained work as a merchant's clerk. During the two years spent here he became acquainted with the poet Carlo Cantoni - a colleague in the office - from whom he acquired a knowledge of contemporary poets and who helped shape his early literary views. And he began writing poetry himself. After a stay in Venice in 1739, where he first met the Gozzi brothers - leading literary lights and minor aristocrats in their ramshackle palace - he spent the years 1740-42 in Milan. Arriving there at the age of twenty-one, he soon obtained entry to the gatherings of some well-known men of letters who were later to form the Accademia de' Trasformati. He was to recall this period of his life with great pleasure; he took up Latin again, perfected his French (which being widely used in Piedmont he had been able to speak since infancy), and began the study of Spanish. And he socialized, versified, and translated two of Ovid's works into blank verse.

Returning to his native Piedmont he became keeper of the stores of the new fortifications at Cuneo from 1742 to 1744; these were being hastily constructed and soon to be besieged by the Spanish during the War of the Austrian Succession. The completion of the fortifications deprived Baretti of employment, but at about this time his father died and he returned home, only to find that the chief beneficiary of his father's will was his stepmother, who soon married again. After a stay in Venice he went to Turin to live with his brothers.

During all this time he was writing ceaselessly - lively letters, poems for special occasions, satire and criticism. Needing money in Venice, he brought out a hasty translation in blank verse of Corneille's works - a production he himself confessed was dull and insipid. Most of his own poetry was in a light, easy style, imitating the burlesque compositions of the sixteenth century poet Francesco Berni, as was then fashionable; he was later to repudiate it, and to cease to think of himself as a poet at all. Already he was showing what was to become a lifelong predilection for controversy and polemics, and when, in 1750, he published a biting attack upon a work by an establishment figure, the pedantic new professor of literature at the University of Turin, he was severely censured by the authorities. This put an end to any hopes of further employment at home. In the following year he set out for London.

1751-60 - Although it was this crisis which precipitated his departure, it seems likely that with his lively curiosity and liking for travel he had already contemplated a visit to England. When still in Italy he had begun learning English, and it is possible that Lord Charlemont, who had met him in Turin and who later became a friend and patron, had suggested a visit.

During Baretto's first years in England he was largely dependent for his livelihood on the Italian opera there; he was given hospitality by the violinist Felice Giardini, and found employment as a poet at the King's Theatre under its director Vanneschi. The theatre, and the Orange Coffee-house close by, swarmed with Italians trying to make a living in one way or another from the opera. But it was not long before Baretto quarrelled with Vanneschi, in 1753 bringing out two satires in French, attacking him. Soon after this he severed connection with the opera for good.

Baretto had a remarkable flair for languages - in Italy he had already mastered several Italian dialects - and now not only pressed ahead with his English but continued his study of Spanish and Portuguese. During the very year of his arrival in London he wrote, although probably with some help, a pamphlet in the form of a letter, Remarks on the Italian Language and Writers which was published in 1753. He also brought out in the same year A Dissertation upon the Italian Poetry in which are interspersed some Remarks on Monsieur de Voltaire's "Essay on the Epic Poets". The task which he had now begun, of disseminating to the English a knowledge of Italy, and of its language and literature, was to continue throughout his life.

From the first he was fortunate with his English contacts. Henry Fielding he met only a few days after his arrival in London. He started giving Italian lessons, and one of his pupils was Charlotte Lennox, author of The Female Quixote, who was wanting to learn the language for access to some of Shakespeare's sources for her projected work Shakespeare Illustrated. It was probably through her introduction that Baretto, in 1753 or 1754, first met Dr Johnson.

This meeting, so fruitful for Baretto's future development, came at the time when Johnson was already deep in work on his dictionary. Baretto was full of admiration for the project, to the extent of planning for its introduction into Italy even before it had been published; in April 1754, having heard that it had become fashionable for the ladies of Milan to learn English, he wrote asking a friend there how many copies he would be able to take of a certain English dictionary then being printed which would outshine all existing dictionaries in any language. (5)

As is well known, Johnson was constantly upbraiding himself for idleness, and Mrs Thrale reports that he used to say that he could easily have completed the dictionary in two years had he been blessed with diligence and health. And she adds: "Baretto used to say very properly, 'had I Johnson's Genius, or he had my Spirit of Application and Drudgery, we might have driven our Coaches and Six long ago'". (6)

Baretto certainly did not lack application. His next works were An Introduction to the Italian Language (1755) and The Italian Library (1757), the first being a literary anthology with parallel English translations and grammatical notes, and the second a catalogue of Italian writers with brief notes and examples of their work, and a preface giving an account of the history

of the Italian language. The English preface of the first work is partly by Johnson and the opening paragraph of the second work is his also. (7)

And then, in 1760, there was published his Dictionary of the English and Italian Languages; grammars were included, which were also published separately. Johnson wrote the dedication for this work. (8) Baretto's dictionary put a decisive end to earlier compilations; two further editions appeared during his lifetime, and it continued to flourish in successive editions without serious rivals until well into the nineteenth century

With this solid achievement to his credit and now enjoying a new if temporary affluence, Baretto determined to return to Italy, availing himself of the opportunity to conduct a young nobleman, Edward Southwell, on a continental tour. He reached Genoa in November 1760 after passing through Portugal and Spain.

1760-66 - During the course of his journey Baretto despatched letters to Johnson, and in a lengthy reply dated 10 June 1761 Johnson thanks him for these, complimenting him on his English style which "still continues in its purity and vigour". And he later continues: "I would have you happy wherever you are; yet I would have you wish to return to England. If ever you visit us again, you will find the kindness of your friends undiminished. To tell you how many enquiries are made after you would be vain; because you may be told in a very few words, that all who knew you wish you well; and that all that you embraced at your departure, will caress you at your return: therefore do not let Italian academicians nor Italian ladies drive us from your thoughts". (9)

Baretto kept an account of his journey to Italy - having been earnestly recommended to do so by Johnson - and once there began preparing a four-volume work in Italian for the press, in the form of letters to his three brothers. However various censorship difficulties prevented more than the eventual publication of the first two volumes (1762-63), and it was only much later that an altered, augmented English version was to appear.

It was now that Baretto launched his periodical La Frusta letteraria ("The literary scourge"), in which the vehemence of his temperament is displayed to the full; where invective, humour, parody and caricature combine in veritable tours de force, and which has prompted at least one modern Italian critic to describe him as the liveliest prose writer of the Settecento. (10) But the Frusta gave so much offence to so many people that its suppression in 1765 was not surprising, and Baretto was to suffer illness and penury before returning to England in the following year.

1766-89 - In spite of these unpleasant experiences Baretto continued to defend and explain his native country to the English. Already in the Frusta he had attacked a recently published work by an English surgeon, Samuel Sharp, who after a visit to Italy had condemned Italian morals and customs. Now, in his Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy, published in 1768, he set out to refute Sharp, and when the latter returned to the charge he brought out a

second edition the following year with an appendix in answer to Sharp's reply. In contrast to the Frusta, the style is sober and measured; nevertheless this wide-ranging work, covering such topics as Italian hospitality to foreigners, the state of literature, art and music, the academies, daily life, dialects, dress, customs and religious life, never fails to hold the reader's interest. Here it may be remarked that (in sharp contrast with Johnson) religion never seems to have touched Baretto in a personal way; when he does defend Italian Catholic institutions, he appears to do so for purely social reasons. The summary which heads chapter 22 of volume 2 of the work is an example of his cautious approach: "Idolatry of the Italians not so great, so absurd, or so blameable as it is represented by fanatical Protestants".

Baretto's Account was an instant success; Johnson described it as "a very entertaining book". (11)

Baretto now (1769) made another brief visit to Spain, having received a proposal to publish an English edition of his partially published account of his journey to Italy, and wishing to expand on his description of Spain. Upon his return he learned that the King had appointed him Secretary for Foreign Correspondence to the newly-founded Royal Academy of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture.

In October 1769 occurred the famous Haymarket fracas, when Baretto having been accosted by a street prostitute, was then pursued by three bullies and killed one of them, allegedly in self-defence. His trial, held the same month, was remarkable for the "constellation of genius" appearing on his behalf, as Boswell recounts: "Next day, October 20, he [Johnson] appeared, for the only time I suppose in his life, as a witness in a Court of Justice, being called to give evidence to the character of Mr. Baretto, who having stabbed a man in the street, was arraigned at the Old Bailey for murder. Never did such a constellation of genius enlighten the awful Sessions-House, emphatically called JUSTICE HALL; Mr. Burke, Mr. Garrick, Mr. Beauchamp, and Dr. Johnson: and undoubtedly their favourable testimony had due weight with the Court and Jury. Johnson gave his evidence in a slow, deliberate, and distinct manner, which was uncommonly impressive. It is well known that Mr. Baretto was acquitted". (12)

Sir Joshua Reynolds and Goldsmith also testified for Baretto. The trial, traumatic though it must have been for him, did not fail to add to his reputation. There was more glory the following year with the publication of A Journey from London to Genoa, through England, Portugal, Spain and France. It still makes entertaining reading. (13) In a letter to Johnson of 17 July 1770 Mrs Thrale mentions it: "... 'tis a most pleasing performance, and meets with eager Readers in our house..." to which Johnson replies: "That Baretto's book would please you all I made no doubt: I know not whether the world has ever seen such travels before. Those whose lot is to ramble can seldom write, and those who know how to write very seldom ramble". (14)

Baretto's success cannot have pleased Boswell, who had no liking for him - a fact which makes it necessary to treat his portrayal of Baretto in the Life and in his own papers with some caution. Calling on him when Baretto was busy

preparing the account of his travels for the press, Boswell comments: "He was so full of himself, and so assuming and ferocious in his manner, that he disgusted me not a little". (15) And Dr Campbell notes in his diary for 1 April 1775: "Dined at Mr Thrales... There was Murphy, Boswell & Baretto - the two last, as I learned, are mortal foes so much that Murphy and Mrs T-e agreed that Boswell expressed a desire that Baretto shd. be hanged upon that unfortunate affair of his killing &c... upon Baretto entering Boswell did not rise, and upon Baretto's descry of Boswell, he grinned a perturbed glance..." (16). The dislike was certainly mutual; in manuscript notes in his own copy of the Piozzi Letters (17), Baretto remarks more than once on Boswell's "noisy and silly" behaviour in company, and to his being "not quite right-headed, in my humble opinion".

Enjoying a little affluence once more, Baretto left for France in the summer of 1770, proceeding thence to Italy where he visited his brothers and friends, and returned to London in the spring of 1771. In the following year he brought out An Introduction to the Most Useful European Languages, being selected passages from English, French, Italian and Spanish authors with parallel translations, "intended for the use of foreigners, merchants and gentlemen who make the knowledge of these languages their study", and in the same year an edition of the complete works of Macchiavelli to which he contributed a preface.

During all this time he doubtless continued his language tuition - which extended to Johnson himself, who in a letter of 2 April 1773 tells Mrs Thrale: "Yesterday we dined very gaily, to day I have been learning Spanish of Mr. Baretto". (18) And in October 1773 there began a new phase in Baretto's life, when he was invited to take up residence in the Thrale household to teach their eldest daughter Italian.

In his tutoring of Hester Maria ("Queeney") Thrale, Baretto shows himself a born teacher and she, for that matter, an apt pupil. In 1774, when she was ten years old, he is supplementing his letters to Mrs Thrale with lively postscripts in Italian to Queeney, which embody new idiomatic phrases for her to learn. (19) And she, before the age of thirteen, was producing verse translations from Metastasio. (20) It was as a by-product of teaching Queeney that in 1775 Baretto produced his Easy Phraseology for the Use of Young Ladies who Intend to Learn the Colloquial Part of the Italian Language, consisting of fifty-six quaint and comic dialogues. The Preface, although Baretto does not say so, was contributed by Johnson; that the latter owned to its authorship is attested by Fanny Burney, who goes on to describe the dialogues to her friend George Cambridge as "the most absurd, and yet the most laughable things you ever saw. I would advise you to get them. They were written for Miss Thrale, and all the dialogues are between her and him, except, now and then, a shovel and a poker, or a goose and a chair, happen to step in". (21)

Relations between Baretto and Mrs Thrale were often tempestuous, he alleging that she was neglectful and cruel to her children, and she that he constantly undermined her authority. (22) Occasionally they were reconciled; after complaining to Johnson about Baretto's behaviour, and receiving from Johnson a conciliatory reply, she writes on 18 July 1775: "Baretto has been very good, and

taken care of my little ones like a Nurse while I was away... I am sorry I was so peevish with him". (23)

Queeney accompanied her parents and Johnson on their excursion to France in the autumn of 1775, with Baretto acting as an efficient courier. (24) It was during this trip that Johnson wrote from Paris to Robert Levet: "...I ran a race in the rain this day, and beat Baretto. Baretto is a fine fellow, and speaks French, I think quite as well as English". (25) Johnson was then 66, and Baretto ten years younger.

An excursion to Italy with the same party was projected for the following year, and Baretto had already begun to make arrangements when the sudden death of the Thrales' son Harry caused the trip to be cancelled. As Mrs Thrale wished to avoid the funeral, Baretto accompanied her and Queeney to Bath. Here a violent quarrel occurred over pills with which Mrs Thrale wished to dose her daughter against the advice of her doctor. Relations between her and Baretto were fast deteriorating; and matters came to a head in July 1776 when Baretto left the Thrale house without taking leave. As Johnson wrote to Boswell on 21 December 1776: "Baretto went away from Thrale's in some whimsical fit of disgust, or ill-nature, without taking any leave. It is as well if he finds in any other place as good an habitation, and as many conveniences. He has got five-and-twenty guineas by translating Sir Joshua's Discourses into Italian, and Mr Thrale gave him an hundred in the spring; so that he is yet in no difficulties". (26)

Baretto's bitter recriminations against Mrs Thrale (later Piozzi) were to continue until his death and even, it appears, after it, for there can be little doubt that the anonymously published malicious comedy The Sentimental Mother (1789) may be ascribed to him. (27)

From the time Baretto left the Thrales until his death he never ceased writing. One work worthy of mention is his Discours sur Shakespeare et sur Monsieur de Voltaire (1777). Here many of the old accusations made against Voltaire in the Frusta and earlier writings are taken up again, together with new ones; he defends Shakespeare's violation of the unities, accuses Voltaire of ignorance of English and Italian language and literature, and insists that the purpose of literature is to instruct and elevate.

In the following year came his Spanish and English Dictionary, which like the earlier Italian and English one, became a standard work.

Asked to provide an anthology of Italian letters for the use of students of Italian, he brought out his Scelta di lettere familiari (1779), which are however all by his own hand with the exception of the first one, being either actual past letters written to friends, or imaginary ones composed especially for the occasion, which thus provide a conspectus of his literary views.

Baretto quarrelled with Johnson in 1783 over a trivial incident, concerning a game of chess. The precise circumstances are unclear, but Baretto's wounded

pride probably caused the rift, and Johnson's death a year later prevented a reconciliation. (28)

In 1786 he brought out Tolondron: Speeches to John Bowle about his Edition of Don Quixote, together with some Account of Spanish Literature. Baretto - who had himself worked on a translation of Don Quixote some years earlier, which had never been published - had come across John Bowle's edition which he criticised for containing a host of elementary errors; in response Bowle had furiously attacked Baretto in the Gentleman's Magazine, and Tolondron is Baretto's reasoned, effective reply. However, as Lacy Collison-Morley remarks, "No one but Baretto would ever have written a bulky volume of three hundred and thirty-eight pages to prove an adversary's ignorance of modern languages and answer a short attack in a magazine". (29)

Baretto continued in good health until a few days before his death, on which day "He took leave, about four o'clock, with the greatest cheerfulness, calmness and composure" of a few assembled friends. "On their leaving the room, he desired the door to be shut, that he might not be distressed by the women, who would perhaps be frightened to see him die. He expired...without a struggle or a sigh, the moment after taking a glass of wine. He possessed his faculties to the last moment". (30)

In her diary for 10 January 1781 Mrs Thrale presents verses she had composed describing the characters of the persons who were to have their portraits (by Reynolds) hung in the library at Streatham Park - those for Baretto being "most to my Liking of the whole Collection". (31)

Baretto hangs next, by his Frowns you may know him,
He has lately been reading some new-publish'd Poem;
He finds the poor Author a Blockhead, a Beast,
A Fool without Sentiment, Judgment or Taste;
Ever thus let our Critick his Insolence fling,
Like the Hornet in Homer, impatient to sting,
Let him rally his Friends for their Frailties before 'em,
And scorn the dull Praise of that dull Thing Decorum;
While Tenderness, Temper, and Truth he despises,
And only the Triumph of Victory prizes.
Yet let us be candid, and where can we find
So active, so able, so ardent a Mind?
With your Children more soft; more polite with your Servant,
More firm in distress, or in Friendship more fervent.
Thus Etna enrag'd his Artillery pours,
And tumbles down Palaces Princes and Towers;
While the Peasant more happy who lives at its foot
Can make it a Hothouse to ripen his Fruit.

- 1 Thraliana, ed. Katharine C. Balderston, 2nd ed., 2 vols (Oxford, 1951), I, 47
- 2 G. Baretti, La frusta letteraria, viii, 15 gennaio 1764.
- 3 Thraliana, I, 154.
- 4 For much biographical data I am indebted to the standard monograph on Baretti, N. Jonard, Giuseppe Baretti: l'homme et l'oeuvre (Clermont-Ferrand, 1963).
- 5 G. Baretti, Epistolario, ed. L. Piccioni, 2 vols (Bari, 1936), I, 98.
- 6 Thraliana, I, 164.
- 7 Boswell's Life of Johnson, ed. Hill-Powell, 4 vols (Oxford, 1934), I, 542. Hereafter cited as Life.
- 8 Life, I, 21, 353.
- 9 The Letters of Samuel Johnson, ed. R.W. Chapman, 3 vols (Oxford, 1952), I, 38. Hereafter cited as Letters.
- 10 Il Settecento, ed. G. Natali (Milan, 1929), p. 1145.
- 11 Life, II, 57.
- 12 Life, II, 96-98.
- 13 A facsimile edition was published 1970 for Centaur Press Travellers' Classics Series, with an introduction by Ian Robertson.
- 14 Letters, 234-35.
- 15 Boswell in Search of a Wife, 1766-1769, ed. F. Brady and F.A. Pottle (London 1957), p. 308.
- 16 Thomas Campbell, Diary of a Visit to England in 1775, ed. James L. Clifford (Cambridge, 1947), p. 67.
- 17 In the British Library.
- 18 Letters, I, 318.
- 19 G. Baretti, Epistolario, II, 127-8, 131-32.
- 20 Thraliana, I, 50.
- 21 Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay, 7 vols (1842-46), II, 262-63.
- 22 See James L. Clifford, Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mrs Thrale), 2nd ed. corr. (London, 1968), 142-44.
- 23 Letters, II, 69.
- 24 See French Journals and Letters of Mrs Thrale and Doctor Johnson, ed. M. Tyson and H. Guppy (Manchester, 1932).
- 25 Letters, II, 88.
- 26 Letters, II, 156.
- 27 J.L. Clifford, Hester Lynch Piozzi, 326-27.
- 28 Lacy Collison-Morley, Giuseppe Baretti (London, 1909), pp. 330-34.
- 29 Ibid., p. 342.
- 30 European Magazine, vol. 16, 1789, p. 93.
- 31 Thraliana, I, p. 470.

BOOK REVIEW

Charles H. Hinnant, Samuel Johnson: An Analysis, London. Macmillan, 1988. ix + 148 pp.

This slim volume is unassuming in appearance: its salmon-pink cover shows a nineteenth-century print of Johnson in the summer-house at Streatham, pen in hand but, it seems, either day-dreaming or temporarily lost for words. This appearance cloaks a weighty and demanding study. Professor Hinnant's readers must be prepared to follow the placing of Johnson in relation to Hegel, Leibnitz and Derrida, and to decode sentences like "For Johnson, parole is a material and therefore mutable manifestation of the ever-present temptation to phonocentric illusion and is thus irreducible to a langue", or "incessantly parenthesized by question and answer, the moral affirmations of Rasselas also emerge as indicators of the lexical process generating them."

For readers willing to shoulder such tasks, the rewards are not inconsiderable. Professor Hinnant begins by connecting Johnson's scepticism over the principle of plenitude or the "great chain of being" (as expounded by Pope in An Essay on Man or Soame Jenyns in A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil) with the scientific argument, first advanced by Isaac Newton, that nature is more like a thinly-populated vacuum than a plenum. Johnson's acute awareness of "negation and the void" therefore reflects his intellectual interests rather than any psychological predisposition. Hinnant distinguishes several effects of this awareness: the centring of Johnson's moral vision on "a conception of life as a vast emptiness needing to be filled up"; his presentation of happiness and pleasure as "always fugitive", disappearing as they appear, appearing as they disappear: his religion making of humanity "an empty vessel which God alone can fill". All this, while not entirely new, is well put and convincing.

The rest of the book presents readings of particular works: Irene, the Juvenalian satires, the Dictionary plan and preface, Rasselas and A Journey to the Western Islands. These readings sometimes range quite far from the issue of the plenum and the vacuum, but they have much of interest to offer. Any detailed discussion of Irene must be welcome, and it is exhilarating to see Hinnant relating the play, with its "dialectic of domination and servitude", to the so much better-appreciated poems. Irene, as a slave required, impossibly, to love her master, becomes unexpectedly a parallel to Thales of London, chafing against the demand that he flatter the misusers of power. Greece is threatened by corrupt, foreign Turkey as London is threatened by corrupt, foreign Spain (or, closer to home, by French immigrants), but each threatened community has already been damagingly brought to resemble that other which its patriots wish it to reject.

Johnson's scepticism about methods of lexicography is effectively related to a belief that language is no plenum, either divine or national. Imlac - and Johnson himself - is seen as replacing "a vision of organic unity and plenitude" with one of "inexhaustible variety", a random "non-unified, heterogeneous plurality". The Journey is interestingly likened to pioneer works of basic anthropology, then distinguished from them on grounds of its refusal to make

unifying or systematizing deductions. Justly highlighted too is Johnson's stress on human competitiveness, and "the way the strong are ultimately and ironically dependent on the weak for their sense of self-worth".

Hinnant might be challenged on several specific points. He reads the Vanity of Human Wishes as organised round antitheses like hope/fear, desire/hate, warrior/scholar, conqueror/suppliant; I believe that for the purposes of the poem the first three pairs are like, not unlike, while its conquerors all implicitly or explicitly turn into suppliants - as Hinnant himself later acknowledges. Nor do I find binary opposition so vital to Rasselas as this book does. The notion of vacuity is somewhat bent to include the gap between words and things, and those between different senses of the same word. Nekayah's resolution to concentrate henceforth on the choice of eternity is not the same thing as the recurrent dream into which she later lapses of founding and presiding over a women's college. There are too many misprints in this book, and an instance of an increasingly common substitution (mitigates for militates) which Johnson would surely have opposed. Yet it makes good part of its blurb-writer's claim: certainly "provocative and incisive", if hardly perhaps "indispensable".

Isobel Grundy
Queen Mary and Westfield College, London University

Suzanne Bloxam, Walpole's Queen of Comedy: Elizabeth Farren, Countess of Derby (Ashford, Kent: Suzanne Bloxam, 1988) 218pp £10.95.

Elizabeth Farren was among the most eminent actresses in London during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. She was born in 1759 to Margaret and George Farren, who had a company of strolling players. By the time Farren was ten she was on the stage and, at the death of her father a year later, she became determined to work to support her mother, her sisters and herself. During the next six years she steadily developed her acting skills, performing chiefly at Manchester and Liverpool, for more and more appreciative theatre-goers. At the age of seventeen Farren was recommended to London's Haymarket Theatre; Garrick saw her play Rosina in The Spanish Barber and declared her a 'most promising piece'. One year later she moved to Drury Lane where she gained admiration and affection from her audiences, especially for her roles in comedies as women of fashion, roles that Horace Walpole thought she played to perfection. In 1797, after portraying Lady Teazle, one of her most successful parts, Farren made her last curtsies, retired from the stage and married Edward, 12th Earl of Derby.

The initial attraction of Farren's story may come from an unconscious connection of the similarity of Farren's own life to the structure of comedy: first the misfortune, then the rise to prominence and finally the retirement to a felicitous match. Suzanne Bloxam's enthusiastic telling of the details of Farren's life reflects this generic shape. Bloxam, however, tends to cast her readers collectively in the role of the agroikos, the resister of comic festivity, by suspecting us of neglecting Farren and depriving her of her 'rightful place as Queen of Comedy opposite Mrs. Siddons' Queen of Tragedy'. In

her effort to 'restore' Farren to our favour Bloxam mars her own argument by trying to nullify the accomplishments of Siddons (and others, like Abington) in order to enhance the reputation of Farren. At present when scholarship is increasingly concerned with the importance of women's places in history and with the reclamation of persons and works neglected in or obscured by time, Bloxam's defensive tactics that attempt to diminish the significance of other women are unfortunate. The emphasis placed upon the 'rags to riches' aspect of Farren's life story is debasing to Farren's real achievement, her carefully considered direction of her life from an early age. Farren's refusal to act the part of Nobody in a play of that name does not indicate, as Bloxam suggests, a lack of confidence, but rather it shows precisely what Farren herself wanted: she preferred to pay the fine for withdrawing from the play so 'that she might continue to be thought Somebody'. That the play was ill-received and was performed only three times, furthermore, gives credit to Farren's ability to choose her work wisely.

The foreword to Bloxam's book states that the impetus for the biography 'stemmed from the full-length portrait of [Farren] by Sir Thomas Lawrence, P.R.A., which was exhibited in London in 1799'. Although the portrait, a reproduction of which is on the dust-jacket of the book, provided the initiative for the biography, it is a pity that it did not become the driving force and image throughout Bloxam's entire work. Neither the eighth chapter devoted to Lawrence nor the ending quotation in the last chapter from Revelation ('... and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy') recaptures the initial impetus. Even Sir Michael Levey's opening remarks are superficial, especially when compared with his fine introduction to the catalogue of the Lawrence exhibition of 1979; and they do not analyse adequately the portrait of Farren. Levey is correct in saying that the portrait shows Farren to be 'highly conscious of her own attraction'. But Lawrence went further than that. Though he may have wanted to paint Farren apart from her profession, Lawrence's own attraction to the theatre, to actors and to actresses ensured a most dramatic rendering of Farren. In the background the vivid, almost gaudy, blues and oranges suggest a theatrical backdrop. The marked contrast of the summer background with Farren's rich white winter garb causes her figure to stand out in a surprisingly powerful way, and her expression reveals not only a keen awareness of her own attraction but also a shrewd consciousness of the need to create a persona and a place in the world. Bloxam believes that the portrait was not changed after it was finished, though the most recent scholarship by Kenneth Garlick proposes that indeed it was altered two years after completion at the request of Farren, who grew weary of the criticisms she received from friends about the exaggerated twist and elongation of the body painted by Lawrence in the manner of Fuseli. Garlick's suggestion that the picture would be even more 'alluring and innovative' if it had not been altered is provocative, for it encourages us to think of Farren as strikingly individual. The repeated emphasis that Bloxam places on Farren's beauty, kindness and virtue devalues the powerful position in which Farren placed herself, as a breadwinner from age eleven, as an engaging actress of comedy with a large and loyal following, and as a woman who chose when to retire and when to marry. What must be stressed when writing about Farren, then, is her deliberate control of her own life.

It is no wonder that a detail of the celebrated portrait of Farren is on the front of the newest study of Lawrence's work (Kenneth Garlick's Sir Thomas Lawrence. A Complete Catalogue of the Oil Paintings, Phaidon, 1989), since that picture did so much to establish the painter's reputation. What is remarkable to see, though, is that the likeness of Elizabeth Farren thoroughly upstages Lawrence's name on the cover, the knowing expression a continual reminder of the power behind the pose.

Laura Payne

BOOK RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

By courtesy of Helen Forsyth, the Editor has received a copy of Fresh Reflections on Samuel Johnson, edited by Dr. Prem Nath and published by The Whitston Publishing Company, Troy, New York: December 1987. It is intended to publish a review of this work in the next edition of The New Rambler.

CANON A.R. WINNETT PhD, DD, a Vice-President of the Society.

The death of Robert Winnett saddened all his friends, and the Society was represented at his funeral by the Editor of this journal. We are pleased to be able to publish this appreciation of him. It is written by The Rev. F.M. Hodgess Roper, for many years his colleague in the Society.

"We knew Robert Winnett as an erudite Johnsonian and a wise counsellor who served the society with distinction over a long period. He wrote for us knowledgeably, he spoke to us clearly and forcefully and he presided over us in committee and in general meetings with genial dignity. We look back over past volumes of THE NEW RAMBLER and recall the breadth of his scholarship and the depth of his understanding of the human condition.

His life work was that of a parish priest and those of us who knew that at first hand echo the words of his Bishop's tribute:

What struck one was the innate goodness of the man and the intelligence of the man. In him they combined in an unusual way. Intelligent people are sometimes more complicated and good people are sometimes not intelligent, but Robert was a lovely man.

He wrote on other than Johnsonian themes. He found time in his busy life for history, biography and poetry. All this as well as being an authority on ecclesiastical law, the Bishop's adviser on liturgical affairs and a member of the Church of England Hymn Commission.

We salute his memory."

Helen Forsyth has also written an appreciation of him, in the form of a sonnet.

A churchman and a scholar and a friend
Is how so many think of you today.
A man whom disappointment could not bend
To anger or intolerant display.
A lover of the Classics and a man
Whose soul was stirred by great poetic art,
Who loved the sound of Latin, yet could plan
A sermon in short words that reached the heart.
An advocate of Johnson, one who knew
The moral writings of that mighty mind,
And found the Christian teaching flowered anew
Within the reverence his life defined.
An author of distinction, who would lend
His brilliant mind to counsel any friend.

He will not soon be forgotten.

LLOYD'S *of* LONDON
1688-1988
LITERCENTENARY □

In 1988 Lloyd's of London celebrated their three hundredth year of underwriting in the City of London. Though now housed in their striking new Richard Rogers building in Lime Street they operated, in the eighteenth century, in the Royal Exchange and it is this connection with the time of Samuel Johnson which makes our link with them so appropriate. For we have received from them generous financial aid towards the cost of publishing this issue of The New Rambler in which we celebrate an important anniversary of our own, our Diamond Jubilee.

NATIONAL WESTMINSTER BANK plc

We also acknowledge with gratitude a generous donation from National Westminster Bank plc.

We are honoured to be associated with these two institutions in this auspicious year and we are grateful to them for their kind and imaginative donations.