

THE NEW RAMBLER



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The Editor regrets that it has not proved possible for these to be included in this issue of *The New Rambler*, but it is hoped that they will appear in the subsequent one.

From the Editor:

The Society still lacked, at the end of the period covered by this issue, a Treasurer and Membership Secretary; but it is a pleasure to announce that since then the positions have been filled. A report will appear in the next *New Rambler*. It is sad to have to record several deaths in the course of the year. Miss Mary Lascelles was for many years a Vice-President of the Society; she was well known, of course, for her pioneering work on Jane Austen. Robert S. Voitle had been Professor in the Department of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Professor James Woodruff was at the University of Western Ontario. We have also lost Mr K. I. McFarlane and Mr Derek Wimble, both members for ten years. We have, however, been happy to welcome both Mrs Wimble and Mrs Woodruff as members of the Society. We enjoy regular contact with other Johnsonian organisations; in particular I would mention the very enterprising Johnson Society of Australia, and the Johnson Club of Japan, whose Secretary (Daisuke Nagashima) is a supportive member of our own Society.

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JOHNSON'S 'LIFE OF POPE': MORALITY AND JUDGEMENT

Dr W. B. Hutchins, University of Manchester — 15th October 1994

Chairman: Mrs A. G. Dowdeswell

Dr Hutchins is an old friend of the Society, and we have enjoyed several of his papers in the past. He is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature in the University of Manchester. He has published books on Pope, Gray and Cowper (among others) and is at present editing a volume of new essays on Gray for Liverpool University Press.

Johnson's last large-scale project, his collection of what he self-effacingly called, in a letter to Boswell, 'little Lives, and little Prefaces, to a little edition of the English Poets'¹, makes a fitting culmination to his literary career. Contrary to his apparent belittling of the project, Johnson actually expanded the work both in range (he proposed the addition of the lives of five poets, those of Watts, Blackmore, Pomfret, Thomson and Yalden) and in the extent of many of the prefaces. He also researched his materials by such means as consulting correspondents, as he had done for the edition of Shakespeare; and the result was a work which took three to four years to complete and which eventually had to be printed in separate volumes rather than as actual prefaces. The culmination is more than one of extent, however: the project's combination of biography and criticism provided an ideal union of two of Johnson's main interests from his earliest writing years.

The 'Life of Pope' is arguably, in its sheer size and in its importance as a full and considered estimate of the work of the major poet of the first half of the century, the most significant of all these *Lives*. Pope's reputation, in that familiar pattern, had suffered after his death. Two years after Pope's death, Joseph Warton had announced his collection of odes with an advertisement declaring that 'the fashion of moralizing in verse has been carried too far', that invention and imagination are the chief faculties of the true poet, and that his own volume was 'an attempt to bring back Poetry into its right channel'. His dismissal of 'Essays on moral Subjects' would have had an unmistakable target, the great poet whose works include *An Essay on Man* and the *Essay on Criticism*.² Warton later codified his resistance to the kind of poetry Pope had perfected in his extended, two volume (1756 & 1782, though the latter had been completed long before its actual publication) appraisal of Pope's work, his *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope*. Warton's dedication of the first volume to Edward Young (whose own *Conjectures on Original Composition* of 1759 would celebrate the genius of the original imagination as the mark of the greatest poetry) repeats his belief that imagination, not understanding, is the key quality of the poet, asserting that 'the most solid observations on human life, expressed with the utmost elegance and brevity, are morality, and not poetry', and naming the epistles of Boileau — Pope's model for the mock-heroic *Rape of the Lock* as well as for his epistles and satires — as types of poetry which are no more truly poetical than moralising prose.³ Thus Johnson's account, in its high praise of such works as the *Essay on Criticism*, *The Rape of the Lock* and above all the translation of Homer — the very type of the poet's devotion to an act of imitation rather than of original genius — could be seen partly as a reaction against such enthusiastic beliefs. One function of the 'Life of Pope', then, is to re-assert the value of traditional forms of poetry by estimating the achievement of the greatest modern exponent of them. But Johnson is far from a single-minded admirer of Pope. Some of Pope's poetry he regards as seriously flawed; and, because Johnson repeatedly traces these flaws to causes within the personality, the essay becomes an examination of how life and art intersect, how an understanding of one can enlighten our perception of the other. So biography and criticism form an inter-related whole.⁴

*

Consider first Johnson's comment on *The Dunciad* in the biographical section. He first quotes at full length an account, published under the name of Richard Savage, but attributed by Johnson to Pope himself, of the war of the dunces out of which the poem grew. This empirical evidence surrounding

the publication of one of Pope's major works includes an account of the poem's success in high circles and a pointed contrast between the attempts of the dunces pilloried in the poem to prevent the poem being sold and the demands of the public to read it:

On the 12th of March, 1729, at St James's, that poem was presented to the King and Queen (who had before been pleased to read it) by the right honourable Sir Robert Walpole; and some days after the whole impression was taken and dispersed by several noblemen and persons of the first distinction . . . On the day the book was first vended a crowd of authors besieged the shop; intreaties, advices, threats of law and battery, nay cries of treason, were all employed to hinder the coming-out of *The Dunciad*: on the other side, the booksellers and hawkers made as great efforts to procure it. What could a few poor authors do against so great a majority as the publick? There was no stopping a torrent with a finger, so out it came.⁵

Johnson comments on this narrative that it reflects a delight in the tumult Pope had raised and a sense of triumph over the dunces, and he points to a moral confusion reflected in these documents: 'He is proud that his book was presented to the King and Queen by the right honourable Sir Robert Walpole; he is proud that they had read it before; he is proud that the edition was taken off by the nobility and persons of the first distinction.'⁶ Thus, while on the one hand Pope displays the publication of the poem as a triumph of the pleasures of the ordinary reading public (what Johnson goes on to call the common reader, the same phrase he employs when celebrating the popularity of Gray's *Elegy*) over the vanities of authors desperate to protect their reputation from the barbed verses of the poem, on the other he reveals his own vanities in all their clarity. The poem's justification depends upon that venerable justification for satire, the moral superiority of the satirist over his victims, and Pope resents it as such, and yet his own pleasure in the poem's reception amongst nobility turns him, in Johnson's account, into one of his own objects of moral satire.⁷

This inconsistency on Pope's part is important to Johnson precisely because the writing of satire has repeatedly been claimed to be an act of moral assertion. Of nobody is this more true than Pope, whose satires openly declare their status as the work of one 'armed for virtue when I point the pen'.⁸ Pope's rhapsodic address to satire in the second Epilogue to the Satires:

O sacred weapon! left for truth's defence,
Sole dread of folly, vice and insolence!
To all but heaven-directed hands denied,
The muse may give thee, but the God must guide . . . (212-15)

raises satire to a divinely-inspired act, whose value lies in its moral status in a Britain now politically corrupted by the passing of the Licensing Act (1737), which Pope, like many opposition figures, saw as the beginnings of a slide towards total government control of the presses. The consequent claim for moral superiority by the satirist would not, in any event, convince the Johnson who was so repeatedly sceptical about all human claims to perfection. But when such claims are patently in conflict with the facts of the case (and it is the empiricist function of biography to establish, as far as possible, such facts), then the contradiction becomes clear. The moral claims for satire are simply in conflict with our human frailty. Hence, incidentally, Johnson's own major poems, his imitations of Juvenal (particularly the mature *Vanity of Human Wishes*), tend to turn the focus of the poem from satire to broader moral vision.

'We are', Johnson famously commented in the 'Life of Milton', 'perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance.'⁹ Warton's distinction between morality and poetry is contrary to what Johnson sees as the inevitable and continual coexistence of moral perception with the act of writing. So, too, is the act of reading indivisible from morality: hence our perception of moral inconsistency or false attitudinizing must affect our sense of the value and validity of a piece of writing. Any report of the conditions in which a work was written, or of the writer's activity in support of his work, is of value in so far as it provides us with knowledge that helps us to judge. To

ignore such knowledge is to cut art off from life, something that Johnson refuses to do. 'All knowledge is of itself of some value. There is nothing so minute or inconsiderable, that I would not rather know it than not.' (Boswell, I, 553)

A different application of the same principle, linking life to art, can be seen in Johnson's strictures on the *Essay on Man*. These strictures are both aesthetic and philosophical. Thus Johnson considers that the poem, though often dazzling in its power and imagery, is inconsistent, and 'contains more lines unsuccessfully laboured, more harshness of diction, more thoughts imperfectly expressed, more levity without elegance, and more heaviness without strength, than will easily be found in all his other works.'¹⁰ This is particularly telling in view of Johnson's high praise of Pope as a technician. Johnson's account of the early life of Pope emphasizes the care with which he learnt the technical expertise of poetic art, forming his versification upon the model of Dryden, but surpassing his original in the smoothness of his numbers. Later, one of his contrasts between Pope and Dryden in the extended comparison between the two great poets which is the culmination of the 'character' section of the biography is between Dryden's relative carelessness and Pope's punctiliousness and diligence with his work. One of the running themes of the entire essay is the success with which Pope revised lines, a further testimony to his artistry and perseverance. Thus Pope's habitual care has, in this instance, been wanting.

On the philosophical side, Johnson's most extended point is that the sentiments presented with such pomp and ceremony in the poem are in fact truisms or current commonplaces. Thus we are informed that 'we are, in comparison with our Creator, very weak and ignorant; that we do not uphold the chain of existence; and that we could not make one another with more skill than we are made'. These Johnson sarcastically calls 'profound principles of natural knowledge', to which Pope adds such moral principles as that 'human advantages are unstable and fallacious, of uncertain duration and doubtful effect'. Johnson summarizes: 'Surely a man of no very comprehensive search may venture to say that he has heard all this before'. And yet Pope lavishes on this work a 'blaze of embellishment', so that — in Johnson's most devastating and terse observation — 'Never were penury of knowledge and vulgarity of sentiment so happily disguised'.¹¹ But Johnson goes further: he is interested in human causes, in what produced this lapse in Pope's otherwise high standards of poetic taste. His opening statement goes to the heart of the matter:

This subject is perhaps not very proper for poetry, and the poet was not sufficiently master of his subject; metaphysical morality was to him a new study, he was proud of his acquisitions, and, supposing himself master of great secrets, was in haste to teach what he had not learned.¹²

Pope's training, as the biography has established, was as a poet, not as a philosopher. Hence metaphysical ideas would be likely to strike him as novel when the experienced philosopher would recognize their familiarity. The excitement so generated by ignorance was lethally mixed with Pope's habitual pride. This pride was justified in some areas. For example, Johnson sums up Pope's early acquisition of poetic powers by commenting on his self-confidence that he 'who forms his opinion of himself in solitude, without knowing the powers of other men, is very liable to error: but it was the felicity of Pope to rate himself at his real value'.¹³ But in the case of the *Essay on Man* and its aspirations to expound philosophical truths, Pope's self-rating was wrong, and his ill-founded self-confidence led him to rush in where angels fear to tread. At the root of this error of judgement, which produced a flawed poem, is that same vanity which expresses itself in such diverse areas of Pope's life as his pleasure at *The Dunciad's* fame and his delight in his grotto at Twickenham, of which Johnson memorably commented:

A grotto is not often the wish or pleasure of an Englishman, who has more frequent need to solicit than exclude the sun; but Pope's excavation was requisite as an entrance to his garden, and, as some men try to be proud of their defects, he extracted an ornament from an inconvenience, and vanity produced a grotto where necessity enforced a passage.¹⁴

And yet, even in the case of such examples which invoke Johnson's strictures, blame is commonly balanced by praise. So, when Johnson addresses *The Dunciad* in the criticism section, he speaks strongly for the poem's achievement. The plan, he says, was based on Dryden's *MacFlecknoe*, but was so enlarged and diversified that it became 'perhaps the best specimen that has yet appeared of personal satire ludicrously pompous'. That word 'personal' is important, and Johnson remains sceptical of Pope's high moral claims: 'That the design was moral, whatever the author might tell either his readers or himself, I am not convinced. The first motive was the desire of revenging the contempt with which Theobald had treated his *Shakespeare*, and regaining the honour which he had lost, by crushing his opponent.' At once, however, the criticism is moderated: 'In this design there was petulance and malignity enough; but I cannot think it very criminal.' Indeed, Johnson goes on to justify the existence of this kind of personal satire. When the bad claim the honour of goodness, then a response is justified; if a bad writer, then let it be another writer who responds. Should the satirist be wrong in estimating the worth of the victim, then satire will have no effect: 'The satire, which brought Theobald and Moore into contempt, dropped impotent from Bentley, like the javelin of Priam.'¹⁵ Johnson sums up:

All truth is valuable, and satirical criticism may be considered as useful when it rectifies error and improves judgement: he that refines the publick taste is a publick benefactor.¹⁶

In its combination of the utilitarian ('useful') and the moral ('rectifies error'), this is a characteristic Johnsonian pronouncement. Typical also is the sheer generosity of its conclusion. But particularly telling is the observation that criticism is useful when it 'improves judgement': for that is what Johnson's own literary criticism is constantly striving to do, nowhere more so than in the 'Life of Pope'. The essay demonstrates, time and again, a careful, meticulous weighing of evidence or interpretations in the interests of balanced judgement.

Johnson's pursuit of judgement is expressed above all in the very style of so much of the writing. We can exemplify this from the passage on the *Essay on Man* discussed earlier. This is how Johnson sums up the poem's mixture of philosophical naivety and rhetorical force:

Surely a man of no very comprehensive search may venture to say that he has heard all this before; but it was never till now recommended by such a blaze of embellishment, or such sweetness of melody.¹⁷

The semi-colon and the 'but' constitute the hinge of the sentence, as the ironic tone of Johnson's exposure of the material's banality is balanced by his testimony to the quality of the poetry. As we have seen, this praise will itself be qualified by Johnson's argument that Pope's writing is uncharacteristically uneven in this poem: the Johnsonian critical process is one of balance and further balance, qualification producing further qualification.

This kind of pattern, conveying a sense of careful judgement, has been argued by Martin Maner to be a central rhetorical method of the *Lives* in general and that of Pope in particular. Maner defines what he calls 'bisociative thinking' as being that which 'entails for Johnson the weighing of the relative likelihood of two juxtaposed possibilities'.¹⁸ This rhetoric reflects a scepticism, an absence of *a priori* certainty, which is a natural consequence of the development of Lockean empiricism and logic. It is this intellectual development which, for Maner, provides biography with its importance and dignity as a genre. 'If induction from experience is the basis for evaluating probability, and if probable knowledge is the basis for most of human conduct, then a literary form based upon induction from particulars may be the most philosophical of literary forms rather than the least.'¹⁹ Judgements have therefore to be the result of a careful balancing of the available evidence, not a means of proving an already assumed case.

Maner is quite right about much of the rhetorical structure of the 'Life of Pope'. Examples abound of sentences or paragraphs whose structure is that of the balanced qualification. We have seen the 'but' form of fulcrum to the sentence. Here is another example, where Johnson is summing up Pope's edition of Shakespeare. As Johnson, himself of course a distinguished editor of Shakespeare, knew

very well, this could by no stretch be called Pope's finest hour, since, as Theobald was quick to show in his *Shakespeare Restored*, Pope's edition was full of errors and false arguments. It was this book that earned Theobald the dubious honour of being made the hero of Pope's *Dunciad*. Johnson acknowledges Pope's failings frankly:

Pope in his edition undoubtedly did many things wrong, and left many things undone; but let him not be defrauded of his due praise: he was the first that knew, at least the first that told, by what helps the text might be improved. If he inspected the early editions negligently, he taught others to be more accurate.²⁰

Again, the semi-colon and the 'but' act as the fulcrum of the sentence, turning the positive back upon the negative. The positive is succinctly stated, Johnson attesting to Pope's originality as an editor in consulting early quartos. As Maner describes it, 'Johnson establishes his reliability by making a concession dialectically opposed to his main point'.²¹ The 'If' sentence, we should add, is likewise balanced at the centre, with its negative subordinate clause setting up a positive main clause.

A further example will show how Johnson plays variations on his theme. Johnson is summing up his view of Pope's early literary apprenticeship:

He had now formed his versification, and in the smoothness in his numbers surpassed his original; but this is a small part of his praise: he discovers such acquaintance both with human life and public affairs as is not easily conceived to have been attainable by a boy of fourteen in Windsor Forest.²²

Here a structure similar to our *Essay on Man* and Shakespeare examples produces a semantic variant. The first proposition is one of praise, not blame: indeed, it could easily have been a single culminating sentence to Johnson's treatment of Pope's poetic learning process — to have achieved technical virtuosity beyond that of the great Dryden. But the turn now reflects Johnson's consistent view that technical expertise is never enough. That Pope surpassed his original is at once dubbed 'a small part of his praise': what is really remarkable about the young Pope is how he achieved a precocious maturity in his knowledge of human affairs. Thus the blame/praise pattern now becomes one of praise/higher praise, the additional tribute qualifying the status of the initial tribute.

Johnson introduces many variants on this structural model. A pleasing example comes from Johnson's account of Pope's dealings with Lord Halifax, who seems to have made overtures to Pope with a view to becoming his patron, overtures rejected by Pope. Now patronage, of course, was a touchy subject for Johnson whose experience of its uncertainties led to the famous letter to Lord Chesterfield, which remains one of the great statements of writerly independence as well as one of the great pieces of ironic writing, demonstrating in its very force the reason why Johnson has now no need of the belated offer of assistance. It is therefore no surprise to find him deriding Halifax as one who sought to become a patron out of a desire for fame and who was in no way fit to be a judge of literary merit. Johnson relates Pope's account, as told to Joseph Spence, of how Halifax requested Pope to read aloud to him the early books of his translation of the *Iliad* and stopped him from time to time when a passage did not please him. Pope's puzzlement at what might be wrong with the passages is answered by the more experienced Dr Garth: 'All you need do (says he) is to leave them just as they are; call on Lord Halifax two or three months hence, thank him for his kind observations on those passages, and then read them to him as altered.'²³ Pope did so, and, sure enough, Halifax pronounced himself well pleased with the "revised" verses. Yet Johnson is not ready to leave his account with the balance so tilted. He is keen to establish the ignorant vanity of the would-be patron, and yet he is also prepared to recognize the possibility that Pope himself had some role in the failure of the literary relationship, given that recurrent flaw which Johnson observes in his character:

The patron was not accustomed to such frigid gratitude, and the poet fed his own pride with the dignity of independence.²⁴

Remarkable here is the extent to which Johnson is willing to acknowledge that the independence he himself so warmly embraced can be reflective of a moral failing. Both parties are exposed in their human frailty: hence the fulcrum of the sentence is at the conjunction 'and', not 'but'. The balance now lies in the perception of the faults of both.

Given all this emphasis upon Pope's pride, a particularly telling example for Johnson's even-handedness comes when he uses that quality as the first part of a qualification. This is when he recounts Pope's loss of his mother. This evokes from Johnson a wholehearted approval of Pope's filial piety — another subject close to Johnson's heart, of course. His statement that Pope's parents had the gratification of living to see their son's fame and yet encountered no diminution in their famous son's respect or tenderness for them leads to this sentence:

Whatever was his pride, to them he was obedient; and whatever was his irritability, to them he was gentle.²⁵

The doubling of the rhetoric with the repeated balance (pride/humility; irritability/gentleness) enforces a strong moment of human praise, all the stronger for its recognition that an habitual vice of Pope's is, at this point, countered by its opposite virtue.

The most extended example in the 'Life' of this kind of pattern comes in the comparison between Pope and Dryden as poets which concludes so resonantly the "character" section of the work. The device of defining a writer's value through a comparison with the qualities of another was familiar enough: indeed, Pope himself had employed it when comparing Homer and Virgil in the Preface to his translation of the *Iliad*. But Johnson's adaptation is much more effective because, in its sustained weighing of the two poets, it produces a large-scale exemplification of the rhetorical method he has used throughout. It thus forms the natural fulfilment of the essay's principal rhetorical device. Johnson proceeds through his comparisons in scrupulous manner reflective of the most careful judgment. So the qualities of 'integrity of understanding and nicety of discernment'²⁶ are seen as displayed in both poets; and yet Dryden's application of this power is viewed as less consistent than Pope's — an inconsistency traced to Dryden's writing 'with very little consideration' as against Pope's minute attention to every detail of his verses. Johnson concludes this section: 'Pope had perhaps the judgement of Dryden; but Dryden certainly wanted the diligence of Pope',²⁷ where the 'but' form carries the double balance of 'perhaps/certainly' and 'judgment/diligence'. As the comparison proceeds, the balances build up: Dryden acquired an extensive knowledge of 'man in his general nature'; Pope of man 'in his local manners'. Dryden's style is, with appropriate liveliness, likened to 'a natural field, rising into inequalities, and diversified by the varied exuberance of abundant vegetation'; Pope's style, conversely, is 'a velvet lawn, shaven by the scythe, and levelled by the roller'. Consequently, with a change of metaphor, Dryden's 'flights' are higher, while Pope 'continues longer on the wing'. As a result 'Dryden is read with frequent astonishment, and Pope with perpetual delight'.²⁸ The pattern here, then, allows Johnson to accord high praise to both his subjects, while defining by contrast the essence of the quality of each. It is, therefore, with a sense of climbing down from the heights of rhetorical display that Johnson concludes his comparison with both a judgement and, crucially, a qualified self-confidence:

This parallel will, I hope, when it is well considered, be found just; and if the reader should suspect me, as I suspect myself, of some partial fondness for the memory of Dryden, let him not too hastily condemn me; for meditation and enquiry may, perhaps, shew him the reasonableness of my determination.²⁹

This remarkable statement goes beyond the confines of judgement as a careful balance of contending empirical evidence. It acknowledges that judgement additionally partakes of the quality of decision; and, further, it points to how these decisions are inextricably linked to the process of judging. Johnson's highly rhetorical comparison has provided us with as carefully managed an estimation of two sets of excellencies as possible, with judgement apparently being repeatedly suspended; and yet the very terms of that rhetoric have implied a valuation: the well-cut lawn is

inevitably less exciting than the wild field, the power of astonishment inevitably more striking than the achievement of delight. The reader thus is led towards an evaluation; but Johnson concludes by showing that he is aware of his own implicitly evaluative prose: no rhetoric can ever suspend judgement entirely because we are, in the end, creatures of judgement in the evaluative sense, too. Our language reflects our nature. Judgement is both a faculty of judging, that discernment which is the process by which we come to our estimation of a subject, and it is a product, the opinion itself, the decision.³⁰ The word semantically includes its own conclusion. Johnson's acknowledgement of this, allied to his due tentativeness ('I hope', 'if', 'perhaps'), is the highest testimony to his perception of the nature of human judgement. The scales of justice in the case of Dryden versus Pope are tilted, but they are tilted with open eyes. Maner's essay acknowledges the degree to which judgements actually lead to decisions: 'Johnson's masterpiece of dialectical rhetoric is his *Life of Pope*, in which he uses contrastive patterns of thought to enforce carefully qualified biographical judgements and to involve the reader in actively preferring one interpretation to another.'³¹ The empirical process, that is, demands of the writer and reader an eventual decision, however qualified. The human mind searches for answers, for moral decisions, because we are perpetually moralists. But a further point is equally important: the quality of judgement as decision actually infiltrates the process of judgement, so that our careful weighing of evidence is itself inherently evaluative. The greatness of Johnson's '*Life of Pope*' ultimately lies in its acknowledgement — by the finest judge in our literature — of the limits of judgement.

A famous example from *Rasselas* will demonstrate that what we are observing is not something particular to the '*Life of Pope*', but a habit of the Johnsonian mind. It will also provide us with the fundamental reason why judgement has these two simultaneous meanings. The lengthy debate about marriage provides a large-scale example of rhetorical balance, within which are many small-scale summary instances. So, when Nekayah in chapter 26 offers the maxim that 'Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures', our familiar 'but' fulcrum is the process by which the formal balance of the sequence of oppositions takes place: 'marriage/celibacy', 'many/no', 'pains/pleasures'. And yet she implies a judgement in the sense of product at the same time, since 'no pleasures' is a more complete negative than 'many pains'. When, therefore, Nekayah goes on in chapter 28 to speak most gloomily of the varieties of marital unhappiness ('I know not . . . whether marriage be more than one of the innumerable modes of human misery'), *Rasselas* rightly reminds her that she earlier 'represented celibacy as less happy than marriage. Both conditions may be bad, but they cannot both be worst.' For *Rasselas*, this seems a triumph of the logical process. But Nekayah rejoins that it is not surprising that we vary in the emphases of our judgements from moment to moment. When we are contemplating subjects which are a function of life, of experience (i.e. those open to empirical observation), we are presented with subjects composed of too many different parts for us ever to see the whole: here, the state of marriage is inevitably larger than the sequence of marriages one has observed. The part we see at any one time will thus influence us towards a different conclusion:

We differ from ourselves just as we differ from each other, when we see only part of the question, as in the multifarious relations of politics and morality: but when we perceive the whole at once, as in numerical computations, all agree in one judgement, and none ever varies his opinion.

Life is not a mathematical equation, in which a perfect balance can be maintained: to claim that judgement can ever be absolute is to pretend that life can be viewed whole, but empiricism tells us that the sum of life can never be contained in a single perception, or a single formula derived from that perception. Hence the most even-handed of syntactic representations of judgement as process, balancing all parts with apparent exactness, can never actually achieve the condition of equation. No statement about life can ever be reduced to the syntactic equivalent of $2x + x = 4x - x$. Partiality of view renders our judgement partial, and this will be reflected in the expression of our judgement. All human judgements are flawed by this limitation of view, and yet, like Nekayah on marriage, all humans are continually drawn to judgement as a condition of our mental life. Johnson's

conclusion to his Dryden/Pope comparison acknowledges this by making a judgement and at the same time declaring his awareness that he is doing so. The generalization, that Johnsonian trademark, is always defined by the limitations of knowledge that have preceded it; and yet it reflects an inevitable human tendency. When Blake seeks to challenge Johnson's generalizations by his famous statement that 'to generalize is to be an idiot', he is himself inevitably making a partial generalization.

Rasselas, it has often been argued, is more a series of essays than a connected narrative. This judgement, since we cannot keep even all of such a relatively short book before our gaze as we can a mathematical equation, is more or less true depending on which part of the book we are observing. But it has enough of truth for it to be of value. If *Rasselas* contains an extended debate on marriage, so too does *The Rambler* in such numbers as 18, 35, 39, 45. To this extent, all Johnson's writing could be seen as tending towards the condition of the essay, that most judgemental of forms in its repeated attempts to marshal evidence and to conclude from that evidence, to be both process and product. And yet, time after time, a *Rambler* essay actually begins with an unsubstantiated generalization as an idea to initiate a chain of argument. Number 114, for example, begins sonorously, 'Power and superiority are so flattering and delightful, that fraught with temptation and exposed to danger as they are, scarcely any virtue is so cautious, or any prudence so timorous, as to decline them.'³²

In the 'Life of Pope' we similarly find that, time after time, the balanced rhetorical procedures we have examined are accompanied at some stage by a generalization, which is sometimes presented as an opening *Rambler*-like proposition, anterior to the discussion and setting up the context within which the analysis takes place, sometimes embedded within the discussion as an explanatory statement, sometimes posterior, as an inductive conclusion to the analysis. The result is that the 'Life' becomes a series of essays linked by the life and works of Pope, deriving their judgemental force from the extent to which the example of Pope provides some, however limited, empirical support for them.

Consider this example from the biographical section of the essay. In his account of Pope's composition of his *Iliad*, Johnson notes a disparity between Pope's claim to have written fifty verses a day and the time it took for the translation to be completed: what should have taken less than a year in fact took from 1712 to 1718. Johnson presents us with the minutiae of the mathematical details, the number of lines in the *Iliad*, the calculation of fifty times that number. Here indeed is empiricism at work. But the detail soon gives way to broad, and, one suspects — given Johnson's repeated self-accusations of lethargy — heart-felt, generalization:

According to this calculation, the progress of Pope may seem to have been slow; but the distance is commonly very great between actual performances and speculative possibility. It is natural to suppose, that as much as has been done to-day may be done to-morrow; but on the morrow some difficulty emerges, or some external impediment obstructs. Indolence, interruption, business, and pleasure, all take their turns of retardation; and every long work is lengthened by a thousand causes that can, and ten thousand that cannot, be recounted. Perhaps no extensive and multifarious performance was ever effected within the term originally fixed in the undertaker's mind. He that runs against Time, has an antagonist not subject to casualties.³³

This marvellous passage is, among other things, a testimony to how personal experience (the writer is the creator, after all, of the *Dictionary* and the edition of Shakespeare, both several years in the making) can expand to an act of fellow-feeling, to explain and excuse the apparent deficiencies of others. In our present context we would also want to note how it employs the rhetoric of judgement ('Pope may seem to have been slow; but the distance . . .'), how general truth is presented with appropriate uncertainty, since no one can encompass the whole of the subject ('Perhaps no extensive & multifarious performance . . .'), and how what begins as an observation about an aspect of Pope's career turns into a small-scale essay on the unequal race between man and time. Here

indeed is biography tending towards the condition of essay. Johnson's observation of Pope's experience joins with his own experience to form the generalization.

Later, during his examination of the writing of *The Dunciad*, Johnson comments on the slowness with which the poem achieved its reputation. This is not surprising, he argues, since the poem was both obscure in its references ('Many of the allusions required illustration; the names were often expressed only by the initial and final letters . . .') and trivial and obscure in its subject-matter ('. . . if they [the names] had been printed at length, were such as few had known or recollected'). How, then, did such a poem become so well-known and well-read by people not directly concerned? Johnson answers this question by noting that what the victims of *The Dunciad* could not do was to keep quiet: instead, they had to make a noise of their sense of injured reputation. Johnson here interposes a proposition: 'every man is of importance to himself, and therefore, in his own opinion, to others'. This generalization is the means by which the empirical evidence can be interpreted: but that evidence is actually the only justification in the text for the generalization. It establishes a cause for the consequence, that the dunces exposed their resentment and so made themselves a laughing-stock, 'for no man', Johnson concludes, 'sympathises with the sorrows of vanity', so adding a further explanatory generalization.³⁴

Johnson's discussion of the publication of the *Epistle to Bathurst* in 1733 concentrates on the most celebrated part of that poem, the passage in praise of the charitable Man of Ross, John Kyrle, who, the poem claims, dispensed his charity from a fortune of only five hundred pounds. Here Johnson's pursuit of truth has led him to an alternative explanation of Kyrle's charity, that his integrity and benevolence became so well known that he was enabled to persuade the wealthy to contribute to his charitable schemes, so that he was thereby able to obtain greater charity than his own fortune unaided could afford. Johnson, typically, adds his source for this truth ('This account Mr. Victor received from the minister of the place') in order to authenticate its empirical basis. This explanation is topped and tailed with two interrelated propositions, the first of which indicates why Pope's version of the story should have been believed ('Wonders are willingly told and willingly heard'); and the second why Pope's miraculous version of the event undermines the moral value of his poem ('Narrations of romantick and impracticable virtue will be read with wonder, but that which is unattainable is recommended in vain: that good may be endeavoured it must be shewn to be possible').³⁵ Here Johnson's judgemental methods expose an inadequacy in the poem as well as in the poet.

Two final instances in the criticism and character sections will show the range of Johnson's judgemental methods and re-emphasize two key points. In his examination of *Windsor Forest*, Johnson notes Dennis's criticism of the poem that there is a lack of plan, a lack of an overall design. Johnson relates this particular piece of criticism to his own habitual — he makes the same point about Thomson's *Seasons* in his 'Life of Thomson' — generalization about the limitations of descriptive poetry: 'There is this want in most descriptive poems, because as the scenes, which they must exhibit successively, are all subsisting at the same time, the order in which they are shewn must by necessity be arbitrary, and more is not to be expected from the last part than from the first.'³⁷ The ambition of this critical generalization is actually immense: it says in a sentence much of what Lessing took a book to examine in his *Laokoon* (1766), the classic text on the difference between linguistic and plastic art. But Johnson checks the ambition just a touch with that word 'most' ('most descriptive poems'); since we cannot see the whole of the subject, the conclusion requires just that touch of caution, even given Johnson's repeated hostility to such writing. The human being as critic inevitably seeks to judge, to provide us with the product that is the art of criticism; and the terse analysis of why there must always be a distinction between visual perception (which is simultaneous) and verbal representation (which is sequential) provides us with the process of judgement. And yet Johnson has not read all descriptive poems: the genre, 'descriptive poetry', is too great for his perception of it as a whole. Because, like Nekayah, he

sees only part of the question, his judgement requires to be tempered. It is remarkable how Johnson, who, in the popular imagination, acquired the reputation of dogmatism, is actually repeatedly concerned to enter into his writing the note of qualification. He thinks that descriptive poetry must always be lacking in form, and is prepared to say forcefully why this should be so; but he also knows that he thinks this from a perspective that cannot encompass the empirical totality of the subject.

An example from the 'character' returns us to the moral issues that, as we have seen, Johnson takes as emerging from Pope's life and work. Johnson is here discussing Pope's letters, which were as much a self-conscious part of Pope's literary output as were his poems. Johnson notes in them a repeated pose, one which we see reflected in much of Pope's satires and, indeed, satirical writing generally: 'He very frequently professes contempt of the world, and represents himself as looking on mankind, sometimes with gay indifference, as on emmets of a hillock below his serious attention, and sometimes with gloomy indignation, as on monsters more worthy of hatred than of pity.' Now such a posture would have always been anathema to the humane Johnson, but he is concerned at this juncture to explore another of those contradictions in Pope that expose his pride. He points out that the very people whom he affects to despise are those whose praise his vanity requires: 'How could he despise those whom he lived by pleasing, and on whose approbation his esteem of himself was superstructured? Why should he hate those to whose favour he owed his honour and his ease?' These rhetorical questions lead to a terse and conclusive piece of logic: 'Of things that terminate in human life the world is the proper judge: to despise its sentence, if it were possible, is not just; and if it were just is not possible.'³⁸ The purpose of writing is to please humankind (this is Johnson's repeated position): or, at any rate, humankind is its only audience. Thus judgement is the prerogative of humankind, and that judgement by the common reader should be acknowledged. Such a judgement cannot be absolute, and may change. But it is the only judgement that we have, and a writer who claims to despise it only reveals his pride and sense of superiority.

Johnson's *Lives*, in particular this packed, rhetorically dense 'Life of Pope', may be regarded as the culmination of his writing career for a number of reasons: they collect so many of his critical criteria, they combine them with that devotion to biography, the lives of human beings, which was so central to his essential humanism, they manifest Johnson the comic observer of human frailty as well as the serious observer of human limitations. Perhaps above all for our present purposes, the 'Life of Pope' brings to a culmination Johnson's use of the rhetoric of judgement as a moral act. To the extent that biography and criticism merge into a series of essays, mixing empirical analysis with broad generalization, they encapsulate Johnson's view of the purpose of writing. To the extent that the rhetorical methods he employs present the process of judgement in the careful weighing of evidence, together with the product of judgement in the generalizations, they embody the two-fold nature of judgement. To the extent that Johnson repeatedly makes the reader aware that those final judgements are inevitably partial, even when deeply-held, he acknowledges both the power and the limitations of empiricism. The observation of the limits of human judgement and the simultaneous inescapability of judgement as the reiterated act of our intellectual being is ultimately a moral perception, a perception about what humanity finally consists in. That is why we are perpetually moralists.

Notes

1. Samuel Johnson, *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. by R. W. Chapman, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), II, p. 515. 3 May 1777.
2. Warton's advertisement is conveniently printed in the Longman Annotated English Poets volume, *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (London: Longman, 1969), p. 410.
3. *Criticism and Aesthetics 1660-1800*, ed. by Oliver F. Sigworth (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1971), p. 291

4. Benjamin Joyce, 'Samuel Johnson's Criticism of Pope in the *Life of Pope*' *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 5 (1954), 37-46, argues that the 'Life' is a desultory work, only really engaging with the subject when Johnson finds something to refute in another critic. 'Johnson did not initiate so much as he attempted to adjudicate; he was often writing a critique of the critics'. (p. 46) The present essay argues that, although Johnson certainly was implicitly responding to critics, the 'Life' uses such critical arguments to form a reasoned defence of Johnsonian criticism. Johnson's review of the first volume of Warton's essay is restrained, confining its criticisms to small points of detail (such as defending Pope's simile of the Alps in the *Essay on Criticism*, a passage he develops in the 'Life'), probably because of his friendship with Warton. Boswell records Johnson's praise for Warton and for his essay, but also that Johnson thought that Warton was unable to continue the work because of his failure to convince the world of his opinion of Pope (I, 278, 422), implying Johnson's view that Warton's evaluation of Pope was somewhat eccentric.
5. *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. by George Birbeck Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), III, pp. 148-9. The account was published in *A Collection of Pieces of Verse and Prose which have been published in occasion of the Dunciad* (1732).
6. Hill, III, p. 150.
7. Compare how Johnson aims Pope's own words back at him: see Colin J. Horne, 'The Biter Bit: Johnson's strictures on Pope', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 27 (1976), 310-13.
8. *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated*, I. p. 105.
9. Hill, I, p. 100.
10. Hill, III, pp. 244-45.
11. Hill, III, pp. 243-44.
12. Hill, III, pp. 242-43.
13. Hill, III, p. 89.
14. Hill, III, p. 135.
15. Hill, III, pp. 241-2.
16. Hill, III, p. 242.
17. Hill, III, p. 244.
18. Martin Maner, *The Philosophical Biographer: Doubt and Dialectic in Johnson's "Lives of the Poets"* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1988), p. 10.
19. Maner, p. 7.
20. Hill, III, p. 139.
21. Maner, p. 124.
22. Hill, III, p. 88.
23. Hill, III, pp. 126-7.
24. Hill, III, p. 127.
25. Hill, III, p. 154.
26. Hill, III, p. 220.
27. Hill, III, p. 222.
28. Hill, III, pp. 222-23.
29. Hill, III, p. 223.
30. *OED*, 'judgement', 8 and 7 respectively.
31. Maner, p. 121.
32. This combination of judgement as argument and judgement as generalization is evidenced in the mixed logical modes of Johnson's essay-writing: Steven Lynn has argued in his essay on Johnson's rhetoric in *The Rambler* ('Johnson's Rambler and Eighteenth-Century Rhetoric', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 19 [1986], 461-79) that everywhere we see Johnson testing propositions by their 'congruence with empirical data' (p. 468), and yet Johnson's style remains distinctly imbued with the use of 'paradigms and formulas' which are 'rhetorical and not investigative' (p. 470). These paradigms often take the form of an initial proposition to be logically considered in the mode of traditional logic. Thus a typical *Rambler* essay will operate by means of elaborations and tests of

starting propositions, thus constituting a method which 'is hardly in the final analysis deductive or inductive, Aristotelian or Lockean, although it draws from both' (p. 472).

33. Hill, III, p. 117.

34. Hill, III, pp. 146-7.

35. Hill, III, pp. 172-3.

36. Hill, III, p. 180.

37. Hill, III, p. 225.

38. Hill, III, p. 210.

**'MY DEAR DR. JOHNSON': THE LINK BETWEEN JANE AUSTEN
AND DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON**

Mrs Susan Watkins — 19th November 1994

Chairman Miss Stella Pigrome

Susan Watkins has, for more than two decades, combined research into Jane Austen's life and novels into a general enthusiasm for design and social history in the Georgian era. Educated in Florida, with degrees in that State and in Vienna and Rome, she has worked as a journalist both in the U.S. and in this country. She is experienced in the refurbishment of period properties and divides her time between her homes in Scotland, London and Florida.

'My Dear Dr. Johnson',¹ is how Jane Austen once referred to the most exalted man of letters of the eighteenth century. Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, Goldsmith are variously admired for their works along with many other literary figures, but Dr. Samuel Johnson is exclusively, 'My Dear'.

They were not personally acquainted; Jane Austen was nine years old when Dr. Johnson died, and she lived nearly eighteen of her forty-one years in another era. Yet the spirit of Johnson pervades her moral values, politics, religion and her writing because Jane Austen, like Samuel Johnson was committed to the eighteenth century doctrine — property is everything. Wealth, culture, status, political power, and even marriage prospects were determined by the amount of one's property creating a society arranged in a natural hierarchical order, and sustained by religion based on principles of virtue and duty.

In 1775, the year of Jane Austen's birth, this solid, traditional creed was being questioned, and among the upper classes considered unfashionably conservative. Liberty was in the air, and sensibility was gaining on reason. But for Jane, daughter of a Hampshire clergyman, the distance from town without good roads and modern communications could be measured in years as far as social and political change were concerned.

By the end of the 1780s when Jane began writing, roads had improved, coaches were comfortably upholstered, and travel at ever greater distances was pursued for leisure, bringing country attitudes more in line with the metropolis. But instead of liberalism, the popular ideology had shifted back to conservatism — a reversal brought about by three enormous forces: the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the rise of a prosperous middle class.

The French Revolution of 1789 rattled the foundations of England as well as Europe, with its far-reaching energy of revolt against established institutions. The conflict was brought directly to Jane's doorstep in the form of her much loved cousin, Eliza, Madame la Comtesse de Feuillide. The Comte, like Robespierre, was executed on the guillotine in 1794, a year after the commencement of the Reign of Terror. Jane was to fear France the rest of her life.

Rapid expansion of trade and the opening of new markets demanded increased productivity and investment in new technology. Britain was becoming an industrialized nation, while the cozy old agrarian world was slipping away. Industrial magnates emerged from the lower middle classes, and enterprising gentry moved to the cities, setting up shops to take advantage of the increased money flow. Jane's brother, Henry, became a banker. This expanded middle class acquired the trappings of wealth — land, a mansion — but rejected the frivolous 'French' habits of the aristocrats; seeking instead the order and symmetry of the past. Also at this time, there was an increasing fondness for nostalgia which often occurs at the end of a period of one hundred years and the beginning of another; the past feels locked away when it belongs to another century. Throughout her novels Jane dislikes change, new, unmerited wealth and frivolity. It is the values and certainties of a well-ordered England that are 'Dear'. Thus, Jane Austen remains neatly in the Age of Johnson.

It was a sweet view — sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright without being oppressive.²

This is the view Emma Woodhouse obtained from Mr. Knightley's land. As for Mr. Knightley's mansion, 'Emma felt an increasing respect for it, as the residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding. — Some faults of temper John Knightley had; but he was the embodiment of true eighteenth century values — even as late as 1814, when Jane Austen's novel, *Emma*, was written.

Samuel Johnson was one of Jane's favourite writers of prose.³ At a youngish age she read *Rasselas*, evidenced by her own surviving copy with her name written on the title page in a juvenile hand. This essay on the 'choice of life' — a phrase repeated throughout the work, is a theme which continuously appears in Jane's novels. Her characters make incorrect choices, reflect, then make correct choices along the road to obtaining happiness. And Jane's writing is peppered with moral vocabulary: benevolence, patience, prudence, openness, integrity, fortitude, wisdom, reason, etc., creating footholds of psychological development and virtue, as in *Rasselas* and other works by Dr. Johnson. Frederick M. Keener, in his book *The Chain of Becoming*, claims that much of Jane Austen's novels are shaped by the moral or psychological tale, especially *Northanger Abbey*, 'a sister of *Rasselas* in form, meaning, and conceptual framework: that of eighteenth-century psychology'.⁴ Language structures in Jane Austen's writing are also compatible with the 'Age of Reason', as Norman Page points out in his essay, *Jane Austen's language*, where he illustrates a firm Johnsonian antithesis taken from *Sense and Sensibility*:

I have more pleasure in a snug farm-house than a watch tower — and a troop of tidy, happy villagers please me better than the finest banditti in the world.⁵

And C. S. Lewis concludes: 'In [Jane Austen] we still breathe the air the *Rambler* and *Idler*'.⁶

In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price, the novel's heroine, reads the *Idler* for amusement during her many solitary hours.⁷ The *Idler*, *Rambler*, *Spectator*, and many other periodicals were continuously reprinted, and found an ever wider audience. Hence, in 1813 when *Mansfield Park* was published, we find Miss Price enjoying Dr. Johnson's essays which first appeared in 1758. While Jane approved of the *Idler*, in *Northanger Abbey* she found the *Spectator*, written between 1711 and 1714, full of 'topics of conversation which no longer concern any one living, with language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no favourable idea of the age that could endure it'.⁸ On must take this statement in its context — contrasting the merits of the novel over the more respectable *Spectator*, and not necessarily as the author's actual views. Dr. Johnson described *The Tatler* and *Spectator* as 'among the first books by which both sexes are initiated in the elegances of knowledge', and said that these volumes of papers 'taught with great justness of argument and dignity of language, the most important duties and sublime truths'. Jane certainly read the *Spectator*, *Idler*, *Rambler* and other periodicals; she was particularly well acquainted with a weekly periodical called *The Loiterer*. In 1789, her brother, James Austen, founded and edited *The Loiterer* in Oxford, and together with another brother, Henry, wrote most of its sixty numbers

mimicking the style of the century's great periodical prose writers. Topics in the *Rambler* — knowledge, journalists, rules of writing, marriage — were taken up again in *The Loiterer*. In *Idler* No. 60, 'How to Become a Critic', Johnson maintains 'that the profession gives vent to malignity without real mischief. No genius was ever blasted by the breath of critics'. This opinion is rejected in No. 13 of *The Loiterer*, 'Use and Abuse of Reviews', which argues that 'the minds of well-meaning individuals [have been] tortured on the racks of criticism — hopes of fame blasted in a single moment'.

That Jane must have read and reread *The Loiterer* is implied by her use of the phrase 'pronounced . . . this bitter philippic' in *Sense and Sensibility*: 'Mrs. Ferrars looked exceedingly angry . . . and pronounced in retort this bitter philippic; "Miss Morton is Lord Morton's daughter."⁹ in No. 58 of *The Loiterer* it appears: 'having pronounced this bitter philippic, he looked round with the triumphant air of a man who does not think his arguments very readily answered.' Several Jane Austen biographers have suggested that she not only studied *The Loiterer*, but may also have been one of its contributors, pointing out that No. 9, 'A Letter from Sophia Sentiment', is remarkably in keeping with the style and vocabulary of her teenage writing and the scope of her reading. Years later Henry Austen confided, 'it is difficult to say at what age she was not intimately acquainted with the merits and defects of the best essays and novels in the English language'. In the ninth number: issued on the 28th of March, 1789, Sophia Sentiment writes:

Sir, I write to inform you that you are much out of my good graces, and that if you do not mend your manners, I shall soon drop your acquaintance. You must know, Sir, I am a great reader and not to mention some hundred volumes of Novels and Plays have, in the last two summers, actually got through all the entertaining papers of our most celebrated periodical writers. Indeed I love a periodical work beyond anything . . . I assure you my heart beat with joy when I first heard of your publication, which I immediately sent for . . . but really, Sir, I think it the stupidest work of the kind I ever saw . . . only conceive, in eight papers, not one sentimental story about love and honour, and all that — not one Eastern Tale full of Bashas and Hermits, Pyramids and Mosques — no, not even an allegory or dream have yet made their appearance in the *Loiterer* . . . I therefore give you this advice, let us see some nice, affecting stories, relating to misfortunes of two lovers, who died suddenly, just as they were going to church. Let the lover be killed in a duel, or lost at sea, or you may make him shoot himself, just as you please; and as for his mistress, she will of course go mad; or if you will, you may kill the lady, and let the lover run mad; only remember, whatever you do, that your hero and heroine must possess a great deal of feeling, and have very pretty names. If you think fit to comply with this my injunction, you may expect to hear from me again, and perhaps I may even give you a little assistance — but, if not — may your work be condemned to the pastry-cook's shop and may you always continue a bachelor, and be plagued with a maiden sister to keep house for you.

Yours, as you behave,
Sophia Sentiment.

About two years before 'Sophia Sentiment' appeared, Jane, already a chronic writer, began saving her compositions later transcribing them into notebooks which she called *Volume the First*, *Volume the Second*, *Volume the Third*. They consist mainly of burlesques through which she gradually developed skilful, satirical sketches of character. *Volume the Second* includes *The History of England from the reign of Henry the 4th to the death of Charles the 1st*, which was perhaps her schoolroom response to the study of Goldsmith's *History of England*. In the margin of the family's copy she wrote more than thirty comments. Flaunting her political views she wrote: 'Nobly said! Spoken like a Tory!'. To which one imagines Samuel Johnson adding: 'and not an accursed Whig!' Jane shared Dr. Johnson's 'tenderness'¹⁰ for the House of Stuart. When Goldsmith wrote of the reign of the Stuarts, Jane penned in the margin:

A family who were always ill used Betrayed or Neglected — whose virtues are seldom allowed while their errors are never forgotten.

Jane's own passage dealing with Mary Queen of Scots is the longest in the *History*. In it she concludes that Mary Stuart 'was entirely innocent; having never been guilty of anything more than Imprudencies into which she was betrayed by the openness of her Heart, her Youth and her Education!'.¹¹ 'Such a Queen!' pronounced Dr. Johnson during his tour of Scotland, 'as every man of any gallantry of spirit would have sacrificed his life for.'¹²

The last entry in *Volume the Third* is a short novel called *Catherine*. During the 1790s Britain was seized by a novel-writing frenzy, and Jane Austen was swept along with the tide. In 1794 she wrote *Lady Susan*, an epistolary novel with a serious theme. In 1795, a longer work, *Elinor and Marianne*, was also written in letters, but converted in 1797 to straightforward narrative, and retitled *Sense and Sensibility*. *First Impressions* was begun in 1796, and completed in 1797. 1798 saw the beginning of *Susan*, which was probably completed in 1799.

The circulating library, supported by the growing flood of sensational literature and despised by Sheridan's Sir Anthony Absolute — 'A circulating library in a town is an ever-green tree of diabolical knowledge!' —¹³ was in its heyday during Jane Austen's lifetime. Being an insatiable reader Jane made no apology for hours spent in country libraries pouring over useless novels. In a letter to her sister she wrote: 'As an inducement to subscribe Mrs. Martin tells us that her Collection is not to consist only of Novels, but of every kind of Literature, &c. &c. — she might have spared this pretention to our family, who are great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so.'

Dr. Johnson, who believed that the primary function of literature was to instruct, was naturally uncomfortable with the popular consumption of fiction which sought merely to entertain. In 1750 he cautioned:

care ought to be taken that, when the choice is unrestrained, the best examples only should be exhibited; and that which is likely to operate so strongly should not be mischievous or uncertain in its effects . . . greater care is still required in representing life; which is so often discoloured by passion, or deformed by wickedness.¹⁴

In Jane Austen's unfinished *Sanditon*, begun in 1817, Sir Edward claims:

I am no indiscriminate Novel-Reader. The mere Trash of the common Circulating Library, I hold in the highest contempt. You will never hear me advocating those puerile Emanations which detail nothing but discordant Principles incapable of Amalgamation, or those vapid tissues of ordinary Occurrences from which no useful Deductions can be drawn —

The narrator goes on to say:

The truth was, that Sir Edw: whom circumstances had confined very much to one spot had read more sentimental Novels than agreed with him. His fancy had been early caught by all the impassioned, & most exceptionable parts of Richardsons; & such Authors as have since appeared to tread in Richardson's steps . . . Sir Edw:'s great object in life was to be seductive. — With such personal advantages as he knew himself to possess, & such Talents as he did also give himself credit for, he regarded it as his Duty. — He felt that he was formed to be a dangerous Man — quite in the line of the Lovelaces.¹⁵

In fairness to the writers of 'sentimental' fiction, Sir Edward, (like Johnson's Dick Minim¹⁶) derived only 'false principles' from every kind of literature: From 'all the Essays, Letters, Tours & Criticisms of the day, . . . he gathered only hard words & involved sentences from the style of our most approved Writers'.¹⁷

Regardless of the inadequacies of readers, the novel in Jane Austen's estimation is a 'work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human

nature; the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language'.¹⁸

'Having no profession [she] became an [authoress]'.¹⁹ Strictly speaking, professional employment was not open to women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and earnings from writing were insufficient and too varied to be relied upon. But, being one of two unmarried daughters of a country parson's widow meant existing on narrow legacies and the charity of brothers. For 'small luxuries', i.e. money — if it could be earned from royalties — would be welcomed. In 1809, or shortly thereafter, Jane returned to literary composition, and with considerable encouragement from her family attempted to secure publication of *Susan*. In 1810 she was more successful, for *Sense and Sensibility* was accepted by a publisher, and furthermore — actually published — appearing in 1811 it sold in three volumes for fifteen shillings. The author of the work is simply, 'A Lady', concealing Jane's identity from the world.

'Most of the popular novels which preceded Fanny Burney's *Evelina*', (published in 1778), says Macaulay, 'were such as no lady would have written; and many of them were such as no lady could without confusion own that she had read'.²⁰ In Miss Burney's *Cecilia* — reputed to have been written under the scrutiny of Dr. Johnson — 'a lady, whether so called from birth or only from fortune, should never degrade herself by being put on a level with writers and such sort of people.' Though the huge acclaim for Fanny Burney's first novel did much to remove this stigma, it still lingered in the country, and Jane, a very private person, shrank from the public gaze.

Sense and Sensibility sold steadily, and was treated kindly by its reviewers, 'It is well written; the characters are in genteel life, naturally drawn and judiciously supported . . . It reflects honour on the writer, who displays much knowledge of character, and very happily blends a great deal of good sense with the lighter matter of the piece'. On the strength of this, *Pride and Prejudice* was published and first advertised in *The Morning Chronicle* of 28th January, 1813, as 'by the Author of *Sense and Sensibility*'.

It is generally claimed that the title *Pride and Prejudice* was taken from Fanny Burney's *Cecilia*, where it appears towards the end in large capital letters: 'The whole of this unfortunate business had been the result of Pride and Prejudice.' The words 'pride and prejudice' are repeated in large capitals twice more on the same page. Jane was a great admirer of Miss Burney's novels, referring to them in her own works²¹ and correspondence²², but whether or not she borrowed 'Pride and Prejudice' for her title is difficult to determine with certainty. The word 'pride' and the word 'prejudice' frequently appear in Jane's writing, and are found throughout moral essays of the eighteenth century. In the first volume of Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), the words are used in conjunction — pride and prejudice — but reversed in Dr. Johnson's *Idler*, No. 5 'A Female Army': 'The prejudices and pride of man have long presumed the sword and spindle made for different hands.' Perhaps more interesting than the origins of the title of *Pride and Prejudice* is its first sentence: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife', which bears an interesting resemblance to the beginning of *Rambler*, No. 115, 'I was known to profess a fortune and want a wife.'

In 1814, *Mansfield Park* was published, followed by *Emma* in 1815. *Susan*, retitled *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion* were published together after Jane's death 1817. Much later, in 1871, *Lady Susan*, *The Watsons*, and *Sanditon* were published along with the other minor works. Jane never achieved anything like the celebrity of Fanny Burney. Indeed, her identity as an authoress was not publicly disclosed until Henry Austen wrote her obituary for the newspapers. Still, her novels became increasingly popular, and her 'Secret spread so far as to be scarcely the Shadow of a secret —'. Henry heard *Pride and Prejudice* praised as far north as Scotland, where he proudly let it slip that the author was his sister. Back in London, 'a nobleman', requested, through Henry, that she

attend a literary evening at his town house. The host was very anxious to meet Miss Jane Austen and as an incentive added that Madame de Stäel was to be present. Jane promptly refused. Madame de Stäel acted as lioness over an intellectual hotbed at Juniper Hall — where Fanny Burney met her husband, General D'Arblay. The gatherings at Juniper Hall were even more intense than those at Streatham. When Fanny Burney was faced with meeting the redoubtable bluestocking, Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, Dr. Johnson instructed: 'Down with her, Burney! down with her! — spare her not! — attack her, fight her, and down with her at once! . . . always fly at the eagle!'.²³ He also advised her to 'learn to be a swaggerer'.²⁴

Jane had plenty of swagger within the confines of the family circle where she happily discussed her works, and was eager to talk on an array of subjects that displayed her store of knowledge. During the eighteenth century conversational powers were highly valued as a sign of education, good breeding and manners. Henry said of his sister: 'she excelled in conversation as much as in composition; she was faultless, and never commented with unkindness even on the vices of others; she always sought in the faults of others something to excuse, forgive, or forget. She never uttered a hasty, a silly, or a severe expression . . .'. Dr. Johnson would have found her company relaxing and to his taste: 'The happiest conversation [is that] where there is no competition, no vanity, but a calm quiet interchange of sentiments'.²⁵ But Dr. Johnson had little patience with inexplicit, civil talk, nor did Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*. In a dialogue between Catherine Morland, Henry Tilney, and Miss Tilney, Henry rebukes Catherine for her use of the word 'nice'. There is much of Samuel Johnson in Henry.

'But now really, do not you think Udolpho the nicest book in the world?'

'The nicest; by which I suppose you mean the neatest. That must depend upon the binding.'

'Henry,' said Miss Tilney, 'You are very impertinent. Miss Morland, he is treating you exactly as he does his sister. He is for ever finding fault with me, for some incorrectness of language, and now he is taking the same liberty with you. The word "nicest," as you used it, did not suit him; and you had better change it as soon as you can—' . . .

'I am sure,' cried Catherine, 'I did not mean to say any thing wrong; but it is a nice book, and why should not I call it so?'

'Very true,' said Henry, 'and this is a very nice day, and we are taking a very nice walk, and you are two very nice young ladies. Oh! it is a very nice word indeed! it does for everything. Originally perhaps it was applied only to express neatness, propriety, delicacy, or refinement; people were nice in their dress, in their sentiments, or their choice. But now every commendation on every subject is comprised in that one word.'²⁶

Jane Austen read Boswell's *Journal of a Tour of The Hebrides* and *The Life of Johnson*, as well as Mrs. Piozzi's *Letters to and From the Late Samuel Johnson*. These works contain several hundreds of letters which Jane often quotes and mimics in her own correspondence.²⁷ Considering the volume of material, one can only be astounded at the power of her concentration and memory.

Although Jane Austen was only nine years old when Samuel Johnson died, through his works and words she grew up in his company receiving all the positive benefits of her 'Dear Dr. Johnson'[s] guidance. Eventually, she became the kind of author he admired, 'acquiring that learning which is to be gained from books, that experience which can never be attained by solitary diligence, but must arise from general converse, and accurate observation of the living world'.²⁸

Some years after the death of her beloved and intimate friend, Mrs. Anne Lefroy, Jane, in her long-continuing grief, wrote the following verses adapted from James Boswell:

At Johnson's Death, by Hamilton 'twas said,

'Seek we a substitute — Ah! vain the plan,

No second best remains to Johnson dead —

None can remind us even of the Man.

So we of thee-unequalled in thy race,
Unequall'd thou, as he the first of Men.
Vainly we search around thy vacant place,
We ne'er may look upon the like again.²⁹

Notes

1. R. W. Chapman, *Jane Austen's Letters* 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1952) Sunday 8 February, 1807, p. 181, (refers to letter of 4 July 1774 from Samuel Johnson to James Boswell concerning *Journey to the Western Islands* — see *The Life of Samuel Johnson*).
2. Jane Austen, *Emma* (London: Folio Society, 1975), p. 285.
3. James Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (London: Century, 1987), p. 89.
4. Frederick M. Keener, *The Chain of Becoming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 249.
5. Norman Page, 'Jane Austen's Language', in *The Jane Austen Handbook*, ed. by J. David Grey, (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), p. 267.
6. C. S. Lewis, 'A Note on Jane Austen', in *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. by Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 28.
7. Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London: Folio Society, 1975), p. 131.
8. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (London: Folio Society, 1975), p. 33.
9. Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (London: Folio Society, 1975), p. 187.
10. James Boswell, *The Life of Dr. Johnson* (London: Everyman's Library, 1906), I, p. 103.
11. Jane Austen, 'The History of England from the reign of Henry the 4th to the death of Charles the 1st', in *Volume the Second, the Novels of Jane Austen*, VI, *Minor Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 146.
12. Margaret Lane, *Samuel Johnson and His World* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), p. 209.
13. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals in The Plays of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1900), p. 23.
14. Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, No. 4, in *Samuel Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 176-77.
15. Jane Austen, *Sanditon*, in *The Novels of Jane Austen*, VI, *Minor Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 403-405.
16. Samuel Johnson, *The Idler*, No. 60, 'How to Become a Critic' (I), in *Samuel Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 290-93.
17. Austen, *Sanditon*, pp. 404-5.
18. Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 32.
19. Samuel Johnson, *An Account of the Life of Mr. Richard Savage, Son of the Earl Rivers*, in *Samuel Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 132.
20. Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay', in *Macaulay's Essays*, IV, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1985), p. 160.
21. R. W. Chapman, 3rd ed. *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933) (NA 1.V, 1.VII, 1.XIV), and R. W. Chapman rev. ed. by B. C. Southam, *Sanditon*, p. 390.
22. Chapman, *Jane Austen's Letters*, pp. 9, 13, 14, 64, 180, 254, 334, 388, 438.
23. Macaulay, p. 115.
24. *Ibid.*
25. James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. by G. B. Hill and rev. by L. F. Powell, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), II, p. 359.
26. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, pp. 95-96.
27. Chapman, *Jane Austen's Letters*, pp. 64, 362, 368.
28. Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* No. 4 in *Samuel Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 175.

29. Jane Austen, 'To the Memory of Mrs. Lefroy' in *The Novels of Jane Austen*, VI, *Minor Works*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 442.

'FINDING GENIUS IN THE SPORTS OF THE FIELD AND AMONG THE MANUFACTURERS IN THE SHOP': JOHNSON'S INTEREST IN SHAKESPEARE'S LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Dr Nigel Wood — 10th December 1994

Chairman: Richard Thrale

Dr Nigel Wood's paper will be printed in next year's *New Rambler* [volume DXI]: the editor much regrets this delay.

DRAWING ON ONE'S CAPITAL: HOGARTH'S LONDON

Dr Roy Porter — 21st January 1995

Chairman: Trevor Russell-Cobb

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There have been many great painters of London, as is amply proved by the present Whistler exhibition at the Tate Gallery. But who would deny that the artist with London truly in his blood, the one who best embodied the spirit of the capital, was William Hogarth? Hogarth and London were like man and wife — his relationship to the capital seems even closer than that enjoyed by those other devotees of London, Samuel Johnson and Charles Dickens. After all, unlike those writers, Hogarth was a true Cockney, born at the end of the seventeenth century in Bartholomew Close, Smithfield, near the very heart of the historic city; and he lived his entire life in the metropolis, fashionably moving west to reside first in Covent Garden and later in Leicester Fields (that is, Leicester Square) before finally retiring to the leafy riverside village of Chiswick, then several miles out of town. His cast-iron sense of identity is established by the very opening statement of his autobiography: 'I was born in the City of London, on the 10th day of November 1697'.

London pervades Hogarth's art; it was the *genius loci* that gave him lasting inspiration — he never was at ease when tackling grand, historical themes in exotic settings, like 'The Pool of Bethesda', on display at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. Often he depicted some location with minute topographical exactitude. Thus his 'March to Finchley' portrayed the English foot-guards bidding farewell to friends and family before marching against Bonnie Prince Charlie, right in front of the very recognizable King's Head Tavern at Tottenham Court turnpike.

The townscape can even be glimpsed beyond many of Hogarth's interiors. In the final print of the 'Marriage à la Mode' series, the suicide of Countess Squanderfield in her father's old-fashioned city house, the artist has politely opened a casement window, affording us a view down onto London Bridge, where the houses lean vertiginously. Modern marriage was evidently falling down, and London Bridge in sympathy.

Sometimes the reference was less precise. There was no street actually called 'Gin Lane'; but when Hogarth conjured up the urban nightmare caused by addiction to Mother Gin — one in which distillers, pawnbrokers and undertakers were the only flourishing tradesmen — he drew in the

distance the unmistakable steeple of Hawksmoor's St George's, Bloomsbury; implying that Gin Lane should be associated with the notorious rookery of St Giles (just east of today's St Giles Circus).

Eighteenth-century graphic satire — the work of Rowlandson or Gillray — was generally schematic or sketchy in its backdrops, but Hogarth by contrast typically paid microscopic attention to the details of time and place. And that is why when we think of Georgian London, it is so often snatches of Hogarth's images that flood into our mind's eye. Ponder the hurly-burly of street life, and 'Noon' from 'Times of the Day' fills the imagination. Set in Hog Lane, also in St Giles, it shows a congregation pouring out of the French church, opposite the Baptist's Head tavern with its sign 'Good Eating'; a girl being accosted by a servant, a boy breaking and dropping a pie-dish, a marital ding-dong going on at an open window, and a general air of hubbub and commotion. In engraving after engraving, Hogarth fused bodies, buildings and neighbourhoods, together with myriad other comic ingredients, to create a satirical stockpot centred upon the city of capital contrasts and moral lessons.

Hogarth's engravings bring us face to face with many metropolitan nooks and crannies. In the Fleet Street district, Newgate is shown in the scene from the *Beggar's Opera*; the Old Bailey in 'Industry and Idleness'; Bridewell figures in the 'Harlot's Progress', the Fleet Prison in the 'Rake's Progress'; Temple Bar forms the location for the eleventh plate of *Hudibras* ('Burning of the Rumps'). 'Industry and Idleness' — the tale of the industrious and the idle apprentice — takes us into Hanging Sword Alley, Water Lane and Fleet Street; Chick Lane, West Smithfield, figures in the same series; Little Britain Gate (King's Arms) and the Cock Lane Ghost frame 'A Medley'. Near the Bank we find the Lord Mayor's Show in Cheapside ('Industry and Idleness'), the Bell in Wood Street ('Harlot's Progress'), the base of the Monument on Fish Street Hill and Fishmongers' Hall ('Industry and Idleness'), and Bedlam, Moorfields ('Rake's Progress').

West of the City Hogarth uses settings in St Giles's, Soho, Covent Garden, Drury Lane, St Martin's Lane, and St James's Street ('Rake's Progress'). Beyond the old cities, Tyburn appears as the locale for Tom Idle's execution in 'Industry and Idleness'; Marylebone Church hosts the wedding in the 'Rake's Progress'; 'Evening' in 'Times of the Day', with its bossy wife and henpecked husband, is set at the Islington summer resort of Sadler's Wells. In every case the associations of the location point Hogarth's moral tale.

Yet Hogarth's relations to the capital are more complicated than may at first appear. He never went around 'snapping' the metropolis. He never was a topographical artist, recording the city simply because it was there. Unlike some artists, he didn't produce glossy images of the metropolis that could serve as publicity brochures or visitors' guides.

Moreover, it is as well to remember just how much of the great and expanding city he never drew. Hogarth left no depiction of Bartholomew Fair — a really surprising omission almost astonishing for one born just a stone's throw away from the Smithfield site where it was held around the end of August — he doubtless sucked from it lasting imaginative stimulus. In Hogarth's work, we never see the Tower of London or the Houses of Parliament, Vauxhall Gardens or (the gates of Burlington House excepted) the swanky new West End stately homes going up in Piccadilly and Mayfair. It comes as a bit of a shock to find that Hogarth depicted only one public hanging, 'The Idle Prentice Executed at Tyburn', with its milling mass of pickpockets, peddlers, pimps and paupers.

When we think of the Foundling Hospital, Hogarth leaps to mind, thanks to his magnificent portrait of its founder, Thomas Coram, and because of his inventive use of its halls and walls for artistic exhibitions. But, odd as it may seem — he was after all a founding governor and the Hospital's inspector in Chiswick — never drew the hospital itself. Many other sites and buildings

renowned, notorious, or strikingly new in the artist's day that one half-expects him to have depicted — the British Museum, Guy's Hospital, or the newly-erected Westminster Bridge — never seem to have caught his eye. The Thames is remarkably missing from his work.

Or take Covent Garden piazza. It was one of London's most bustling social centres, Hogarth's own residence between 1729 and 1733 (he occupied the house of his father-in-law, Sir James Thornhill), and a magnet for artists. It's odd, then, that the Covent Garden piazza appears only once throughout his oeuvre.

So what kind of an urban artist was Hogarth? Unlike Canaletto, with his dignified processions of shipping on the silvery river and St Paul's shimmering in the sunlight, or later James McNeill Whistler, who made the city his sitter, Hogarth was never concerned with townscapes as such. In this respect, he differs from a great tradition of Dutch urban artists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

This is an important point, because it calls into question one way of seeing Hogarth deeply ingrained in the traditional English appreciation of him. Art scholars used to celebrate him as the supreme realist, applauding the accuracy of his vistas of the capital. He was dubbed 'the cockney's mirror', made to appear an admirable topographical artist, a sort of precursor of Henry Mayhew but armed with brush instead of pen. It was for these reasons that Hogarth's praises are sung earlier this century by his biographer, W. B. Wheatley, who gloried in 'the realism of Hogarth's art' — 'half the value of it to us would be lost if we did not understand the truthfulness of his work'. One of Hogarth's outstanding virtues, in Wheatley's judgment, was that, being true to life, his works could serve as archival sources, valuable for documenting social conditions in bygone times. Noting the fire blazing in the middle of the road in the print 'Night', Wheatley commented, 'such a view of the streets of London as we see in 'The Four Times of the Day' is not elsewhere to be seen. The dangers of the streets must have been appalling'. Nor was it just the fires. 'The streets were doubtless noisier in the eighteenth century than now (although some of us complain of the present condition of things)', Wheatley further observed, 'and we are shown in the "Enraged Musician" how difficult was the life of the intellectual worker in the midst of the turmoil around him'. 'Gin Lane' has similarly been used by many historians to document the evils of the gin craze.

But to view Hogarth thus is to mistake the artist for the news reporter, to confuse realism with reality. Hogarth's Londoners are no more facsimiles of city life than Brueghel's revellers are real peasants caught puking or pissing in a carnival — and Hogarth's emotional responses and moral judgments were quite as equivocal as the Fleming's. This becomes clear if we look at Hogarth's somewhat rare personal portraits, like 'The Shrimp Girl'. In such works, we see a different Hogarth, catching a real person without obvious moral or didactic purpose — quite unlike the stereotypes depicted in 'Marriage à la Mode' or the 'Harlot's Progress'. There and elsewhere, Hogarth deliberately created types because he embraced lofty views of art's mission to instruct and bring about moral reform. Hogarth meant his art to appeal to the mind and emotions as well as to the eye.

As an art theorist, Hogarth held no brief for documentary drawing. He admired the figurative and the allegorical: aiming to advance his career and with it heighten the dignity of English art, he cared passionately about the correctness of his styles and images — as is evident from the innumerable visual echoes, quotations and parodies injected into his works. He thus saw London not through innocent eyes but through emotionally-charged verbal and visual idioms of the town as such — Sodom, Babylon, Troy, Jerusalem, Rome, and so forth — already developed by painters, poets and playwrights.

And the London he represented was one that was quite independently putting itself on display, one making a public spectacle of itself. In the face-to-face communities typical of the pre-industrial city, life was led out of doors, and all manner of customs, rites and conventions shaped the public domain. Comradeship and conflict, loyalties and distinctions — of rank, occupation, politics, religion — were acted out in street-culture. Dress, gestures, songs, slogans, parades, pickets and protests — every sign had a meaning, every picture told a story. Festivals, holidays and fairs celebrated the rhythms of the ceremonial year: the King's birthday, the anniversary of William of Orange's landing in 1688, Guy Fawkes Night, the Lord Mayor's procession. City spaces provided stages for multitudes of processions, public spectacles, political parades, civic pageantry and apprentice rallies.

Such convivial, festive activities often carried a political charge. Economic, legal and political grudges and grievances were expressed through highly-orchestrated, well-structured public behaviour, notably by means of crowd protests and riots — in London, the Wilkite riots of the 1760s, led by John Wilkes, were especially memorable. In the streets the crowd acted out a politics that gloried in highly public appeals to fundamental moral, social and political values upheld by what the late E. P. Thompson dubbed 'the moral economy' of the crowd. 'There is a sense', argued the great historian of the people,

in which rulers and crowd needed each other, watched each other, performed theatre and countertheatre to each other's auditorium, moderated each other's political behaviour. This is a more active and reciprocal relationship than the one normally brought to mind under the formula 'paternalism and deference'. The plebeian crowd rituals were countertheatre in the sense that they acted out, rehearsed, or mimicked action against their betters, but did not actually 'live out' their actions. They burned effigies, not people.

There was in other words a theatre of the streets. Civic pomp and pageantry were commandeered to make social and political points: all the city was a stage. Like Henry Fielding and so many other of his contemporaries and friends, Hogarth was stage-struck. He visited Bartholomew Fair many times in his youth, and later engraved *Southwark Fair* (1734), displaying acrobats and gamblers, showmen, prizefighters, musicians, conjurers and actors, all clamouring for the attention of the potential audiences clustering around the nearby booths and taverns.

Hogarth's ties with the theatre were long and lasting. At the outset of his career, he designed tickets and receipts for performances. He was a passionate fan of David Garrick, depicting him in various poses. He drew backstage scenes like *'Strolling Actresses in a Barn'*, also exploring the front-of-house ambience in *'The Laughing Audience'*. Not least, he produced no fewer than six versions of the prison scene from *The Beggar's Opera*, the work (later the model for Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*) that decisively put early Georgian London low-life on stage. From his youthful doodlings onwards, the stage, the mask and the performance provided idioms for his satirical craft.

Steeped in this culture, Hogarth pictured London as a theatre of ritual public enactment, decked out with togs and props. To clinch this point, it is worth referring back to an illustration earlier mentioned: 'Night' in 'The Times of the Day'. In his discussion, T. B. Wheatley drew attention to the fire obstructing the road, commenting that this revealed the traffic hazards of Hogarth's time. This pedestrian reading totally misses the point. For what is truly significant is that Hogarth set his scene on May 29th when, as noted by Christoph Lichtenberg, the Göttingen anglophile author of astonishing insightful *Commentaries on Hogarth*,

the restoration of the monarchy and of King Charles II is celebrated by the supporters of that great event (and who would not be among them?) with bonfires and illuminations. That is why we see oak leaves on the houses here and on the hats, in memory of the famous Charles' Oak which has become immortal. With that in mind, the artist has chosen the scene really well For we must know that this is the district of Charing Cross in London,

where stands that masterpiece in the art of bronze casting, that statue of the unhappy King Charles I, which is seen here in the background, and which our artist thus, in a way, causes to take part in the festivities.

The fire blocking the street was thus one of Hogarth's master-strokes, blazing forth ironic moral messages. It was evidently a loyal, royalist bonfire, but it also stood for the flames of erotic passion, disorder and destruction (all of these, of course, pertinent to the Merrie Monarch); it echoed the Great Fire of 1666 and perhaps also the inferno of the Apocalypse and Hell. Hogarth thereby presented double-meaning and parody. What might naively be read as a lifelike low-life genre composition was essentially a subversive text packed with comic hints, nudges and artifice. Every picture told a multitude of stories.

Herein lies the key to Hogarth's London. For him the great city served as a stage-set, a theatre of props, flats and backdrops for unfolding various scenarios. With an intensely theatrical eye, he loved staging crowd scenes, he filled his streets with masquerade. His famous 'progresses' — 'The Rake's Progress', 'The Harlot's Progress' — are moral melodramas that unfold and come to a climax within the moral topography of the metropolis.

Hogarth's London was a playhouse staging all the dramatic genres — comedy, romance, melodrama, tragedy. His presentation habitually involved schematization, requiring the equivalent of suspension of disbelief in the auditorium. An early forceful instance is the 'The South Sea Scheme' (1721) in which the action is set within a simplified frame, with the Guildhall on one side, the Monument on the other and St Paul's and other London buildings at the back (all with quite unnatural perspectives). On this dais, a group of figures presents a dumb-show of deceivers and dupes. A wheel of fortune is used as a merry-go-round, turned by directors of the South Sea Company; its passengers (the shareholders) include a whore and a clergyman. To the right, Honour is being flogged; on the left, a devil carves pieces from Fortune's body, tossing them to the crowd below. Stage-centre, Honesty is broken on the wheel.

The atmosphere of 'The South Sea Scheme' is totally non-naturalistic but triumphantly artificial and emblematic. Elsewhere Hogarth puts more concrete slices of London life onto the stage. Churches were divine theatres. His 'Enthusiasm Delineated' presented Methodistical furor as farce, with the ranter in the pulpit preaching his audience into convulsions. 'The Sleeping Congregation', by contrast, shows listeners sent to sleep by the monotony of a pulpit performance. Elsewhere Hogarth had an eye for political theatre. 'The Committee of the House of Commons' (1729), one of his earliest paintings, portrayed the visit to the Fleet Prison of the Committee appointed in 1729 to investigate corruption in gaols — a subject dear to Hogarth's heart, as his debtor father had spent four years confined to the Fleet Prison.

Not surprisingly, however, Hogarth's dramatization of London is most conspicuous in the print sequences that unfold through a succession of acts — as in the significantly titled 'Stages of Cruelty', whose final stage, ('Reward') occurs quite literally in a theatre, an anatomy theatre. Tom Nero (the name evokes 'no hero', as well as the sadistic Roman emperor) is being dissected. He began in the first print with tormenting animals. He descended into murdering a maidservant whom he has ruined; after his execution, his fate lay in exhibition in the dissecting room, being disembowelled and having his eyes gouged out (is there much difference, Hogarth seems to be asking, between the cruelty of doctors and of criminals?).

Hogarth's progresses — the 'Rake's Progress', the 'Harlot's Progress', the careers of the industrious and idle apprentices — are scenes from life's journey but also literal journeys through the allegorically-charged topography of the capital. The Industrious Apprentice, Goodchild, ends up heading the Lord Mayor's procession; the Idle Apprentice, Tom Idle, by contrast, makes his Calvary-like way to Tyburn Tree.

The 'Rake's Progress' demands special attention. Having just come into his fortune on his father's death, Tom Rakewell passes through several stages of decline, index-linked to morally-significant London venues: beginning by drinking at the Rose Tavern in Covent Garden, he is later arrested for debt in fashionable Piccadilly while *en route* to a *levée* at St James's Palace. He recoups his fortune by marrying an old maid (using the somewhat out-of-the-way Marylebone church); he then loses it again gambling, and ends up successively an inmate of those two terrible institutions just beyond the walls of the City, the Fleet Prison and Bethlem Hospital.

Hogarth presents the Bedlam scene of the 'Rake's Progress' framed by a semblance of a stage set. All the lunatics have assumed extremely stagey poses. There is a melancholy lover, a mad astronomer, a religious lunatic, a crazy king (is he perhaps the Pretender against whom the redcoats in the March to Finchley were advancing?) and, centre stage, Tom Rakewell himself, near naked, no longer an heir but a raving maniac, undergoing a change of part, a change of costume, and maybe even a change of mind.

Hogarth was here drawing upon the favourite motif that conflated madness and histrionics — both distinguished by illusion and savage passion: the madhouse was thus a theatre and vice versa. And surely it is no accident that Hogarth introduced a mad artist at the rear of the action, caught in the act of drawing the scenery. The artist was crayoning a guinea, bearing the legend 'Britannia 1763'. The perceptive Lichtenberg pointed out its emblematic significance:

It represents a seated Britannia with somewhat dishevelled hair, and bears the date 1763. If one looks a little more closely, one notices a chain which passes from under the medal on the right towards number fifty-four. There would have been more room for the chain above it. But a medal with the chain above would hang *from* the chain, and in England the words 'hang' and 'chain', even if used of medals, readily remind one of more important things than orders and child's play. Hogarth thus meant to say: in the year 1763 Britannia was, or deserved to be, in chains in Bedlam. The Glorious Peace concluded at that time seemed, to some, much too peaceful; it should have been much more bellicose, they thought, and would then have been still more glorious. Britannia could have done better, said one; she ought to have been cleverer, said another; she deserves to be in a lunatic asylum, said Hogarth. *Ecce Signum*.

Bethlem was thus, as Lichtenberg's ingenious logic-chopping teased out, the national theatre. Hogarth was suggesting that London's Bedlam was no more crazy than London, or Britain, itself.

Hogarth's irony was further ironized shortly afterwards in Paul Sandby's lampoon of him as the 'Author Run Mad'. The pertinence of this to Hogarth's London will be clear. For Hogarth was playing the oldest of jokes about the double-face of Bethlem. Not many years earlier, Ned Ward, whose *The London Spy* was pioneering a piece of town-life journalism, had presented a pair of characters puzzled by Bethlem:

I conceiv'd it to be my *Lord Mayor's Palace*, for I could not imagine so stately a structure could be design'd for any Quality inferior; he smil'd at my innocent Conjecture, and inform'd me this was *Bedlam*, an Hospital for Mad-Folks: In truth, said I, I think they were Society.

In all the prints and paintings here discussed, Hogarth's genius stands out. Discussing Hogarth's dramatic flair, Celina Fox in her admirable book *Londoners* (1987) has rightly insisted that he was the first native-born artist to portray the common people massed together, to bring recognizable types, characterized by dress and physiognomy, into focus in the foreground of his works. He diffused the centre of interest away from the procession, fair or execution taking place, and treated the scene as a stage on which the actors up front are turned outwards and engage with the audience. Thus the individual and the mass could be portrayed simultaneously, each counterpointing the other in expressive power.

Alongside this, two other points suggest themselves by way of conclusion. One is about Hogarth. My discussion has shown, I hope, that there were two sides to Hogarth, the prosaic and poetical; what is special about him is the blending of the two. His genius lies precisely in the fusion of fabulous and factual, actual and imagined, literal and literary: London as material, London as moral.

The other is about Georgian London. Hogarth's achievement in fusing art and actuality was perhaps possible because Londoners in the Georgian age grew remarkably self-referential. They relished and demanded art and novels, journalism and theatre about themselves and their world. If they were still fascinated — as of course they were — by Jerusalem and Byzantium, Rome and Paris, they were certainly preoccupied (Blake stands as the supreme proof) with the challenge of superimposing those mythic cities on the London they knew, of which they were proud, and by which they were puzzled. Londoners lapped up Ned Ward's *The London Spy* and Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*; they relished the familiar and local writings of Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding, with their merchants and molls, costers and cutpurses, and they loved George Lillo's tragedy, *The London Merchant, or the History of George Barnwell*, produced at Drury Lane in 1731, hailing it as a brilliantly successful innovation because it made city apprentices and harlots into tragic figures. The metropolis, as Raymond Williams once emphasised, was a new moral arena: 'As London grew, dramatically, in the eighteenth century, it was being intensely observed, as a new kind of landscape, a new kind of society'.

Like these other cultural producers in a burgeoning bourgeois commercial culture, Hogarth excelled at dramatizing moral contrasts that made London into a theatre and put its people on stage. 'My picture was my Stage', recalled Hogarth, 'and men and women my actors, who were by means of certain actions and expressions to exhibit a dumb shew'.

A TWENTIETH CENTURY JOURNEY TO SCOTLAND IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JOHNSON AND BOSWELL

Mrs Phoebe Killey — 18th February 1995

Chairman: J. H. Leicester MA FRSA

Mrs Killey is a member of the Society. She is a Chartered Physiotherapist, in retirement, and is the widow of Professor H. C. Killey. The paper was vividly illustrated by excellent slides of the places visited, which she contrasted with appropriate extracts from Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. The latter we can reproduce, but the former — obviously but regrettably — we cannot.

Even as I first read both Johnson's and Boswell's accounts of their tour I had a great desire to follow their route and see what it looked like today.

After they left Edinburgh they had to ferry across the Firth of Forth, and the first place at which they stopped was the island of Inch Keith and of which Johnson did not think much.

Inch Keith is nothing more than a rock covered with a thin layer of earth, not wholly bare of grass . . . We found only the ruins of a small fort . . . One of the stones had this inscription 'Maria Reg. 1564' . . . If [this little island] had been placed at the same distance from London . . . with what emulation of price a few rocky areas would have been purchased, and with what expensive industry they would have been cultivated.

After landing on the north side they travelled by chaise to St. Andrews, and as I too approached it I wondered whether they had the same view as it is still a compact town. But Johnson says:

At an hour somewhat late we came to St. Andrews, a city once archiepiscopal: where that university still subsists in which philosophy was formerly taught by Buchanan . . . In the morning we rose to perambulate [the] city . . . and surveyed the ruins of ancient

magnificence, of which even the ruins cannot long be visible unless some care be taken to preserve them . . . The cathedral, of which the foundations may be still traced . . . appears to have been a spacious and majestic building . . . It was demolished . . . in the tumult and violence of Knox's reformation . . . Not far from the cathedral, on the margin of the water, stands a fragment of the castle, in which the archbishop anciently resided. It was never very large and was built with more attention to security than pleasure. Cardinal Beaton is said to have had workmen employed in improving its fortifications at the time when he was murdered by the ruffians of reformation.

Travelling on, Johnson complained very much about the lack of trees in East Scotland, using the expression, 'A tree might be a show in Scotland as a horse in Venice,' and the position is not all that different today.

I then reached Arbroath, which is a shortened form of Aberbrothic, where I found the Abbey, which seems to have impressed Johnson, as he says:

The Monastery of Aberbrothic is of great renown in the history of Scotland. Its ruins afford ample testimony of its ancient magnificence . . . The arch of one of its gates is entire, and of another only so far dilapidated as to diversify the appearance. A square apartment of great loftiness is yet standing . . . Two corner Towers particularly attracted our attention. Mr. Boswell, whose inquisitiveness is seconded by great activity scrambled in at a high window, but found the stairs within broken and could not reach the top . . . I should scarcely have regretted my journey had it afforded nothing more than the sight of Aberbrothic.

I was also able to climb up above the gate, but on my onward journey I was unable to find the house of Lord Monboddo (where Johnson and Boswell had called) and went on to Aberdeen.

When they came to Aberdeen, Johnson was contacted by a professor whom he had known twenty years before in London! In describing the city he says, 'Old Aberdeen is the ancient episcopal city in which are still to be seen the remains of the cathedral.' Today, it is a functioning church of Scotland. The nave has been shortened, the transept is ruined and the central tower collapsed.

New Aberdeen has all the bustle of prosperous trade, and all the show of increasing opulence . . . The houses are large and lofty . . . and they build almost wholly with granite . . . In each of these towns is a college, or in stricter language, a University . . . In Old Aberdeen stands the King's College, of which the first President was Hector Boethius, who may be justly revered as one of the revivers of elegant learning . . . The other, called the Marischal College, is in the new town. The hall is large and well-lighted.

The present building they would not have seen, as it is a rebuilding of 1844.

Johnson had the honour of being given the freedom of Aberdeen by the Provost.

From Aberdeen they travelled to Slanes Caste, on the invitation of the Earl and Countess of Errol. (I was unable myself to get to the Castle ruins.) The Countess insisted on their going to see the Buller of Buchan, an unusual formation on the cliffs. Johnson says,

We soon turned our eyes to the Buller, or Bouilloir, of Buchan, which no man can see with indifference, who has either sense of danger or delight in rarity . . . The top is open, from which may be seen a dark gulf of water which flows into the cavity through a breach made in the lower part of the inclosing rock . . . The edge of the Buller is not wide and to those that walk round, appears very narrow. He that ventures to look downward sees that if his foot should slip he must fall from his dreadful elevation upon stones on one side or into the water on the other. — We however went round and were glad when the circuit was completed.

They then took a boat and went inside and he finishes his description of this by saying, 'But terrour without danger is only one of the sports of fancy, a voluntary agitation of the mind that is permitted no longer than it pleases.'

As it was getting late and I had to be in Inverness for the night, I was unable to stop in Bamff or Elgin, though I did see the ruins of the cathedral there in passing, or Fort George.

So I will now pass on to their route by Loch Ness. They took the military road, which runs on the south side of Loch Ness, which I followed faithfully.

The view of the Loch from here would be pretty much the same as it was in 1773, and I am sure these wild pansies would have been growing in profusion then. It was on this road that Johnson visited his first Highland hut and a family that spoke Erse (or Gaelic). Like them I passed the Falls of Fiers, but as it was very steep and there was no one about, I did not go down.

After Fiers the road leaves the side of the Loch, because of the nature of the terrain, and further on you can see much higher mountains. Here I reached the south-Western end of the Loch, just outside Fort Augustus I enquired at the tourist office if one could see the remains of the Fort, but was told it was on private land, now a monastery or retreat house. After their night at Fort Augustus they had their most difficult journey so far, to get over the mountain roads to Glenelg Ferry. Coming down from the Ratigan pass, Johnson lost his temper with Boswell, who had gone too far ahead without him. Even today in a car it is quite a difficult and narrow road with hairpin bends in places and the Glenelg Ferry only takes a few cars.

After a filthy night at Glenelg Johnson writes,

We were ferried over to the Isle of Skye. We landed at Armidel, where we were met on the sands by Sir Alexander MacDonald, who was at that time there with his lady, preparing to leave the island and reside at Edinburgh . . . Armidel is a neat house built where the MacDonalds had once a seat which was burnt in the commotion that followed the Revolution.

They were staying, at the time, in a tenant's house, (the old house was in ruins). This might have been the house, which is now a showplace and a historical museum of the MacDonald clan. Here they were first entertained at dinner with the music of the bagpipes. While here, they were invited to the Isle of Raasay. After crossing part of Skye, some gentlemen of Raasay met them with the laird's boat.

Johnson writes,

The waters were calm and the rowers were vigorous . . . When we came near the Island we saw the laird's house, a neat, modern fabrick and found Mr Macleod, the proprietor of the island, with many gentlemen, expecting us on the beach . . . Our reception exceeded our expectation. We found nothing but civility, elegance and plenty. After . . . the usual conversation, the evening came upon us. The carpet was then rolled off the floor, the musician was called and the whole company invited to dance, nor did ever fairies trip with greater alacrity.

Johnson and Boswell seemed to have a wonderful welcome from a large and happy family and thoroughly enjoyed their stay there. The house is now a Youth Activities Centre and looks rather bleak and spartan. It seems very sad that two or three generations later the Macleods of Raasay sold up and went to Australia. I also saw the little unroofed ruinous chapel surrounded by Macleod graves. I found it an attractive island and the view from the grounds in front of the house, looking across the water to the Cuilins, would still be the same as Johnson and Boswell would have seen. Boswell danced a Highland dance on highest hill.

Leaving Raasay they landed at Portree, so called Johnson says, 'because James V of Scotland came into it. The port is made by an inlet of the sea, deep and narrow, where a ship lay waiting to dispeople Sky by carrying the natives away to America.'

Then I went on to Dunvegan, where Johnson said, 'To Dunvegan we came, very willing to be at rest, and found our fatigue amply recompensed by our reception.' They had to mount a flight of steps to get to this door, but now the moat has been filled in there to make a causeway for easier access. There were quite a number of alterations made in the nineteenth century, including the crenellated battlements and the pepperpots.

This castle is still the main home of the chief of the Macleods, a descendent of the Macleods who entertained Johnson and Boswell. One item I saw in the house, that Johnson writes about, is the ox's horn known as Rory More's horn, used as a drinking vessel, out of which the young heir had to drink in one draught to prove his manhood.

Johnson writes, Dunvegan is a rocky prominence that juts out into a bay on the west side of Sky. The house, which is the principal seat of the MacCleods, is partly old and partly modern: is built upon the rock and looks out upon the water. It forms two sides of a small square, on the third side is the skeleton of a castle of unknown antiquity . . . As the inhabitants of the Hebrides lived for many ages in continual expectation of hostilities, the chief of every clan resided in a fortress. This house was accessible only from the water, till the last possessor opened an entrance by stairs upon the land.

The original water supply had been from a deep well, but Johnson says, 'The family is now better supplied from a stream which runs by the rock from two pleasing waterfalls.' The waterfall still comes over the little cliff in the dark background, and the stream today runs between banks of very attractive water plants.

They were so well entertained by the Macleods in spite of the awful weather that Johnson said, 'At Dunvegan I had tasted lotus and was in danger of forgetting I was ever to depart until Mr Boswell sagely reproached me for my sluggishness and softness.'

Talisker is still very remote and isolated — there they first met young Col. After more stormy weather that kept them waiting on Sky, they and young Col took a ship, hoping to get to Mull. The storm started up again, they were blown in the wrong direction but Young Col helped the master to pilot the ship into his own harbour in Col.

I came into the harbour of Col in completely calm weather. I wanted to get over to the south of Col to Breacacha, to see the old house and the castle, five miles away — but how was I to get transport? A lady with a minibus offered to take me there. I had my first sight of the house, where Johnson and Boswell stayed. I was told that it had been rather neglected, but now new people had renovated it and were living there. Johnson says, 'From Grissipol, Mr McClean [that is young Col] conducted us to his father's seat, a neat new house erected near to the old castle, I think by the last proprietor. Here we lived very commodiously while we waited for moderate weather and a fair wind.'

After writing about the people and economy of Col he says, 'very near the house of McClean stands the Castle of Col, which was the mansion of the Laird till the house was built upon a rock. It is very strong and having been not long uninhabited, is yet in repair.' I was not able to stay as long as I would have liked on this attractive island.

After eleven days on Col they got a passage to Mull, to Tobermoray.

We were landed next day at Tobermoray, a port in Mull which appears to be formed for the security of ships, for its mouth is closed by a small island which admits them through narrow channels into a capacious basin . . . We found several other vessels at anchor so that the port had a very commercial appearance.

The harbour front here would not have changed much since 1773, but there would not have been buildings on the hill at that time.

In order to get to Iona they had to travel on horseback across Mull and the country could not have looked as attractive as I found it here as Johnson wrote of 'traversing this gloom and desolation', and he found it very fatiguing. And then they heard that where they hoped to stay, the man lay dying and they had to go on to the island of Ulva.

When they reached the water the ferry boat was gone and no house within reach, 'however', Johnson writes 'while we stood deliberating, we were happily espied from an Irish ship that lay at anchor in the strait . . . which quickly conveyed us to Ulva, where we were liberally entertained by Mr Macquarry.'

I did not go to Iona this time, but they went on to Inch Kenneth and Iona. I think Johnson would have been pleased to know that the Abbey Church has been rebuilt and is very active, as he says, 'Perhaps in the revolutions of the world Iona may be sometime again the instructress of the Western regions.'

They landed again in Mull, and made their way to Lochbuy 'Where we found a true Highland Laird, rough and haughty and tenacious of his dignity'. I had to make some efforts to find the castle. Johnson says, 'Lochbuy has, like the other insular chieftains, quitted the castle that sheltered his ancestors and lives near it in a mansion, not very spacious or splendid.'

The castles of the Hebrides, many of which are still standing and many ruined were always built upon points of land on the margin of the sea. A castle is only a single tower of three or four storeys of which the walls are eight or nine feet thick with narrow windows and close winding stairs of stone. The top rises in a pyramid of stone, encompassed by battlements. The castle of Lochbuy was secured by double doors of which the outer was an iron grate. In every castle is a well and a dungeon. Boswell gives an amusing account of their stay there.

From Mull they were ferried to Oban, and I do not think they would recognize it today with the large McBrains steamers coming and going. After another wet and long ride, they arrived after dark at Inverary where they found an inn he describes as 'Not only magnificent, but commodious'. I also stayed a night at the same inn, and found it pleasant — but hardly magnificent!

After Boswell had called on the Duke of Argyll, they were invited to dinner, and Johnson was treated very hospitably by the Duke and Duchess; but poor Boswell was apprehensive as he knew he had previously offended the Duchess in some way, and she was very cold towards him and ignored him.

In the hall of the castle, Boswell says that Johnson 'took much notice of the large collection of arms which are excellently disposed there'. These are still there arranged round the wall in elaborate patterns.

They then travelled on to Glasgow, where I also stayed, and I visited the cathedral, which Johnson describes as 'the only Episcopal city whose Cathedral was left standing in the rage of Reformation'.

From Glasgow they made their way to Boswell's father's house at Auchinleck. I had a particular desire to try to find Auchinleck House. I found the Boswell museum and was given directions to it.

Finally, after coming up a farm road and realizing the farmhouse was not it, the drive turned right through a belt of trees and there it was! The door was out and I heard two men working. I asked to go in. It was very dilapidated, but I could see from the decorated plasterwork, traces of its former elegance.

Johnson said of his visit to Auchinleck House, 'Lord Auchinleck who as one of the Judges of Scotland and therefore not wholly at leisure for domestick business or pleasure, has yet found time to make improvements to his patrimony. He has built a house of hewn stone very stately and durable and has advanced the value of his lands with great tenderness to his tenants.'

They stayed in this house for six days and Boswell records one altercation between the two very different men. Lord Auchinleck showed him an Oliver Cromwell coin and this introduced Charles I and Toryism. Boswell writes, 'They became exceedingly warm and violent and I was very much distressed by being present at such an altercation between two men, both of whom I revered, yet I durst not interfere!'

They appeared to part amicably, however. Lord Auchinleck gave him the name of *Ursa Major*, but I like to think of him civilly and politely, as Boswell says, attending him to the post chaise on their departure in front of this house. That was really the end of their tour, except to get back to Edinburgh — and the end of mine.

I have shown you and talked about the various places they visited on their tour and how these places look now; but Johnson was not so interested in places, except as they affected people, and he actually disliked wild country.

He wanted to see the old way of life in the Highlands and Islands before it changed and how the people coped with the hard environment and economic conditions. He enjoyed meeting the professors at the universities, and the Highland lairds and their families who entertained them so hospitably.

So, although we can revisit some of the places Johnson and Boswell passed through, we can never bring back the interesting people they encountered on their long journey.

SAMUEL JOHNSON'S RELATIONSHIP WITH EDMUND BURKE

Professor Elizabeth Lambert — 18th March 1995

Chairman: Richard Thrale

Dr Elizabeth Lambert is an Associate Professor of English at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania. She has published articles on Burke, including his relations with Johnson: and she is at present working on a biography of Burke focusing on his life outside the House of Commons and utilising the unpublished correspondence of his wife, Jane Nugent Burke.

I came to the subject of Johnson's friendship with Edmund Burke in the first year of my graduate studies. As I read the assigned selections of Johnson's work I was captivated by his understanding

of the human condition and his ability to articulate it so well. It seemed that there was not a nook and cranny of any subject that he did not burrow into and bring it to the light of his intellect. When I read Burke a month or so later in that course, he too established a permanent claim on my mental landscape for his understanding of the human condition and for his eminent good sense in describing the ways people should be governed. I was intrigued by the idea that these two men with their intellectual acumen enhanced by particular insights into the workings of human nature belonged to the same age, much less the same circle. Looking for more information, I turned to Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. From Boswell I learned that Johnson and Burke, together with Sir Joshua Reynolds, were the founders of the Literary Club, and that Johnson more than once evaluated Burke as the most extraordinary man one could ever meet. Boswell gave just enough details to make me want to investigate the subject further, and, in doing so, I discovered the richness of eighteenth-century diaries and letters. What you will hear this afternoon is an account of this unique friendship put together from many sources.

Before getting into details of time and place, it might be good to pause and reflect for a moment on what the two men had to say about friendship and the value they placed upon it. Burke's statements on friendship are not easy to come by; his daily life was consumed by the immediate and the necessary. The philosophical and personal reflections interlaced in his political writings have to do with his perception of the nature of governments and of people with respect to governments and of Burke's duties as one involved in the political process. In an effort to find pithy statements on friendship, I plumbed Burke's private correspondence and have come up dry except for an insight here and there such as his remark to Lord Rockingham that moments of discouragement were eased by 'those who are dear to me'.¹ However, in the course of my search through Burke's writings I realized that his *actions* as a friend and his statements of concern to individuals constitute Burke's philosophy of friendship. Then too there are the comments of those who knew him. George Canning remarked: '... he had among all his great qualities that for which the world did not give him sufficient credit, of creating in those about him very strong attachments, as well as unbounded admiration, which I am every day more and more convinced was his due.'² In these sources there is abundant material with which to examine his relationship with Johnson.

With Johnson, statements on the nature of friendship are everywhere in his life and writings. For example, in *Rambler* 99 he elaborates on the thesis that 'To love all men is our duty, ... but to love all equally is impossible'. Thus, he writes that out of the many, an individual selects a few 'for intimacy and tenderness' and in so doing, improves 'the condition of his existence by superadding friendship to humanity and the love of individuals to that of the species'.³

In *Ramblers* 64, 89, and 160 he discusses the requisites of true friendship — the equality needed to make it lasting; the benevolence that operates between friends; and the elements that go into the choosing of friends. On a sombre note he writes in *Idler* 41 of the death of friends and in *Idler* 23 of the elements that work against lasting friendships such as 'opposition of interest, suspicion', and 'long separation without contact'.⁴ In writing and in conversation Johnson, ever accurate with respect to terminology, makes important distinctions between companions, friends, and intimate friends. For example, he always refers to Mrs. Anna Williams, the blind daughter of a friend, as a companion. Mrs. Williams lived in his house for thirty years, managed his household, listened to his counsel over tea late into the night, and when she died in 1783 Johnson truly mourned her. He wrote to Dr. Burney of his loss: 'My domestick companion is taken from me. She is much missed, for her acquisitions were many, and her curiosity universal; so that she partook of every conversation.'⁵ Yet Anna Williams was a companion and not an intimate friend. In signifying her as a 'companion' to Burney and others Johnson was not deprecating the relationship between himself and Mrs. Williams; rather he was describing it for what it was. *Intimate* friendship is particularized by two elements as he told Sir Joshua Reynolds: 'An individual wishes', he told

Reynolds, 'to have an intimate friend with whom to compare minds and cherish private virtues.'⁶ Burke fitted Johnson's definition on both counts.

Johnson had been attracted by the quality of Burke's mind from their first meeting on Christmas Day 1758 at David Garrick's home. At that time, Burke, twenty years Johnson's junior and a fledgling author, corrected Johnson on the subject of Bengal. Arthur Murphy reports that on the following day Johnson approached him and said, 'I suppose Murphy, you are proud of your countryman. *Cum talis sit utinam noster esset!*' — 'If this be the kind of man he is, would that he were ours'.⁷ Johnson could not have been referring to Burke's political connections because, at the time, Burke had not entered Lord Rockingham's service. However, we may correctly suspect that Johnson, his Tory soul alert to such nuances, may have heard Whiggish overtones in Burke's observations on Bengal. What is clear is that Johnson took the correction — not always the case — and that he admired the younger man's intellect. Murphy also records Johnson telling him that 'a man of sense could not meet Mr. Burke by accident, under a gateway to avoid a shower, without being convinced that he was the first man in England'.⁸ Other contemporaries such as Mrs. Thrale, Fanny Burney, James Boswell, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Dr. Brocklesby record the same compliment. In fact, Johnson singled Burke out as the man who most tested his intellectual powers. Once when he was ill visitors at his bedside mentioned Burke, and Johnson exclaimed, 'That fellow calls forth all my powers. Were I to see Burke now, it would kill me.'⁹

Given the intellectual range of both men, it is not surprising — in that century when good conversation was highly valued — that their public conversation was one of the salient features of the relationship. As a matter of fact, they were known as conversational rivals and frequently took each other on in public for the sheer intellectual exhilaration of it. Johnson wrote to Mrs. Thrale of one such incident:

But Montagu and you have had with all your adulations nothing finer said of you than was said last Saturday night of Burke and Me. We were at the Bishop of St. Asaph's . . . and towards twelve we fell into talk, to which the Ladies listened, just as they do to you, and said as I heard, *there is no rising unless somebody will cry fire*.¹⁰

At times it seems in these conversations they deliberately took opposing sides. One evening before Joseph Baret's murder trial, Johnson and Burke differed somewhat heatedly concerning some part of the defense. Later George Steevens admonished Johnson for arguing with 'too much warmth'. 'It may be so, Sir, [replied Johnson] for Burke and I should have been of one opinion if we had no audience.'¹¹

We wish in vain that the tape recorder had been an eighteenth century invention, because even Boswell, when he tried once to record the conversation between Burke and Johnson came off uncustomarily weak. It may have been because their conversational styles differed so much. Johnson was precise and to the point. Once explaining to a questioner his extraordinary accuracy in talk he said that he always tried to impart whatever he knew in the most forcible language and that by constant practice, and never suffering any careless expressions to escape him, or attempting to deliver his thoughts without arranging them in the clearest manner, accuracy became habitual to him. As we know, this clarity and force sometimes gave Johnson's opponents the impression, as Boswell phrased it, that they had 'been tossed and gored' of an evening.¹²

Burke also did his share of tossing and goring, but his style was more discursive. Goldsmith noted that Burke wound 'into a subject like a serpent'.¹³ Johnson described the particular excellence of Burke's eloquence to the Scotsman MacLeod as: 'copiousness and fertility of allusion; a power of diversifying his matter by placing it in various relations. Burke has great knowledge and great command of language.'¹⁴

Generalizations aside, what did they talk about? From Boswell's various accounts of Club meetings in the *Life*, we know some of the subjects: sculpture, immigration, breeding cattle, philology, human nature, Parliamentary oratory, the make-up of the House of Commons, the Irish language, books of travel and the multiple benefits of travel. Furthermore, we can let our imaginations work upon the statement Johnson made in a letter to Mrs. Thrale: 'Two nights ago Mr. Burke sat with me a long time, he seems much pleased with his journey. We had both seen Stonehenge this summer for the first time.'¹⁵ It is not pushing the bounds of probability to think that they mused about the way the stones could have gotten there, by what means the lintels were placed, and possible religious and/or scientific functions of the site. They may have also speculated about the people who put them there, and it is possible they spoke of English history and what was known of pre-Roman Britain — Johnson did tell Mrs. Thrale that it was a long evening.

No relationship is ever without its more challenging aspects, especially when two people of decidedly different political minds are concerned. In a light moment Johnson enumerated to Sir John Hawkins all the aspects of human felicity to be had when seated on a tavern chair. Among them, he noted was '... the free conversation and interchange of discourse with those whom I most love; I dogmatize and am contradicted, and in this conflict of opinions and sentiments I find delight'.¹⁶ In spite of this declaration most of Johnson's friends would have put qualifications on certain subjects and would have noted that to contradict him on these matters would be quite risky. One such subject was politics.

The political differences between Burke and Johnson can be and have been described in the simplest way as a difference of party ideology: Johnson was a Tory and Burke was a Whig. However, we know that the terms, 'party' and 'ideology' — now and in the eighteenth century — are fraught with complexity and have nuances that turn simple definitions upside down. A useful exercise toward clarification is to compare Burke's *Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies* and Johnson's *Taxation No Tyranny*, published within two weeks of each other. Johnson writes of Parliament's right to tax the colonists and their duty to obey; Burke preferred to work for conciliation by bending law to fit the particular circumstances of the colonies. Johnson once put the ideological differences into a nutshell: 'The prejudice of the Tory is for establishment; the prejudice of the Whig is for innovation.'¹⁷ However much he may have encapsulated the dissimilarity into a sentence, the ways these differences worked in practical politics made for a volatile response to the other's stance. Johnson blasted Burke as 'a cursed Whig, a bottomless Whig'¹⁸ and asserted that he was pragmatically political in the worst sense: 'We are sure that [Burke] acts from interest. We know what his genuine principles were. They who allow the passions to confound the distinctions of right and wrong are criminal.'¹⁹ In his turn, two years after Johnson's death Burke shocked Boswell by speaking violently about Johnson's political writings. Burke went on to charge that his accusing the Opposition of an endeavour to involve the nation in a war on account of Falkland's Islands was a false charge.²⁰

Thus politics was a subject they approached with caution. In a letter to Burke about Percival Stockdale (poet, deacon in the Church of England and Johnson's neighbor) Johnson slipped in the comment, 'To his political heresies, I wish that *you* were more an enemy.'²¹ And Burke's silent gift to Johnson of a volume of his speeches upon the affairs of India suggest they both employed the light touch — here, an aside; there, a gift book to be read and pondered in private. Such divergent political views could easily have been the rock upon which their friendship broke. But this was not the case. Once when Goldsmith said that people who disagree 'in any capital point cannot live together in friendship', Johnson disagreed and cited his relationship with Burke as an example: 'Why Sir, you must shun the subject as to which you disagree. For instance, I can live very well with Burke: I love his knowledge, his genius, his diffusion, and affluence of conversation; but I would not talk to him of the Rockingham party.' Goldsmith did not have the sense to leave well

enough alone but continued; 'But Sir, when people live together who have something as to which they disagree, and which they want to shun, they will be in the situation mentioned in the story of Bluebeard: "You may look into all the chambers but one." But we should have the greatest inclination to look into that chamber, to talk of that subject.' According to Boswell, Johnson responded as expected — 'with a loud voice': 'Sir, I am not saying that *you* could live in friendship with a man from who you differ as to some point: I am only saying that *I* could do it.'²²

Even more telling is Johnson's support of Burke during one of Burke's most discouraging moments in public life. The circumstances were these: on 2 April 1783 the King had given in to pressure and had formed the coalition government by appointing the Duke of Portland to be the first Lord of the Treasury; Lord North and Charles Fox, former adversaries, to be Principal Secretaries of State, and Burke to be Paymaster of the Forces. As Paymaster of the Forces, Burke regained a position that he had held under the second Rockingham Administration. No sooner had he come back into office than a scandal erupted concerning John Powell and Charles Bembridge, two clerks in the Pay Office who had been dismissed for misconduct. Burke, believing them to be innocent, had reinstated them while they were still under indictment. Powell resigned, but before his case came to trial, committed suicide. The ensuing criticism of Burke made him talk of retiring, and he stated as much to Johnson. Johnson dissuaded him saying, 'Never think of that.' According to Boswell, who discreetly omits Burke's name in the *Life of Johnson* but gives it in his journal account, 'The gentleman urged, "I should then do no ill." Johnson replied, "Nor no good either, Sir, it would be civil suicide."²³ In the light of their political differences Johnson's advice was significant; even more so when considered against his comment two weeks before when Boswell complained that Burke's detractors were 'actually representing him as mad'. On that occasion Johnson had no sympathy, saying that if one emoted as Burke did on the floor of Commons 'can he wonder that he is represented as mad?'.²⁴

The last two incidents — Johnson's support of Burke at a critical moment, and a long evening spent in easy conversation — give insight into the manner in which the relationship between Burke and Johnson functioned in private and personal situations. Burke did not customarily spend long evenings with an individual. When he was in London he was besieged by people, events, and duties that demanded all the hours of his days. When there was a chance for escape he went to his country home at Beaconsfield. Thus, for Burke to 'sit a long time' with Johnson of an evening is evidence of his affection for the older man and for the security he felt in their relationship. 'Security' is a striking word to use with respect to a relationship. However, throughout his public life Burke was the target of satire, rumor, and innuendo because of his Irish nationality and the strength of his convictions. Early on he resolved, as he said, 'to keep within' his opinions of others, of himself, and of his affairs.²⁵ While he could not always avoid the meddler, he was rarely off-guard with such. Thus to confide his self-doubts to Johnson and to take time to be with him without the reason of Club meeting or social occasion, illustrates the significant place Johnson had in Burke's life.

These occasions also bring us to the second half of Johnson's definition of an intimate friend — they 'cherish private virtues'. Clearly there was some finer quality in Burke that, to Johnson's mind, overrode political ideology. Mrs. Thrale spoke of it in her *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson*: 'He had always a very great personal regard and particular affection for Mr. Edmund Burke, as well as an esteem difficult for me to repeat, though for him only easy to express.'²⁶ Moralist that he was, Johnson viewed virtue in terms of *action* and not pious sentiments or metaphysical speculation. Again, Mrs. Thrale: '[Johnson] has more tenderness for Poverty than any other Man I know; and . . . in consequence of these principles he has now in his house whole nests of People.'²⁷ In terms of active virtue, it is interesting to note the similarities between Burke and Johnson in this respect. We all know the cast of characters who lived in Johnson's house that Mrs. Thrale had in mind: the blind Mrs. Williams referred to earlier; Dr. Levet, the down and out physician; the black

servant Francis; Mrs. Desmoulins, widowed daughter of Johnson's godfather. Burke too, took into his house 'whole nests of people' — Irish relations, impoverished poets, a fledgling painter with talent, French emigrés fleeing for their lives — and these various personalities frequently set Burke's household at odds much in the same way as the quarrels of Mrs. Desmoulins and Mrs. Williams made Johnson wary of going home. For example, French aristocrats, fleeing from the terrors of the Revolution, literally sought refuge under Burke's roof. At one point, Jane Burke, who did not speak French, was, according to Edmund, spending 'whole days with those who could not speak a word English'. Burke, to his credit, recognized how exceptional Jane was, and told a friend, 'This, I venture to say, was what would not have been endured by any other woman in the world; and it required great force of Mind.'²⁸

The virtues shared by the two men also included personal courage of an unusual sort. Johnson told Boswell of a night he was attacked in the street by four men, to whom 'he would not yield, but kept them all at bay till the watch came up and carried both him and them to the roundhouse'.²⁹ Witnesses also report similar conduct on the part of Burke during the Gordon Riots. 'Mr. Burke', one report went, 'was in great danger this morning — he too up two rioters himself and went to ask the mob what they would have. "If you want me", he said, "here I am but never expect I shall vote for a repeal of the Act I supported."'³⁰ Similar stories are told of their responses to the importunities of street beggars: Someone once complained to Johnson that it was useless to give money to beggars, as they only spent it on gin. Johnson rejoined, 'gin and tobacco are the only Pleasures in their power, let them have the enjoyments within their reach without Reproach.'³¹ Burke too was admonished for giving a shilling to a beggar because it would only be spent on gin: 'He is an old man', Burke replied, 'if gin be his comfort, let him have gin.'³² Perhaps today we would withhold the gin and tobacco and put such individuals into a social program of rehabilitation; however, the reaction of others to 'wasteful' charity and the realistic, humane response of Johnson and Burke echo across the gulf of two centuries.

When all is taken into account, Johnson and Burke were more alike than they were different. Their powers of mind, their convictions regarding the nature of human folly and pain, and their personal involvement with the unfortunate of the world were the elements that held the relationship together for twenty-six years without a break. In a touching letter to Mrs. Thrale, Johnson spoke of the quality of such a relationship:

Those that have loved longest, love best . . . that fondness which length of time has connected with many circumstances and occasions, though it may for a while be suppressed by disgust or resentment with or without a cause, is hourly revived by accidental recollections . . . esteem of great powers or amiable qualities newly discovered may embroider a day or a week, but a friendship of twenty years is interwoven with the texture of life.³³

Boswell, using Langton's account describes Burke's last visit to the dying Johnson. Burke, in the company of others, was one of the last to visit him. Noting the number of men in the room, Burke said to Johnson, "I am afraid, Sir, such a number of us may be oppressive to you." — "No, Sir, (said Johnson,) it is not so; and I must be in a wretched state, indeed, when your company would not be a delight to me." Obviously affected, Burke replied, "My dear Sir, you have always been too good to me." Immediately afterwards he went away.³⁴ When Johnson died on 13 December, Burke came from Beaconsfield to be first pall bearer at his funeral.

In 1792 Burke spoke publicly of what Johnson's friendships meant to him. His remark came in the midst of fierce parliamentary debate on Fox's motion to send a minister to Paris to deal with the provisional government of France. Burke noted that Erskine, the preceding speaker, had quoted Johnson in arguing against foreign war. Although he reminded Erskine that Johnson had not been against war with the colonies in 1776, the rest of his remarks are characteristic of the numerous

references Burke made to their relationship over the thirteen years he outlived Johnson. 'Dr. Johnson was a great and good man', Burke said, and continued, 'his virtues were equal to his transcendent talents, and his friendship I value as the greatest consolation and happiness of my life.'³⁵

Notes

1. Edmund Burke, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke* ed. by Thomas W. Copeland, 10 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958-78), III, p. 35. Subsequent references will be designated as *Corres.*
2. Quoted in Lord Malmesby, *Diaries and Correspondence of Lord Malmesby*, III, p. 398.
3. Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* E. L. McAdam, Jr. with Donald and Mary Hyde (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 2nd ed. rev. 1960, IV, p. 166. Subsequent references will be designated as *Works*.
4. Johnson, *Works* II, p. 73.
5. Samuel Johnson, *The Letters of Samuel Johnson* ed. by R. W. Chapman, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), no. 882. Subsequent references will be designated as *Letters*.
6. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Portraits: Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. by Frederick W. Hilles (London: Heinemann, 1952), p. 82.
7. Arthur Murphy, *An Essay on the Life and Genius of Samuel Johnson* (London, 1792), p. 96.
8. Murphy, p. 96.
9. James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson* ed. by George Birbeck Hill, rev. by L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935-64), II, p. 450. Subsequent references will be designated as *Life*.
10. *Letters* no. 669.
11. *Life* IV, p. 324.
12. *Life*, II, p. 66.
13. *Life* II, p. 260.
14. James Boswell, *Journal of a tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson*, ed. by Frederick A. Pottle and Charles H. Bennett (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936) p. 172.
15. *Letters* No. 669.
16. Sir John Hawkins, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (London, 1787) p. 48.
17. *Life* IV, p. 117.
18. *Life* IV, p. 223.
19. *Life* III, p. 45.
20. James Boswell, *Boswell: The English Experiment 1785-1789*, ed. by Irma S. Lustig and Frederick A. Pottle (New York: McGraw Hill, 1986), p. 98.
21. *Letters* no. 598.1.
22. *Life* II, p. 181.
23. *Life* IV, p. 223.
24. James Boswell, *Applause of the Jury, 1782-1785*, ed. by Irma S. Lustig and Frederick A. Pottle (New York: McGraw-Hill), pp. 153 and 219, n. 4.
25. Arthur P. I. Samuels, *The Early Life, Correspondence, and Writings of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), p. 88.
26. Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi, *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson LL.D.* ed. by S. C. Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), p. 155.
27. Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi (Mrs. Thrale) *Thraliana: The diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale* (Later Mrs. Piozzi) 1776-1809, ed. by Katharine C. Balderston, 2nd ed. 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), I, p. 185.
28. *Corres.* VIII, p. 8.
29. *Life* II, p. 299.
30. *Corres.* IV, p. 246.
31. *Thraliana* I, p. 185.
32. Sir James Prior, *Life of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke* (London, 1872), p. 242.

33. *Letters*, no. 900.

34. *Life* IV, p. 407.

35. *Parliamentary History* XXX, p. 109. See also *Life* IV, p. 407, n. 3.

**'WE ALL LOVE BEATTIE' THE TRUTHFUL MINSTREL IN THE
JOHNSON CIRCLE
Dr Roger Robinson — 8th April 1995
Chairman: C. Tom Davis**

Dr Roger Robinson was educated at Poole Grammar School followed by Balliol College. For the last 15 years of his professional life he held the chair of Paediatrics at Guy's Hospital; but retirement has given him the time to pursue his interest in the writing of the Romantic and pre-Romantic periods. He is currently working on a projected edition of Beattie's Poems.

'We all love Beattie'. This was Johnson's comment to Boswell in 1772, when Boswell thanked him for the kindness with which he had received Beattie the year before.¹ It is love of James Beattie which led to me being here to talk to you. But I realize that I am in a position which must have been occupied by many previous speakers to this society — of bringing before you someone of interest and prominence in his day, whose stature then, and even more now, is overshadowed by the towering figure of Johnson: now an almost forgotten personage in relation to one of the literary and intellectual giants of all time.

Nevertheless, I hope it will be of interest to hear about someone whom Johnson greatly admired and liked; and also to hear what can be learnt about the great man himself by the observations of a devotee, but an objective one who was prepared to be critical.

But first I must tell you about James Beattie. He was a poet, a philosopher, a man of letters, and a teacher, and Johnson admired him in all these capacities. He was also a Scot, and it won't surprise you that Johnson felt no less warmly towards him for that reason, because despite his occasionally disobliging remarks about Scotland, five of his six assistants on the great dictionary were Scottish,² and so, of course, was Boswell.

Beattie was born in 1735 in northeast Scotland, the youngest child of a fairly humble farming family.³ He was what is known in Scotland as 'lad o' pairts' — a promising boy — and he benefited from the high regard in which education has always been held in Scotland, and the willingness of Scottish families even in the eighteenth century to provide it generously to able children from poor families. So he got a good classical education at the Parish School at Laurencekirk, and at 14 he won a bursary to Marischal College, one of the two colleges of the University of Aberdeen where he had excellent teachers in the liberal arts. He had five years as a village schoolmaster near his birthplace, then became master at Aberdeen Grammar School, and in 1760, just before his twenty-fifth birthday, he was appointed Professor of Moral Philosophy at Marischal College. He held that position in Aberdeen till he died in 1803, and from there he established his position as a poet, philosopher, defender of religion, and man of letters.

So there are several paths that might lead one to Beattie, and I was first led through Wordsworth to Beattie's poetry. I had read how deeply affected Wordsworth was by Beattie's poem *The Minstrel*, and how influential it was on *The Prelude*, and indeed on all the Romantics. *The Minstrel* is a poem in two books, about a boy brought up in mountainous county in Scotland, who feels called to be a poet, and about the growth of his mind in response to Nature. So it is an early Romantic poem, and a very appealing one. But highly popular as *The Minstrel* was among

Beattie's own generation, and among the next generation of the Romantic poets, and indeed well into the nineteenth century, it wasn't what originally led to his fame, nor what first led to his friendship with Johnson, though Johnson certainly admired it. Beattie's most celebrated work was something quite different.

As I told you, at the age of twenty four he was appointed Professor of Moral Philosophy in Aberdeen. From the very first, and for the forty years that he held the post, he took his teaching duties, and his moral responsibilities towards his very young students very seriously. He prepared his lectures with great care, and in doing that, and in the discussions of a lively [philosophical] club of Aberdeen academics and intellectuals, he studied the ideas of the sceptical philosophers, working through Descartes, Locke, Berkeley and Hume. He regarded David Hume's ideas as a serious threat to religion and morality. Now there was an opposing school of Scottish philosophy, known as the Common Sense school, and one of its most prominent advocates was Beattie's Aberdeen colleague Thomas Reid. But Beattie felt that Reid was too academic in the way he presented his views, and too polite and deferential to Hume, and that the dangerous fallacies of Hume's scepticism, as Beattie saw them, were not effectively being answered. So he decided to do it himself, in a book published in 1770 under the somewhat unpromising title of *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism*, almost always known in his time and subsequently as the *Essay on Truth*.⁴ It's written in a forthright and readable style, not mainly for professional philosophers. He ridicules ideas such as that matter does not exist except as an idea in the mind, or that there are no innate moral laws. It is an answer to sceptical philosophy, but the underlying intention was a defence of religion and morality. And it was hugely successful. Those who felt their philosophy of life was undermined by Hume's argument that we can be certain of nothing in the fields of natural philosophy, ethics, religion — or anything else — believed that Beattie had refuted Hume and re-established the validity of their beliefs. The book sold well — it went through six editions in six years — but even more importantly it was talked about and esteemed by the most influential people in London: by literary men, churchmen, politicians, and even by the king. When King George III gave Beattie an audience at Kew in 1773, having just granted him a pension, he told him that he and the queen always kept the book by them. He had one copy in Kew and one in town. 'I never stole a book, but one' the king said (Don't we wish we could all say the same), 'and that was yours. I stole it from the Queen to give to Lord Hertford to read.'⁵ Among those who read, admired, and were reassured by the *Essay on Truth* was Johnson, as we know from several remarks to Boswell: 'Beattie's book is, I believe, every day more liked; at least, I like it more, as I look more upon it'.⁶ That was in 1772, and twice during the Scottish tour Johnson praised Beattie's motivation and success in countering Hume: 'Sir, he has written like a man conscious of truth, and feeling his own strength.'⁷ Later, in the Hebrides, Johnson was arguing that an author should welcome an attack on him, because it engaged people's attention.

BOSWELL: Then Hume is not the worse for Beattie's attack?

JOHNSON: He is, because Beattie has confuted him.⁸

Beattie and Johnson first met in 1771.⁹ Beattie made the long journey from Aberdeen to London by stagecoach that summer. He had become well known as the author both of the *Essay on Truth* and the first book of *The Minstrel*, and he was enormously well-received in London. He met Burke, Reynolds, Garrick, Goldsmith, Lord Lyttleton, Mrs Montagu, and many others who became close friends, but above all he met Dr Johnson. The introduction came through Boswell. On his journey, Beattie stopped in Edinburgh, and Sir William Forbes, the Edinburgh banker, and friend of both men, asked Boswell to write a letter of introduction to Johnson. He did, and Boswell gives his rather formal introductory letter in his *Life*.¹⁰ What is actually much more interesting, but not in the *Life*, is Boswell's accompanying letter of advice to Beattie on how to cope with Johnson. It was clearly meant to be helpful but was not exactly calculated to reassure a nervous arrival on Johnson's doorstep.

The best time to find him at home is about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. Although you may not find him the first time you call, do not give up your purpose of waiting upon him. It was by much perseverance that I attained to that acquaintance with him which improved into an intimacy that I value very highly . . . I would suggest to you that it may be necessary to exert yourself when with Mr Johnson to lead him to talk of such subjects as are agreeable. You must not be disconcerted though he should appear reserved and wanting in some of the commonplace modes of making a stranger easy. Bring upon him something worthy of his abilities as soon as you can, and I will venture to promise you conversation superiour to any you have ever heard.¹¹

Whatever misgivings that letter might have caused for Beattie, he was overwhelmed with the warmth and kindness with which Johnson received him. He wrote to a friend in Edinburgh:

He received me with the utmost kindness and affection, and desired me to be with him as much as possible. We dined together at a tavern on Saturday last, where we sat by ourselves from two o'clock till it was dark [this was in August]; after which he introduced me at Sir Joshua Reynolds's, where I found that my works were well enough known. Johnson is pleased to bestow the highest compliments both on my principles & on my style. Of the Minstrel he says there is not a line in it which he would not have wished to have written. He is a man of most extraordinary abilities, and, if I mistake not, of great benignity of temper. As to what they say of his roughness, prejudices against Scotland, and overbearing manners, I can only say, that I saw no such thing. Had I been his brother, he could not have treated me with more attention and kindness. I cannot express my gratitude to Mr Boswell for procuring me the honour of such an acquaintance.¹²

From that letter we get a picture of the formidable and rather alarming reputation Johnson had in 1771, and of the contrast in the way he actually befriended a thirty-five year old writer of humble origins, and with a rising rather than an established reputation. A week or so later, Mrs Beattie wrote to her father: 'The doctor has taken an extraordinary attachment to Mr Beattie; he is not satisfied with seeing him at his own house, but has introduced him to all his favourites.'¹³

I am now going to jump two years to 1773. I believe it was a crucial year in determining how both Johnson and Beattie came to be regarded by their own and future generations, and it was a year in which each showed very clearly his regard for the other. For Johnson it was the year of the journey to Scotland and the Western Isles. Now I feel diffident about my own comments on Johnson, speaking as a non-expert among those who emphatically are experts. But it does seem to me that the popular image of Johnson heavily depends on that tour for two reasons. First it was a remarkable event and achievement. Some Johnson admirers look on it with affectionate amusement — at the picture of the doctor traversing those remote areas and islands, and his remarks on Scotland and the Scots. But anyone who has had the experience, as my wife and I had for the first time last spring, of going to just one or two of the Hebridean islands, taking as companions Johnson's *Journey* and Boswell's *Journal of the Tour*, the reaction is something far more than just affectionate amusement. It is overwhelming admiration for the courage and endurance of the sixty-five year old Johnson, undertaking that arduous, and at times hazardous journey, with eighteenth century roads and transport, and crossings of wild seas in small boats in autumn weather. We also have to admire Johnson's insatiable intellectual curiosity and the pertinacity of his research. When my wife and I had scrambled over an area of huge and slippery rocks on the coast of Mull to reach the entrance to the formidable Mackinnon's Cave, Jane refused to enter it at all, and forbade me to go further in than she could keep me in sight. Johnson, you will remember, reaching the same place in a small boat, sent the boatmen to get one small candle, and then ventured into the cave as far as any previous adventurer.¹⁴ This he confirmed by carefully measuring the distance back — 160 yards! The rest of us might then have breathed a sigh of relief and called it a day, but Johnson and his

party continued the 12 miles or so by rowing boat to Iona across waters that are never free of a substantial Atlantic swell.

It was an astonishing journey, and it is not surprising that it has remained part of everyone's image of Johnson. But I believe it was crucial to the picture we now have of Johnson for another reason. We have two wonderful and complementary narratives of that tour. Johnson's is a straightforward account of the journey, the places, and the people. Boswell's contains those things too, but above all it is a vivid portrayal of Johnson himself. It was the preliminary run for the great *Life of Johnson* he would later write. And even the most revisionist biographers and students of Johnson recognize the overwhelming influence of Boswell in creating our picture of Johnson.

So 1773 was a momentous year for Johnson and Boswell. But you will be asking, what has that to do with Beattie, and where was this Scottish friend of Johnson when Johnson was in Scotland. Well, the answer, paradoxically is that he was in London, and for his reputation too, it was a decisive year. But though during the tour Johnson and Beattie were separated by seven hundred miles, Beattie was deeply involved in planning the tour, and each man was very much in the other's mind during that late summer and autumn of 1773.

Beattie was in London because his London friends, including particularly Mrs Montagu, but also Johnson, believed that his writings, especially the *Essay on Truth*, deserved a reward in the form of a royal pension. And, not to beat about the bush, that is what he had come to London to seek. We feel a bit squeamish about that, but it was, after all, a regular custom for distinguished writers to be rewarded in this way in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and of course Johnson himself had received a pension from George III in 1762. We should perhaps regard Beattie seeking a pension in the same light as a writer seeking support from the Arts Council, a commercial sponsor, or, I suppose, the National Lottery. Beattie did receive his pension, after a good deal of what I think he found rather distasteful canvassing, and knocking on the doors of influential folk like Lord North, who usually weren't at home. But this London visit did far more for Beattie and his reputation than just provide him with a pension of £200 a year for life. He was received and honoured by almost every leading figure in politics, the church, the nobility and the arts, including Johnson, Reynolds, Burke, Garrick and Goldsmith. He had an hour's audience with the King at Kew. He received and honorary doctorate at the Encaenia at Oxford, along with Sir Joshua Reynolds. And Reynolds decided to paint a great allegorical portrait of Beattie, called *The Triumph of Truth*.

But in all this curious geographical reversal of 1773, with Johnson going from the heart of literary and political London to the rugged Western coast and Islands of Scotland, and Beattie from the bleak northeast coast of Scotland to the heart of London society, the two men were very close to each other.

Johnson's wish to visit the Western Islands, as he tells us at the start of the *Journey*, was of such long standing that he could not remember how it first began.¹⁵ But when, in the spring of 1773, Boswell realized that Johnson was in earnest about going that year, he immediately set to work to get those with most influence with Johnson to encourage him to go. And of the three Scots he chose to do this, one was Beattie. To him he wrote in April:

I now seriously believe Mr Samuel Johnson will visit Scotland this year: but I wish that every power of attraction may be employed to secure our having so valuable an acquisition, and therefore I hope you will without delay write to me what I know you think, that I may read it to the mighty sage, with proper emphasis . . . He talks of you with the same warmth that he did last year. We are to see as much of Scotland as we can in the months of August and September.¹⁶

And Boswell said they would include Marischal College, Beattie's college, in their itinerary. If you and I were going from London to the Hebrides, we would probably not go via Aberdeen, and I think one reason they took this extraordinarily circuitous route by the northeast coast must have been to see Beattie's home territory and base.

Unknown to Boswell when he wrote to Beattie, Beattie was already in Edinburgh on his way south. He replied to Boswell:

I am to set out this day for London, and hope to have the honour of paying my respects to Mr Johnson and you, about a week or ten days hence. I shall then do what I can to enforce the topick you mention.¹⁷

Boswell continues his journal:

Beattie was as good as his word, and threw some pleasing motives into the northern scale. But indeed, Mr Johnson loved all he heard from one whom he tells us, in the *Lives of the Poets*, Gray found 'a poet, a philosopher, and a good man'.

So Beattie was deeply involved in Boswell's plot to get Johnson to Scotland, and in Johnson's plans for going there. Beattie kept a diary during that London visit which records several meetings with Johnson; one intriguing entry on May 25th reads:

I sat two hours wt. Dr. Sam. Johnson, who was in exceeding good humour and spirits; showed me some latin verses he had lately composed on finishing the last Editn. of his Dictionary, and allowed me to take a copy.¹⁸

Regrettably those verses seem to be lost — they aren't in the complete Yale edition of Johnson's poems, and there is no copy in the Beattie papers. I shall be interested to know if anyone has heard of them. [Editor's note: This poem appears in *The Latin and Greek Poems of Samuel Johnson*: Barry Baldwin (London, 1995) pp. 75-86. There is a reference to this conversation. The book appeared after the date of this paper; it is hoped that it will be reviewed in the next issue of *The New Rambler*.] Both Beattie and Johnson regretted that they would not be going together to Scotland. On August 5th, the night before setting out, Johnson wrote to Beattie:

I shall set out tomorrow with less cheerfulness, because I shall not find you and Mrs Beattie at the College, but as my journey is regulated by the vacation of the Courts, [that referred to Boswell's legal commitments], I cannot delay it.

Then, showing how involved he felt in the question of Beattie's hoped for pension, he continued:

It is very little to the honour of the age that you should meet with any delay or obstruction in the improvement of your fortune. If I had power or influence, you should soon be raised above your difficulties, but I can do nothing more than . . . wish that your perseverance may obtain success however below your merit, yet equal to your desires.¹⁹

On the evening of August 21st, Beattie finally heard from the Secretary to the Treasury that he had been awarded the pension. Among the many people he had to write to he immediately remembered Johnson, and wrote to Sir William Forbes in Edinburgh, asking that if Johnson was still in Edinburgh, he would convey the news to him

for I know the intelligence will give him great pleasure. It grieved me that I could not accompany him to Scotland. I wish the illustrious stranger will meet with every mark of attention and respect.²⁰

Johnson was no longer in Edinburgh, and Beattie's news did not reach him till two months later, when the travellers were at Inverary on the way back. But Boswell records:

I communicated to Dr Johnson the news that Dr Beattie had got a pension of two hundred pounds a year. He sat up in bed, clapped his hands, and cried 'O brave we!' a peculiar expression of his when he rejoices.²¹

I could tell you many other recorded instances of the warmth of friendship and regard between Beattie and Johnson, but I must now move quickly, and finish with one or two little vignettes.

Boswell tells us in the *Life*:

Such was [Johnson's] sensibility, and so much was he affected by pathetick poetry, that when he was reading Dr. Beattie's 'Hermit', in my presence, it brought tears to his eyes.²²

The Hermit is a poem about mortality, and the transience of human life.

A remarkable instance of Beattie's affection for Johnson occurs in a chatty letter which he wrote to David Garrick in 1772.²³ He mentioned that he had lately had a letter from Dr Darwin, a physician in Lichfield, containing some objections to the *Essay on Truth*, and defending Hume. 'My heart warms to the man, because he has the honour to live in the town where you and Dr Johnson were born.' This was of course Erasmus Darwin, grandfather of Charles Darwin, and celebrated in his own day as a botanist and a poet. Two things intrigue me about Beattie's response to this letter from a man whom at that time he had obviously never heard of. The first is that he was able to read it, because I have seen Erasmus Darwin's letter, and I gave up the attempt to decipher it.²⁴ Darwin was a botanist, and wrote an extraordinary epic poem called *The Loves of the Plants*, and his handwriting puts one in mind of some luxuriant but undisciplined creeper. The second is that Beattie did not usually respond warmly to those who criticized his essay and defended David Hume. But such was his affection for Johnson that merely the word 'Lichfield' was a passport to Beattie's affection.

Then some pictures of Johnson in his final years given us by Beattie on his visits to London:

Johnson grows in grace as he grows in years. He not only has better health and a fresher complexion than ever he had before . . . but he has contracted a gentleness of manners which pleases everybody.²⁵

That was in 1781, and an example of Johnson's gentleness of manner is a very tender letter to Beattie the previous summer. He knew that Beattie had suffered very bad health, and had been extremely anxious about Mrs Beattie's worsening mental illness. Johnson wrote:

More years than I have any delight to reckon have past since you and I saw one another . . . If you say that I ought to have written, I now write; and I write to tell you, that I have much kindness for you and Mrs Beattie, and that I wish your health better, and your life long. Try change of air and a few degrees southward; a softer climate may do you both good. Winter is coming on, and London will be warmer, and gayer . . . and more fertile of amusement than Aberdeen.²⁶

Perhaps the most remarkable example of Johnson's increased mellowness, and even of Beattie's, was a dinner party which Boswell engineered in 1781 at the house of Edward and Charles Dilly, who were Beattie's London publishers. Between Johnson and Beattie sat John Wilkes, political gadfly, scourge of Scotland and attacker of almost all the values Johnson and Beattie treasured. Beattie and Johnson had both in the past publicly attacked Wilkes, yet Boswell describes the three of them sitting down happily to dinner and exchanging urbane jokes.²⁷ All of us can think of dinner parties we would very much like to have attended; for me, this extraordinary event would have ranked with the hilarious 'Immortal Dinner Party' at the house of Haydon the painter, with Wordsworth, Keats, Charles Lamb, Landseer, and a bemused Comptroller of Stamps.

Beattie gives a vivid sketch of Johnson in his final year of life:

[He] has got the better of his late illness but he has the look of decline. Wine, I think would do him good, but he cannot be prevailed on to drink it. He has, however, a voracious

appetite for food. I verily believe that on Sunday last he ate as much to dinner as I have done in all for these ten days past.²⁸

In lapidary inscriptions, Johnson said, a man is not upon oath. In offering titles of talks one is to give a year later, a man should not be regarded as altogether on oath either, because one's ideas of what one wants to say may have changed. But what I had in mind in my title, referring to Beattie as the truthful Minstrel was partly a play on words, that the two works which first led to Johnson's admiration of Beattie, were the *Essay on Truth* and *The Minstrel*, and partly that Beattie, the Minstrel, was a truthful witness, and that the picture he gives of Johnson's kindness and mellowness is likely to be an accurate and unbiased one. Beattie was not an uncritical admirer of Johnson, and was prepared to disagree with some of his views. He looked forward to Johnson's account of the journey to the western isles, but some of it he did not like when he read it:

It contains many things worthy of the author, and is . . . very entertaining. [But] his accounts of *some* facts . . . are not unexceptionable . . . the Scots have virtues, and the Scots have faults, of which he seems to have no particular information. I am one of those wish to see the English spirit and manners prevail over the whole island. But we are not all, without exception, a nation of cheats and liars, as Johnson seems willing to believe . . . I admire Johnson's genius, I esteem him for his virtues; I shall ever cherish a grateful remembrance of the civilities I have received from him: I have often, in this country, exerted myself in defence of both his character and writings; but there are in this book several things which I cannot defend.²⁹

Beattie also disapproved of what he saw as Johnson's prejudice against Milton: Johnson once shocked him by saying that he only read *Paradise Lost* to find words for his dictionary.³⁰ It is Beattie's willingness to be critical of Johnson which makes his testimony to him more valuable.

The primary object of my research on Beattie is to prepare an edition of his poems. One of the many fascinations of studying his documents and correspondence has been in Beattie's many encounters with the great characters of the middle and late eighteenth century. And of these, the greatest is certainly Johnson. I would like to finish by gratefully acknowledging two ways in which Johnson has directly helped me in this research. One is his dictionary. By any standards the dictionary was an astonishing achievement, and when the compilers of the great *Oxford English Dictionary* set to work over a century later, it was clear what model they had to follow. In editing Beattie's poems, I find many words whose meaning has subtly changed in the last two hundred years. For a clear definition of what they meant in his time, with illuminating quotations, I always go first to Johnson's *Dictionary*.

Another curious way in which I was helped very recently by Johnson takes us back to the Scottish tour. It has been very important to me to compile a complete and accurate bibliography of how Beattie published his poetry, and I was troubled by a bibliographic problem about a poem Beattie wrote to celebrate the birth of the first son of his friend the Earl of Erroll in 1767. Its first recognized publication was at the end of 1773, but I found that in the University of Texas there was a pamphlet version of the poem, apparently privately printed by Beattie for the Countess of Erroll in 1767. The difficulty was that it transpired that this pamphlet came to an American book collector ninety years ago through the agency of Thomas J Wise, the famous bibliographer and collector who was finally unmasked in the 1930s as a literary forger. And his main kind of forgery was to create pamphlets which appeared to be previously unknown first editions of poems. So was the Texas pamphlet of the poem, which appeared to be the only one in existence, genuine? I spent a day at Austin, Texas, trying to decide with the wonderfully helpful staff of that superb library. I finally decided on the basis of watermarks, and some textual points, that it probably was genuine. But I couldn't be certain, and the Thomas J Wise connection certainly left me uneasy. Then a few weeks ago, I found the solution was not in Texas; it was with Johnson and Boswell. To prepare this

talk, I was reading again Boswell's journal of that Scottish tour. On their way north from Aberdeen Johnson and Boswell stayed at Slains Castle with the Earl and Countess of Erroll, and Boswell wrote 'Lady Erroll had given each of us a copy of an ode by Dr Beattie, on the birth of her son'.³¹ Now, if she gave them *each* a copy, it must have been a printed version, so there genuinely was a printed pamphlet then. So that's additional evidence that the Texas pamphlet is genuine, and not just one of the T J Wise's pieces of creative bibliography. For this, and for many other pleasures I am, like Beattie, grateful to Johnson and Boswell.

Notes

1. Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, ed. by George Birbeck Hill, revised by L. F. Powell, 6 vols (Oxford, 1934-50), II, p. 148. (Hereafter abbreviated to Hill-Powell, with volume and page number. References to vol. V are to Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*).
2. J. C. D. Clark, *Samuel Johnson: Literature, Religion and English Cultural Politics from the Restoration to Romanticism* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 174.
3. The main biographical sources are: Sir William Forbes, *An account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie, LL.D.*, 2nd edition, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1807), hereafter abbreviated to W. Forbes; and Margaret Forbes, *Beattie and his Friends* (London, 1904; reprint Altrincham, 1990). There is further biographical information in a substantial collection of letters in Aberdeen University Library, hereafter referred to as AUL MS.
4. Edinburgh, 1770.
5. *James Beattie's London Diary 1773*, ed. by Ralph Walker (Aberdeen, 1946), p. 86 (Hereafter abbreviated to *Diary*).
6. Hill-Powell, II, p. 201.
7. Hill-Powell, V, p. 29.
8. Hill-Powell, V, p. 273.
9. For sympathetic accounts of Beattie's relationship with Johnson, see James Gray, 'Beattie and the Johnson Circle', *Queen's Quarterly*, 58 (1951), 519-32, and Everard King 'James Beattie: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Didacticism and Literary Taste' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, London University, 1965), 484-90.
10. Hill-Powell, II, p. 141.
11. Boswell to Beattie, 27 July 1771 (AUL MS 30/24/1/1).
12. Beattie to Dr John Gregory, 28 August 1771 (AUL MS 30/1/31).
13. Mary Beattie to Dr James Dun, 12 September 1771 (AUL MS 30/36).
14. Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*; ed. by J. D. Fleeman (Oxford, 1985), p. 121 (Hereafter abbreviated to *Journey*).
15. *Journey*, p. 1.
16. Hill-Powell, V, p. 15.
17. Hill-Powell, V, p. 16.
18. *Diary*, p. 40.
19. Johnson to Beattie, 5 August 1773 (AUL MS 30/24/2/2).
20. Beattie to Sir William Forbes, 22 August 1773 (National Library of Scotland, ACC 4796, Box 94).
21. Hill-Powell, V, p. 360.
22. Hill-Powell, IV, p. 186.
23. Beattie to David Garrick, 16 March 1772 (AUL MS 30/13).
24. Erasmus Darwin to Beattie, 21 January 1771 (AUL MS 30/2/47).
25. Beattie to Sir William Forbes, 1 June 1781 (W. Forbes, 2.265).
26. Johnson to Beattie, 21 August 1780 (W. Forbes, 2.253).
27. Hill-Powell, IV, p. 101.
28. Beattie to Sir William Forbes, 1 July 1784 (W. Forbes, 2.324).
29. Beattie to Dr. Beilby Porteus, 4 March 1775 (W. Forbes, 2.104).
30. Beattie to Sir William Forbes, 10 December 1787 (W. Forbes, 3.31).

SAMUEL JOHNSON AND THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN READER

Professor James G. Basker — 20th May 1995

Chairman: David Parker

Professor Basker, whose degrees are from Cambridge and Oxford, is Professor of English at Barnard College, Columbia University. He is an eminent critic of eighteenth-century writing and has published many articles and reviews in this field and also a study of Smollett (*Tobias Smollett: Critic and Journalist*, 1988). He has edited (with Alvaro Ribiero) *Tradition in Transition: Women Writers, Marginal Texts and the Eighteenth-Century Canon* (1995). He is currently working on a critical study of *Roderick Random* (for the University of Georgia Press) and on *Samuel Johnson and the Common Reader*.

I should explain two things at the outset. First, there has been a slight change in topic: about a year ago when I was invited to present a paper to you I undertook to speak on 'Johnson and the American Common Reader' but in the interim that piece has come out as an essay in *The Age of Johnson* (to my surprise, months ahead of schedule) and, as I didn't want to give you a talk that was already published, I decided to present instead something new, on a related subject on which I have been working: 'Samuel Johnson and the African-American Reader'.

Second, my title today might also have included the 'Afro-Caribbean' and the 'Afro-English' Reader, and any reader of African descent in the English-speaking world; indeed, strictly speaking, the category 'African-American' may not be said to have existed until after about 1787, as America formally became a nation, by which time of course Johnson was already dead. Still, because the term 'African-American' encompasses some 30 million people in the United States and because we in America are so deeply involved in debates over multiculturalism and the ways minority cultures relate to the dominant culture, I use it at the outset. If as I proceed I occasionally interchange such terms as 'Black readers' or 'people of colour', I hope that no one will be offended and that the whole business doesn't sound too parochial or provincial, speaking as I know I am in a country with its own multi-racial population and multi-cultural issues.

When we turn to the topic itself, questions immediately arise. Johnson and the African-American or Afro-English Reader: *Were* there any such readers? *Are* there any today? Was Johnson aware of readers of colour in his audience? What would such readers find of interest in Johnson's writings? As I try to address those questions in this paper, I hope to show in the end that Samuel Johnson is perhaps the most valuable eighteenth-century writer — and one of the most valuable in all of English literature — for African-American and Afro-English readers looking for interest in, and a sense of connection with, the mainstream English literary tradition.

Let's turn first to Johnson's readership in the eighteenth century. Would Johnson have had any reason to think there were Blacks in his reading public? Would he have even thought Blacks capable of literacy, of participation in literary culture on the level of *The Rambler*, *The Dictionary of the English Language*, and *The Lives of the Poets*? The answer is a decided *yes* to both questions. Most visible were famous figures such as Phillis Wheatley, the young slave poet from Boston, who took literary London by storm in the summer of 1773 when she crossed the Atlantic to publish her first book of poems, who in her rhyming couplets consciously imitated Pope and the other masters of neo-classical poetics, and of whom one scholar has concluded that she had 'read virtually all the British and American poets of her century'¹ — presumably Johnson among them. Another is Olaudah Equiano, who settled in England in the 1770s after an arduous life at sea, first as a slave and then a freeman, and whose autobiography, published in support of the abolition movement in the 1780s, makes it clear that even a self-educated working class Black and former

slave could be fully conversant not only with the Bible but with the works of Milton, Pope, and later eighteenth-century poets.²

On a larger scale, Johnson was no doubt aware of the thousands of Africans and Indians throughout the American colonies, the Caribbean, and the continent of Africa that the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was educating in its schools and missions over the course of the eighteenth century. The Society published detailed reports each year, along with sermons extolling the Society's accomplishments delivered by some of the most prominent clergy in the Church of England.³ Church groups and other humanitarians did the same sort of work at home, seeking to educate many of the 13,000-15,000 Blacks — free and slave — who were estimated to live in Britain by the early 1770s. We know that Johnson was specifically aware of one such instance, in which, according to Boswell, a slave brought from Jamaica to Scotland in the 1760s was taught to read by sympathetic locals and then, as a result of reading in the newspaper about the Somerset legal decision of 1772, began a five-year legal campaign in quest of his own freedom.⁴ Johnson became deeply involved in that slave's case as a supporter and advocate, as we shall see.

But of course Johnson would have been aware of Blacks in the reading public from sources literally under his nose. Frank Barber, the former West Indian slave whom Johnson took in as a boy and raised as something of a surrogate son as well as a servant, was a very active reader, as Johnson was well aware. At one stage Johnson paid to educate Frank in a private school for three years and made clear his expectations that Frank would become highly literate. 'Let me know what English books you read for your entertainment', Johnson wrote to Frank at school in 1770, 'You can never be wise unless you love reading.'⁵ By 1778 Frank's literacy and literary interests were so much taken for granted that Johnson, in a letter to Hester Thrale, could casually say of Fanny Burney's newly published novel *Evelina* that 'Francis [i.e., Frank Barber] wants to read it' — finding nothing remarkable whatsoever in a former slave's wanting to read the most acclaimed novel of the year on the English literary scene.⁶ As the record of Johnson's conversation and interaction with Frank Barber over the years suggests, Johnson had a deep, if unconscious, belief in the intellectual capabilities of Blacks — deeper perhaps than all but a handful of the most enlightened of his contemporaries.

It is disappointing, therefore, that in the more than 200 years since Johnson's death, the evidence of his readership among Blacks is very slender. Not surprisingly, it tends to crop up — if at all — among Black intellectuals and literary figures: William Wells Brown, the leading Black novelist and man of letters of the 19th century⁷; W. E. B. DuBois, the great intellectual and writer of the turn of the century⁸; William Stanley Braithwaite, the poet, critic and editor who included Johnson in the anthology of eighteenth-century poetry he published in 1909.⁹ Even more disappointing is that none of these writers convey any sense of Johnson the outspoken opponent of slavery, the man who could disrupt an Oxford Common Room with his toast to 'The next insurrection of the Negroes in the West Indies'. Even Braithwaite, who wrote his own brief biographical sketch of Johnson for his anthology, makes no allusion whatsoever to Johnson's antislavery views or his sympathy for the condition of the Blacks.¹⁰

The same is true among the scattering of the late-20th century Black writers who evince a familiarity with Johnson in their works — with one notable exception. The African-American novelist Charles Johnson, for example, weaves a quotation from Johnson into his novel *Middle Passage* (1991), about a Black man on the run in the nineteenth-century South,¹¹ and the Harvard-based writer, critic, and scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. — widely acknowledged as the leader of African-American Studies in the United States — frequently alludes to Johnson in his various writings.¹² Neither of them, however, makes any allusion to Johnson's advocacy on behalf of Blacks. The exception — and one hopes he may prove a sign of the future — is the young novelist Darryl Pinckney. In Pinckney's prize-winning autobiographical novel *High Cotton* (1992) there is

a dramatic passage in which he make Johnson the symbol of racial toleration in the mind of a young American Black man who, in seeking to escape the racial tensions of America, comes rather tentatively to England. In the passage, the hero's Anglophilia and his anxieties are both palpable:

Messages in bottles had floated toward me: in England's green and pleasant land. I had retrained my handwriting so that it resembled the script on the dust jacket of my edition of Lord Hervey's memoirs. In those rare moments when I thought about the problems of black Britons, I, the born-butler type, made up an argument in my head that began and ended with how much Dr. Johnson had liked his spendthrift servant.¹³

With this brief allusion to Johnson's great fondness for Frank Barber, Pinckney suggests just one of the ways modern African-American and Afro-English readers might connect with Johnson. And it is on *that* readership — more a prospective than an actual readership, a readership of the future — that I would like to focus in the rest of my paper. For it is my belief that Johnson has a large Black readership out there, somewhere in the future, waiting to discover him.

With today's understandable emphasis on multicultural education, there is a question that, rightly or not, every teacher of literature who faces a mixed-race class — that is virtually every college and high school teacher in America today — would have to answer about Johnson: Which writings of Johnson's would hold interest for students and other readers who identify themselves as African-American? One might point them to Johnson's correspondence, especially some of his fatherly letters to Francis Barber; or to his *Idler* 81, with its sympathetic depiction of the plight of Native Americans and its linkage of their condition to that of African slaves; or to his political pamphlet *Taxation No Tyranny* (1775) in which Johnson utters his famous taunt 'How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?'

But there are two texts in particular which, though long ago eclipsed in the Johnson canon, seem most appealing for the modern African-American reader and for any reader interested in racial issues. I would like to focus on each in turn for a few minutes, in an effort to tell the story behind them and to suggest some of the qualities in each that might engage such readers and connect them most immediately to the mind of Johnson.

The first bears a deceptively bland title: it is the 'Introduction' to *The World Displayed*, a thirty-page history of pre-Columbian European exploration that Johnson wrote for John Newbery in 1759 as the introduction to a 20-volume collection of what the subtitle identifies as 'A Curious Collection of Voyages and Travels, Selected from the Writers of All Nations'.¹⁴ Drawing chiefly on two earlier chroniclers for basic historical information, Johnson's 'Introduction' presents a short history of European exploration and discovery as it progressed southwards along the coast of Africa from the early 1400s to the eve of Columbus' historic voyage in 1492.¹⁵ In this innocuous-sounding text, however, Johnson mounts a scathing critique of European discovery and conquest, and particularly of European cruelty and treachery toward indigenous peoples, throughout the whole period of imperial expansion.

From the beginning, as Johnson points out with disapproval, it is a chronicle of gratuitous violence. In one of the earliest instances of contact with Africans, for example, a group of Portuguese explorers happens onto a group of natives 'whom' (Johnson reports) 'according to the savage manners of that age they attacked' — resulting in a bloody skirmish and injuries on both sides.¹⁶ It is a pattern repeated in episode after episode, as unprovoked violence quickly evolves into brutal conquest and enslavement. In 1440 a group of Portuguese, arriving in Africa and feeling themselves (in Johnson's words) 'of strength sufficient to venture upon violence . . . landed, and without either right or provocation, made all whom they seized their prisoners, and brought them to Portugal, with great commendations both from the Prince and the nation' (224).

Johnson is at pains to stigmatize the European behavior as systematically inhumane, unenlightened, uncivilized. In describing another episode from the 1440s, in which the Portuguese turned on an African tribe with whom they had been allies, Johnson reports that the Portuguese, 'not being made so rich as they expected [in their expedition], fell upon their friends, in contempt of all the laws of hospitality and stipulations of alliance, and, making several of them prisoners and slaves, set sail for Lisbon' (225). Here Johnson hints at the darker psychological underpinnings of the slavetrade that he senses in these, its origins. It was an insight on which he expanded later in the essay as, for example, when he paused in recounting yet another atrocity by the Portuguese to say: 'It may be observed that slaves were never forgotten, and that wherever [the Portuguese explorers] went they gratified their pride if not their avarice, and brought [home] some of the natives, when it happened that they brought nothing else' (231). Elsewhere, in summarizing the factors that fuelled the 15th-century European drive to conquer Africa, Johnson lists not only 'the hope of gain from golden regions' and 'the approbation of the Pope', but, in phrases that foreshadow postmodernist discussions of *difference* and *the Other*, the added motivation of 'the sight of men whose manners and appearance were so different from those of Europeans' (224).

Johnson the moralist cannot detach himself from the chronicle of these sad events and thus finds himself frequently lashing out at the very historians from whom he derives his information. Thus, for example, in noting that from about the mid-1400s the slavetrade really began to take off and that hundreds of slaves began to be imported into Portugal each year, Johnson both credits and criticizes his source: so 'Lafitau relates' (says Johnson) 'and relates without any appearance of indignation or compassion' (226). In another passage Johnson pauses to defend the intelligence of Africans from the imputations of the historian he draws on. Having repeated Lafitau's condescending report that the Africans first thought the European ships to be birds, or flying fishes, or even phantoms, Johnson remarks: 'Such is the account given by the historian, perhaps with too much prejudice against a negro's understanding' and then proceeds to demonstrate at length the unlikelihood that Africans actually held such superstitious ideas (226-7).

From about the middle of the narrative, Johnson begins to grow more heated and outspoken in his criticism of European exploration. History gives way to polemic. Unable to contain his moral indignation at stories of massacres in which the Portuguese fired muskets and cannons into crowds of defenseless Africans, Johnson interrupts the narrative with an angry commentary that damns both the Portuguese and their chroniclers:

On what occasion, or for what purpose cannons and muskets were discharged among a people harmless and secure, by strangers who without any right visited their coast; it is not thought necessary to inform us. The Portuguese could fear nothing from them, and had therefore no adequate provocation; nor is there any reason to believe but that they murdered the negroes in wanton merriment, perhaps only to try how many a volley would destroy, or what would be the consternation of those that should escape. (227)

Lest we mistakenly think that Johnson's anger is directed only at the Portuguese or that he is falling into national prejudices, we should note that he immediately expands his critique to encompass all European nations, including his own:

We are openly told [by Lafitau], that they had the less scruple concerning their treatment of the savage people, because they scarcely considered them as distinct from beasts; and indeed the practice of all the European nations, and among others of the English barbarians that cultivate the southern islands of America proves, that this opinion, however absurd and foolish, however wicked and injurious, still continues to prevail. Interest and pride harden the heart, and it is vain to dispute against avarice and power. (227)

Here is the root of Johnson's critique: in their racism, hardened by the dual sense of cultural superiority and economic interest, the Europeans have de-humanized the Africans, treating them as subhuman, enslaving or slaughtering them at will.

And to Johnson the devout Christian there is a further evil in all this that is perhaps even more wicked than simple cruelty and exploitation: the hypocrisy of so-called Christians who, under the guise of bringing the 'truth' and 'enlightenment' of Christian civilization to a 'savage' nation, do nothing of the kind. They not only allow, they encourage Africans to live and die without baptism or the benefits of Christian education. As Johnson says,

What may still raise higher the indignation of a christian mind, this purpose of propagating truth, appears never to have been seriously pursued by any European nation; no means whether lawful or unlawful, have been practised with diligence and perseverance for the conversion of savages. When a fort is built and a factory established [on the slave coast], there remains no other care than to grow rich. It is soon found that ignorance is most easily kept in subjection, and that by enlightening the mind with truth, fraud and usurpation would be made less practicable and secure. (230)

Johnson was no doubt concerned, literally, about the salvation of the souls of Black people. But of course in the eighteenth-century mind, the conversion of 'savages' to Christianity was also much more than a sacramental ritual: it carried with it broader ideas of education, acculturation, and enfranchisement in European society.

There was a widespread belief on both sides of the Atlantic, for example, that baptism as a Christian made a slave eligible to claim his freedom, which explains the vehemence with which almost all slavetraders and plantation owners opposed Christian proselytizing among the slaves.

Even for those modern readers made a bit skeptical about the supposed wrongs done native peoples by withholding Christianity from them, however, Johnson anticipates other, more secular objections to the European conquest of Africa. At moments he evinces, for example, a sense of natural human rights inhering in such peoples, no matter how technologically or otherwise inferior. Thus Johnson drily mocks the way the Portuguese, to mark a claim, would 'erect piles of stone with a cross on the top, and engraved on the stone, the arms of Portugal, the name of the king, and of the commander of the ship, with the day and year of the discovery. This was [he says] accounted sufficient to prove their claim to the new lands; which might be pleaded with justice against any other Europeans, and the rights of the original inhabitants were never taken into notice' (229).

Johnson had the subtlety to see through other European practices which on the surface might seem legitimate and fair. Thus, in marking the moment when European trading posts or 'factories' started up on the African coast, Johnson manages to cast doubt on the fairness of *any* trade between the two cultures: 'from this time began something like a regular traffick', he says, 'such as can subsist between nations where all the power is on one side' (228). Similarly, Johnson exposes the emptiness and hypocrisy of treaties made with people powerless to resist. He describes one such negotiation between a Portuguese commander and a shrewd African chief:

The Portuguese uttered by his interpreter a pompous speech, in which he made the Negroe Prince large offers of his master's friendship, exhorted him to embrace the religion of his new ally, and told him that as they came to form a-league of friendship with him, it was necessary that they should build a fort which might serve as a retreat from their common enemies, and in which the Portuguese might be always at hand to lend him assistance. (230)

The canny African, says Johnson wily, 'seemed very well to understand what the Admiral intended', but as Johnson also saw, he could not hope to avoid this fortified 'friendship'. Ultimately the African chief, says Johnson, 'either induced by hope or constrained by fear, either desirous to make them friends or not daring to make them enemies, consented with a shew of joy, to that which it was not in his power to refuse, and the new comers began next day to break the ground for the foundation of a fort' (230). History records all too well the consequence of such treaties and such forts.

Johnson's survey of 15th-century discovery and exploration emerges, then, as a sweeping indictment of European conquest and exploitation. His summary view is uncompromising:

Much knowledge has been acquired, and much cruelty been committed, the belief of religion has been very little propagated, and its laws have been outrageously and enormously violated. The Europeans have scarcely visited any coast, but to gratify avarice, and extend corruption; to arrogate dominion without right, and practise cruelty without incentive (228).

For Johnson, this past was indeed prologue. After recounting in detail the treachery and havoc generated in two further Portuguese incursions into Africa between 1487 and 1490, he closes the essay by setting the stage for the drama that would soon unfold in the Americas: 'Such was the state of the Portuguese navigation, when in 1492, Columbus made the daring and prosperous voyage, which gave a new world to European curiosity and European cruelty' (236). With that conclusion to the 'Introduction', Johnson offers his immediate readers a rather dark lens through which to view the exploits of Columbus and Drake and all the others assembled in the twenty volumes of *Collected Voyages* that follow. But for late-20th-century Black readers and others sensitive to the legacy of slavery and other outcomes of European expansion, his text shines a light back into history and restores to view the ideas of those such as Johnson who (we are in danger of forgetting) dissented from racist ideology and vigorously opposed the practices of slavery and exploitation it fostered.

In turning from that text to the second in which Black readers might find Johnson most engaging, we turn in a sense from perspectives on the past to prospects for the future, from a text in which Johnson clarified how present conditions had evolved historically to one in which he argued for ways they should be remedied in future. This second text is very short: a two-page legal brief that Johnson wrote in September 1777 on behalf of Joseph Knight, a Black slave seeking his freedom in a Scottish court of law. Before examining the text of the brief itself, we should first review the dramatic but long-forgotten story that lies behind it.

Joseph Knight was a slave who had been purchased in Jamaica as a twelve or thirteen-year-old by a Scot named John Wedderburn and then in the late 1760s brought to Scotland by Wedderburn to be part of his household at Ballandean in Perthshire. At Ballandean Knight served as Wedderburn's personal servant while he also, with the encouragement of fellow servants and sympathetic friends, learned to read and began to educate himself. In about mid-1773 several things seem to have happened at once. Knight had read the newspaper reports of the Somerset case in London, in which Lord Mansfield ruled that a slave could not be compelled to return to the colonies against his will, and began to form the idea — as so many other slaves and their sympathizers did — that he was entitled to his freedom. Meanwhile he had fallen in love with a servant girl in the household, Anne Thomson, and she had become pregnant by him. The order of events is not precisely clear, but shortly thereafter: the master Wedderburn banished Anne for her 'immorality'; she fled to her parents' home in Dundee; Joseph petitioned his master for permission to marry her and bring her back to live at Ballandean (permission was denied); Joseph and Anne Thomson got married anyway; Joseph petitioned his master for wages and then for permission to seek employment off his master's estate, presumably with the aim of supporting her and their expected child; Wedderburn denied these requests also; the baby was born sickly and died within days, although Wedderburn, as he was at pains to point out in subsequent legal documents, did pay the doctor's bills and burial expenses for the child. Under these circumstances, in November 1773 Joseph Knight decided to run away and when Wedderburn learned this he appealed to the local Justices of the Peace to return Joseph and force him to remain in service as a slave, which they promptly did.

This was the beginning of more than four years of legal action. In December 1773 Joseph Knight applied to the Sheriff of Perth (a known opponent of slavery) for three things: to be declared free, to be paid wages for his back service, and to be granted the liberty to change masters as other servants did. In May 1774 the Sheriff, although he did not grant him his back wages, otherwise found in Knight's favour and declared him free. John Wedderburn appealed to the Court of Session in Edinburgh, where hearings began in February 1775; from that point a progression of written submissions, oral arguments, and deliberations was to crawl along for another three years.

It is not known exactly when or how Johnson first became aware of the case and took an interest in it, except that it was almost certainly through John Maclaurin, one of Boswell's closest friends and one of the lawyers who was representing Joseph Knight. Johnson had known Maclaurin since his tour of Scotland with Boswell in 1773, when he and Maclaurin had dined together more than once, and the great literary man and the young lawyer had formed very favorable impressions of each other. Like Johnson Maclaurin was an intellectual polymath, and he shared much of Johnson's moral idealism, particularly his detestation of slavery. Later in life, after a long and distinguished legal career, Maclaurin was to recall the Joseph Knight case as one of the two most important he had ever been involved with. (Significantly, even at the time Maclaurin insisted on representing Knight *gratis*.)

The precise details are lost; but early on Maclaurin had become the lead lawyer for Knight and by February 1776 Boswell, who was himself a lawyer, was visiting the Court of Session to hear Maclaurin and the other lawyers plead.¹⁷ By June of 1776 the surviving correspondence shows Johnson and Boswell already referring familiarly to the Knight case. In a letter to Johnson of June 25 Boswell mentions an important enclosure: 'I send you Mr. Maclaurin's paper for the negro, who claims his freedom in the Court of Session.'¹⁸ This was a copy of the argument Maclaurin had submitted to the Court on April 20, 1776¹⁹ and clearly Johnson was being consulted, probably even solicited for ideas. He wrote back immediately with a suggestion: 'It was last year determined by Lord Mansfield, in the Court of King's Bench, that a negro cannot be taken out of the kingdom without his own consent.'²⁰ Although he misremembered the year, Johnson obviously had taken an interest in the Somerset case of 1772 and was suggesting it as a possible precedent. He wrote again four days later: 'Since I wrote [he tells Boswell], I have looked over Mr. Maclaurin's plea, and think it excellent' and then he continues in a way that suggests how important he thought the case and how committed he was to supporting it: 'How is the suit carried on? If by subscription [i.e. donations to pay Knight's legal bills], I commission you to contribute in my name, what is proper. Let nothing be wanting in such a case.'²¹ Despite long delays, Johnson's interest in the case never flagged and a year later we find him still beseeching Boswell for news of it: 'I long to know how the Negro's cause will be decided,' he wrote Boswell in a letter of 22 July 1777, 'What is the opinion of Lord Auchinleck, or Lord Hailes, or Lord Monboddo?'²²

Thus two months later, when Johnson dictated the brief we are examining here, it was the outgrowth of a significant period of reflection, discussion, and a review of the legal literature. More than a brief on behalf of one man, it became Johnson's manifesto against slavery itself. Johnson's brief rewards close reading because into it he has distilled arguments against slavery drawn from diverse sources, both civil law and Christian morality, ancient history and contemporary events, theoretical ideals and pragmatic concerns. In introducing this text to readers (Black or white) for the first time, I would focus them on several qualities in it that deserve particular notice.

First, Johnson is absolute: slavery is indefensible on any grounds, now or at any time, from pre-history to the present. Yet he avoids airy philosophy to pursue strenuous argument. From the opening line, he enters the case as an active protagonist, as if he were Knight's lawyer and this brief were actually to be heard in court. The first clause, in fact, rather than positing anything,

seems to be responding to an earlier argument from Wedderburn's lawyers. Conceding one of their points — 'It must be agreed that in most ages many countries have had part of their inhabitants in a state of slavery' — Johnson deftly invokes natural law and overleaps recorded history to reach back to 'the natural condition of man'. 'It is impossible not to conceive that men in their original state were equal', he says, 'and very difficult to imagine how one would be subjected to another but by violent compulsion.'²³

From there Johnson's brief becomes a miniature compendium of law, as he argues points that touch on both common law and statutes, in such various areas as criminal law, constitutional law, appellate law, even — in the moment when he suggests that the merchant who sold Joseph never had his title (i.e., his 'right to sell him') examined — property and contract law. Similarly, Johnson seems to touch on an aspect of international law and a notion of inherent human rights when he argues that the slave laws of Jamaica 'are merely positive' and cannot hold sway in Britain because they are 'apparently injurious to the rights of mankind'. It must be left to legal experts such as my colleague Dr. Geoffrey Marston of Cambridge University²⁴ to analyze the legal arguments, their derivations and implications, but it seems clear that Johnson argued with not inconsiderable legal knowledge and authority.

Pausing from legal arguments momentarily, Johnson also succeeds in interjecting into the case a note of human drama drawn from contemporary events: 'In our time', he reports, 'Princes have been sold, by wretches to whose care they were entrusted, that they might have an European education; but when once they were brought to a market in the plantations, little would avail either their dignity or their wrongs.' Johnson refers there to a *cause celebre* of the 1740s, heavily covered in the London press, in which an African prince and his attendant had indeed been entrusted to an English captain who promised to take them to England to be educated, but who, once at sea, threw them into shackles with the intention of selling them as slaves. Fortunately, the captain died while still at sea and the other officers reported his treachery to the Admiralty Office, who freed the Africans and arranged for them to live in London and undertake their education after all.

Their story gained a wider audience and a deeper sentimental charge on February 1st 1749 when the two Africans, according to the London press that reported the event with relish, were so upset by the play they were seeing at Covent Garden that they burst into tears and one of them had to leave the theater in distress. The audience was reported to have been more moved by their ordeal than by the play itself, which was, of course, a performance of Thomas Southerne's *Oroonoko* in which an African prince is betrayed into slavery by the English captain to whom he has been entrusted for his education. The two had been watching a re-enactment of their own harrowing experience.²⁵ Johnson well remembered this episode in 1749 not only because it was covered extensively in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, with which he was still connected, but because it occurred during the very week in all his life that Johnson was most focused on what was happening in the London theater, as his own play *Irene* opened at Drury Lane five days later.²⁶ But more than his own, it was in a sense the memory of an entire generation, and Johnson wisely drew on that memory to dramatize the horrors that slavery perpetrated, not just in faraway plantations but in the very heart of Britain itself.

Beyond ideas of law and human rights, Johnson at one point also focuses on the root evil of racism itself. Racism is shown to be arbitrary and unsustainable: 'The laws of Jamaica afford a Negro no redress', Johnson finds, because, in his words, 'His colour is considered as a sufficient testimony against him.' Here Johnson seems to reject in advance the racialists such as Thomas Jefferson, among others, who increasingly from the 1780s on were to argue the inferiority of Blacks based on physical and other specious pseudo-scientific 'evidence'.²⁷ For Johnson, racism was a moral issue first and last. Implicitly condemning those who, starting from a position of convenience and self-interest in their ownership of slaves, then concoct rationalizations and legal codes based on racial

difference, Johnson declares: 'It is to be lamented that moral right should ever give way to political convenience.'

But finally, ever attuned to human nature, Johnson closes his brief not with broad moralistic proclamations but with two very practical rhetorical gestures. In the first he allows for human weakness and error — 'if temptations of interest are sometimes too strong for human virtue, let us at least retain a virtue where there is no temptation to quit it' — and then refocuses his audience on the specific case of Joseph Knight, servant in Scotland: 'In the present case there is apparent right on one side, and no convenience on the other.' Dropping for the moment the question of slavery elsewhere, Johnson reminds the judges: 'Inhabitants of this island can neither gain riches nor power by taking away the liberty of any part of the human species.'

The second tactic, brilliantly effected in closing, is to transfer to the opposing counsel the burden of proof. Arguing that 'No man is by nature the property of another: The defendant is, therefore, by nature free: The rights of nature must be some way forfeited before they can be justly taken away'. Johnson rhetorically supplants the slaveholders' status quo with an earlier one in which Knight was free and then requires *them* to prove why it should not hold: 'That the defendant has by any act forfeited the rights of nature we require to be proved; and if no proof of such forfeiture can be given, we doubt not but the justice of the court will declare him free.' It is a radical resolution to the argument, but ultimately not a surprising one from someone like Johnson who is always taking us back to first principles.

We do not know whether Johnson's brief was actually submitted to the Court, or whether Maclaurin used any of his arguments during oral proceedings over the remaining four months of the case. But we do know the outcome of the case: on January 15, 1778, by a vote of 10 to 4, the Lord Justices of the Scottish Court of Session decided in favour of Joseph Knight and ruled that slavery did not, could not, exist in Scotland. The press emphasized the honor this decision brought to Scotland, abolishing slavery altogether, where the English courts had only curbed its practice.²⁸ One can only speculate, had Johnson not died in 1784, what his role might have been in the late 1780s, when the Abolitionist Society formed in London and the campaign began, led by Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce. In the nineteenth century various Abolitionists in England and in America remembered Johnson's arguments in support of the Joseph Knight case, and quoted them in support of their cause.

Johnson the abolitionist seems to have been forgotten in our time, but it seems the very element of his life and work — especially in the shape of texts such as the two we have been examining — to place him at the center of today's ongoing discussion about the legacy of slavery and the problem of race relations, to open new possibilities for imaginative connection between Black readers and the mainstream English literary tradition, and to attract for Johnson the multi-racial readership he deserves.

Notes

1. John C. Shields, 'Preface', *The Collected Works of Phillis Wheatley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. xxix. For details of Wheatley's visit to London in 1773, see William H. Robinson, 'Phillis Wheatley in London', *College Language Association Journal* (1977), no. 2, pp. 187-201.
2. *The Life of Olaudah Equiano* (London, 1789), *passim*.
3. See, for example, *A Sermon Preached Before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts*, by the Lord Bishop of Landaff (London, 1775). For an account of one S. P. G. colonial school that was active in the education of Blacks over the entire course of the 18th century, see 'The S. P. G. Program for Negroes in Colonial New York', chap. 4 in Frank J. Klingberg, *Anglican*

- Humanitarianism in Colonial New York* (Philadelphia: The Church Historical Society, 1940), pp. 121-90.
4. James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, ed. by George Birbeck Hill, rev. by L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-64), III, p. 214, n. 1. Cited hereafter as *Boswell's Life of Johnson*.
 5. *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. by Bruce Redford (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992-5) I, p. 350.
 6. *Letters of Johnson*, III, p. 140. More poignant in its symbolism is the set of the *Rambler* that Johnson had originally given his beloved Tetty and which, after his death, became the property of Frank Barber — though whether as part of Johnson's bequest or at Frank's request is not known; see *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, I, Appendix G, p. 539.
 7. See for example Brown's quotation from Johnson in his letter to the American abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, Nov. 12, 1857, printed in *The Mind of the Negro As Reflected in Letters Written During the Crisis 1800-1860*, ed. by Carter G. Woodson (Washington, D. C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc., n.d.), p. 383.
 8. See Du Bois' rather disapproving invocation of Johnson on the topic of education in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), cited here from the edition of Donald B. Gibson (New York: Penguin, 1989), p. 77.
 9. William Stanley Braithwaite, ed., *The Book of Georgian Verse* (London: Grant Richards, 1909).
 10. Braithwaite, *Book of Georgian Verse*, pp. 1270-71.
 11. See for example the Johnsonian quotation ('Being on a ship is being in jail with the chance of being drowned to boot') placed in the mouth of the ship's first mate, Peter Cringle, in Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage* (New York: New American Library, 1991), p. 25.
 12. See for example Henry Louis Gates Jr. citing Johnson for a definition of 'literature' in his *The Signifying Monkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) or conjuring up Johnson's stone-kicking refutation of Bishop Berkeley in his essay 'Let Them Talk' in *The New Republic* (Sept. 27, 1993), p. 38.
 13. Darryl Pinckney, *High Cotton* (New York: Penguin, 1992), p. 127.
 14. For bibliographical and publishing details, see Alfred Hazen, *Samuel Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), pp. 216-21.
 15. Johnson drew on Manuel de Faria y Sousa, *The Portuguese Asia* (London, 1695) and J. F. Lafitau, *Histoire des decouvertes et conquestes des Portugais* (Paris, 1733); see Hazen, pp. 217-8.
 16. 'Introduction,' *The World Displayed*, quoting Johnson's text as reprinted in Hazen, p. 223. Cited hereafter parenthetically in the text.
 17. Boswell's journal for Friday 16 February 1776: 'I was well entertained this forenoon with Maclaurin's pleading in favour of the freedom of Negroes in Britain in the case of Joseph Knight, one of that race.' See *Boswell: The Ominous Years 1774-1776*, ed. by Charles Ryskamp and Frederick A. Pottle (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 235; see also the entry for 20 February 1776 on p. 237.
 18. Printed in *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, III, p. 86.
 19. [John Maclaurin], *Additional Information . . . for Joseph Knight, April 20, 1776* (Edinburgh, 1776).
 20. Johnson to Boswell, 2 July 1776, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, III, p. 87.
 21. Johnson to Boswell, 6 July 1776, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, III, p. 88.
 22. *Letters of Johnson*, III, p. 42.
 23. This and all further quotations are from the brief as reprinted in *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, III, pp. 202-3.
 24. My thanks are due Dr. Marston for his generous help in preliminary research into the Joseph Knight case and for agreeing to collaborate in a larger project of research into the legal and historical significance of Johnson and Joseph Knight.
 25. The tragic stories of individual African princes and other royalty sold into slavery continued to attract public sympathy and literary treatment, from Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko; or, the Royal Slave* in 1689 until well into the 19th century, while millions of ordinary Africans languished in slavery

anonymously. See, for example, the story of Abd Rahman Ibrahima, a West African prince sold into slavery in 1788 and not released until 1827 through the intercession of President John Quincy Adams, as retold by Terry Alford, *Prince Among Slaves: The True Story of an African Prince Sold into Slavery in the American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

26. *Gentleman's Magazine* 19 (1749), pp. 89-90, 323-5, and 522; for details of Johnson's *Irene* in performance, see James Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson* (London: Heineman, 1979), pp. 4-7.

27. For Jefferson's racialist theories, see his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, first published in London in 1787, modern edition by William Peden (New York: Norton, 1972), pp. 138-43.

28. See the *Edinburgh Advertiser* for 16 January 1778 and the *Caledonian Mercury* for 17 January 1778, the latter of which reads in part 'It must give a very high satisfaction to the inhabitants of this part of the united kingdom, that the freedom of negroes has received its first *general determination* [sic] in the Supreme Civil Court of Scotland.'

THE WREATH-LAYING

The annual wreath-laying ceremony, commemorating the death of Dr Johnson, took place in Westminster Abbey at mid-day on 10th December 1994. The allocution was delivered by Dr Nigel Wood, Lecturer in the School of English at Birmingham University. He reminded us that we were gathered to remember a life as well as to commemorate a death. We were there to give thanks for the life of a remarkable example of steadfast belief, liberal thought and also moral courage. Such commemorations ensure that reputations and influence are not confined to mere lapidary inscriptions.

Shortly after Johnson's funeral, Sir John Hawkins discovered an anonymous letter which portrayed Johnson in an unflattering light. What impressed him most was the fact that Johnson had placed it so obviously in his bureau that it might 'look him in the face' whenever the bureau was opened. This stern aid to humility is surely, said Dr Wood, the hallmark of a great and charitably-disposed talent.

Anniversaries can be empty rituals, but in honouring his memory we acknowledge the effect that a full life can have on us. Meeting here on such an occasion we come closest to Johnson's life and to his virtues. As Imlac notes, in *Rasselas*, 'mortification is not virtuous in itself' and 'he that lives well in the world is better than he that lives well in a monastery.'

Such charity, Dr Wood concluded, does not properly begin at home but amongst us all; such hope is not irrational but is firmly founded on the rock of belief on which Johnson's whole life was based.

The Annual Luncheon of the Society, organised as in other years by Mrs A. G. Dowdeswell, then took place in the *Vitello d'Oro* restaurant.

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

SAMUEL JOHNSON'S 'LATE CONVERSION' REEVALUATED IN VIEW OF THE PUBLISHED SERMONS¹

By Andrew Sandlin, American editor of *Calvinism Today*

This fit of sickness continued on me for seven weeks, and a glorious visitation it was. The blessed Spirit was all this time purifying my soul. One day, perceiving an uncommon drought and a disagreeable clamminess in my mouth and using things to allay my thirst, but in vain, it was

suggested to me, that when Jesus Christ cried out, "I thirst," his sufferings were near at an end. Upon which I cast myself down on the bed, crying out, "I thirst! I thirst!" Soon after this I found and felt in myself that I was delivered from the burden that had so heavily oppressed me. The spirit of mourning was taken from me Now did the Spirit of God take possession of my soul, and, as I humbly hope, seal me unto the day of redemption.

George Whitefield
from *George Whitefield's Journals*, 1735

Both Maurice Quinlan² and Donald Greene³ have detailed the events surrounding the controversy of Samuel Johnson's 'late conversion', a significant remark in a written prayer offered soon before Johnson's death. Greene provides the historical background of the controversy:

Such was the prayer which that very great Christian, Samuel Johnson, composed and uttered . . . eight days before his death, when, in his sick room, he, with a few friends, received his last communion at the hands of the Reverend George Strahan The transmission of the text of this prayer has had a curious history, involving very important questions concerning the nature of Johnson's fundamental religious beliefs. Eight months after Johnson's death, George Strahan became one of the first to publish in the field of competing Johnsonian biographers and editors, bringing out a book which he called *Prayers and Meditations, composed by Samuel Johnson, LL.D., and published from his manuscripts*. In this volume, heavily edited throughout, Strahan printed the prayer composed for Johnson's last communion — with silent alterations. The most drastic of these was the deletion of its second petition, "Forgive and accept my late conversion." Hawkins later published, both in his *Life of Johnson* and in Volume XI of the collected *Works* of Johnson, the full text of the prayer. But Boswell, in his *Life*, chose to reproduce the version emended by Strahan⁴

Quinlan insists that evangelicals like William Cowper misinterpreted Johnson's reference in his prayer of December 5, 1784 to refer to the Methodist and evangelical 'conversion experience', and even that Johnson's biographers may have skewed the evidence in favor of an 'evangelical conversion', just as Strahan and Boswell apparently attempted to obscure the comment to prevent such speculation. Quinlan believes that, in any case, since Johnson understood conversion as moral reformation, he did not have in mind the sort of emotional, often enthusiastic experience the evangelical view of conversion denoted.

Greene, on the other hand, claims that there is no essential difference between the major branches of Christianity with respect to the definition of conversion and that, therefore, when Johnson employed the term, he attached to it no unique denotation.⁵ This view is endorsed by Pierce, who remarks, 'there was no evidence for the belief that the phrase "my late conversion" ever meant to Johnson . . . a change from the Anglican to the Evangelical faith We should thus now look at this prayer not as an expression of new belief but rather as an affirmation of an old dispensation, of a lifelong desire to believe in the truths of Christianity.'⁶

This dispute is clouded by the differing interpretations of the term *conversion*. There is no question about its Biblical denotation; it means an active turning away from sin to God and religious virtue.⁷ The dispute concerns what this turning entails. Greene recognizes the genuine dispute but insists the necessity of conversion is a moot point inasmuch as all conceive of it as a turning away from sinfulness to righteousness.⁸ The very questions which Greene concedes do surround the issue of conversion in general impinge on the controversy of Johnson's 'late conversion'. He cites the employment of the terminology of conversion by several Anglican divines who influenced Johnson to prove a consensus regarding the general idea of conversion. The issue is not so simple, however. For example, Greene himself admits one of the doctrinal controversies surrounding conversion is 'about the degree of distinction to be made between the concepts of conversion and regeneration'.⁹ Indeed,

this issue is most relevant to Johnson's conversion. There is no evidence Johnson even held to the evangelical doctrine of regeneration.¹⁰ For the Methodists regeneration was intimately tied to conversion.¹¹ They recognized conversion as the human response to regeneration, a gratuitous and instantaneous act of God by which the dead spiritual nature of the unbeliever is enlivened. This feature of eighteenth-century, as well as contemporary, evangelical soteriology which conceives of man as passive prior to regeneration because of his innate spiritual inability is absent from Johnson's ethical and moralistic understanding of salvation. For instance, in a sermon urging charity Johnson states:

Men are not charitable, as they are not just; because they suffer themselves to be captivated by their senses, because they are wholly engrossed by present happiness, and extend not their prospects to another state; they do not contemplate the duration of their future existence, or impress upon their minds, the great importance of pleasing God; and the danger of falling into everlasting misery; and have therefore no motives, which they can oppose to the solicitations of appetite, the incitements of passion, or the tranquillity of negligence; but pass their lives, some in the slumbers of indolence, and others in the hurry of business or of pleasure, without any preparation for that change, which must determine their state to all eternity.¹²

Likewise, in Sermon 9 on communion, Johnson's extensive exhortation to self-examination is void of any reference to the necessity of reliance on God as supplier of our conversion:

We cannot receive the sacrament unless, unless we believe in Christ, because by receiving it, we declare our belief in him, and a lying tongue is an abomination to the Lord. We cannot receive it without repentance, because repentance is the means, by which, after sin, we are reconciled to God; and we cannot, without dreadful wickedness, by partaking of the outward tokens of reconciliation, declare that we believe God at peace with our souls, when we know, that by the omission of repentance, we are yet in a state of voluntary alienation from him. We cannot receive it, without a sincere intention of obedience; because, by declaring ourselves followers, we enter into obligations to obey his commandments.¹³

In Sermon 14 Johnson expresses his idea of conversion; and here, moreover, he omits any allusion to the divine supply of regeneration as the cause of man's turning to God:

He that hopes to find peace by trusting God, must obey him; and when he has at any time failed in his obedience, which amongst the best men will be very frequent, he must endeavour to reconcile God to him by repentance This constant and devout practice, is both the effect, and cause, of confidence in God. He will naturally pour out his supplications to the Supreme Being, who trusts in him, for assistance and protection; and he, who, with proper fervour and humility, prostrates himself before God, will always rise with an increase of holy confidence. By meditating on his own weakness, he will hourly receive new conviction of the necessity of soliciting the favour of his Creatour; and by recollecting his promises, will confirm himself in the hope of obtaining what he desires, and if, to secure these promises, he steadily practices the duties on which they depend, he will soon find his mind stayed on God, and be kept in perfect peace, because he trusteth in him.¹⁴

Significantly, one's 'holy confidence' in this conversion rests not with God's actions, but man's. Man can be relatively certain of God's promises if 'he steadily practices the duties on which they depend'.

It is incumbent on individuals to prepare for 'that change', conversion, 'which must determine their state to all eternity'.¹⁵ However, to the evangelicals, following the Reformers, conversion is 'human response to regeneration, the infusion of new life into the soul'.¹⁶ It is not an act for which one can prepare; he must be regenerated that conversion may occur. The key difference between the views of Johnson and the evangelicals is the stress the latter place on special grace as a requisite of conversion. Johnson believes each individual has within himself the capacity to convert himself. In Sermon 2 he enjoins:

But it is of the highest importance to those who have so long delayed to secure their salvation, that they lose none of the moments which yet remain; that they omit no act of justice or mercy now in their power; that they summon all their diligence to improve the remains of life, and exert every virtue which they have opportunities to practice.¹⁷

This citation is typical of Johnson's numerous exhortations to conversion: there is no hint it is contingent on and engendered by a particular elective grace so indispensable to the Reformation and evangelical understanding of conversion. All men are given the means to convert themselves; they are under divine requirement to do so.

While divine regeneration apart from human co-operation is no essential antecedent to Johnson's view of conversion as it is for evangelicals, 'amendment of life' in the act of repentance clearly is.

An amendment of life is the chief and essential part of repentance. He that has performed that great work, needs not disturb his conscience with subtle scruples, or nice distinctions.¹⁸

The divine assistance necessary to this conversion is not regeneration, of course, but 'those means which God has prescribed for obtaining his assistance', including 'prayer', 'the holy sacrament', and indeed 'all those institutions that contribute to the increase of piety'.¹⁹

In his view of conversion, as in his conception of justification, sanctification, and assurance, the cast of Johnson's mind is largely Tridentine. While the Reformers and evangelicals insist that God must regenerate and convert the totally unable sinner,²⁰ Trent holds that God enlivens the sinner so he may convert *himself*.

... they, who by sins were alienated from God, may be disposed through his quickening and assisting grace, to convert themselves to their own justification, by freely assenting to and co-operating with that said grace: in such sort that, while God touches the heart of man by the illumination of the Holy Ghost, neither is man himself utterly inactive while he receives that inspiration, forasmuch as he is also able to reject it [Individuals are justified] when, understanding themselves to be sinners, they, by turning themselves, from the fear of divine justice whereby they are profitably agitated, to consider the mercy of God, are raised unto hope, confiding that God will be propitious to them for Christ's sake; and they begin to love him as the fountain of all justice; and are therefore moved against sins by a certain hatred and detestation, to wit, by that penitence which must be performed before baptism: lastly, when they purpose to receive baptism, to begin a new life, and to keep the commandments of God This disposition, or preparation, is followed by justification itself²¹

Eight days before his death did Johnson experience an 'evangelical conversion' distinct from the 'amendment of life' he consistently equated with repentance and conversion? It hardly seems possible. The strongest evidence, in fact, that Johnson's soteriology remains essentially unchanged even at the end of his life is the text of the controversial prayer itself. Johnson prays:

Almighty and most merciful Father, I am now, as to human eyes it seems, about to commemorate for the last time, the death of thy son Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer. Grant, O Lord, that my whole hope and confidence may be in his merits and in thy mercy: forgive and accept my late conversion, enforce and accept my imperfect repentance; make this commemoration [of] him available to the confirmation of my Faith, the establishment of my hope, and the enlargement of my charity, and make the death of thy son Jesus Christ effectual to my redemption²²

It will be recalled Johnson's soteriological foundation is that 'Salvation is promised to all Christians, on the terms of *faith, obedience, and repentance*',²³ key actions on the application of which Christ's merits is suspended.²⁴ Interestingly, Johnson's final recorded prayer adverts to these actions in precise order. First, he mentions his faith: 'Grant, O Lord, that my whole hope and confidence may be in his merits and in thy mercy.' Second, he petitions God to take account of his

most recent amendment of life: 'forgive and accept my late conversion.' Third, he appears to God to accept his flawed but sincere repentance: 'enforce and accept my imperfect repentance.' Greene is quite justified, then, to chide 'even the most assiduous Johnsonian students' for their lack of sensitivity to 'the nuances of Johnson's style'.²⁵ I believe, though, such sensitivity may lead Johnsonians to conclusions differing somewhat from Greene's own that Johnson always affirmed justification by faith alone and that his understanding of conversion was no different from that of the Methodists and other evangelicals.

For one thing, as Hudson observes,

... at a time when many orthodox theologians [including the evangelicals] were trying to reintroduce real passion into Christianity, Johnson was still cautious and concerned to place limitations on this notion of piety. His idea of the Christian life ... saw Christianity not as a joyful celebration of God's love for mankind, but above all as a particularly impressive ethical code.²⁶

In addition, the Restorationist divines and, it appears, Johnson, identify justification by faith alone with antinomianism.²⁷ Johnson is deeply concerned with morality to his dying day (as his diaries evince), and it can scarcely be expected that he can sustain such a radical change of heart weeks before his death.

Further evidence that Johnson's 'late conversion' represented no alteration in his essential soteriology is the advice in a paragraph in Sermon 28 to convicts whose death was impending just as Johnson's was in 1784:

Nothing therefore remains, but that we apply with all our speed, and with all our strength, to rectify our desires, and purify all our thoughts; that we set God before us in all his goodness and terrors; that we consider him as the father and judge of all the earth; as a father, desirous to save; as a judge, who cannot pardon unrepented iniquity: that we fall down before him self-condemned, and excite in our hearts an intense detestation of those crimes which have provoked him; with vehement and steady resolutions, that if life were granted to us, it should be spent hereafter in the practice of our duty; that we pray the giver of *grace* to strengthen and impress these holy thoughts, and to accept our repentance, though late, and in its beginnings violent: that we improve every good motion by diligent prayer: and having *declared* and *confirmed* our faith by the holy communion, — we deliver ourselves into his hands, in firm hope, that he who created and redeemed us will not suffer us to perish.²⁸

This style of linked clauses urging Christian dedication is reminiscent of Law, who, like Johnson, indicates his concern for the application of the faith to 'common life'. Note the similarities:

Our blessed Saviour and His Apostles are wholly taken up in doctrines that relate to common life. They call us to renounce the world, and differ in every temper and way of life, from the spirit and way of the world: to renounce all its goods, to fear none of its evils, to reject its joys, and have no value for its happiness; to be as new born babes, that are born into a new state of things; to live as pilgrims in spiritual watching, in holy fear, and heavenly aspiring after another life: to take up our daily cross, to deny ourselves, to profess the blessedness of mourning, to seek the blessedness of poverty of spirit: to forsake the pride and vanity of riches, to take no thought for the morrow, to live in the profoundest state of humility, to rejoice in worldly sufferings: to reject the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; to bear injuries, to forgive and bless our enemies, and to love mankind as God loveth them: to give up our whole hearts and affections to God, and strive to enter through the strait gate into a life of eternal glory.²⁹

There is every reason to assume the expression 'accept our repentance, though late' in Sermon 28 is equivalent to Johnson's death-bed petition, 'accept my late conversion'. In both the sermon and petition holy communion is coincident; both depict repentance and amendment of life, or at least intent to do so, as essential; both appeal to God's mercy; both express a confidence in personal salvation. Most importantly, both harmonize with Johnson's foundational dictum of soteriology: the application of Christ's merits is contingent on faith, obedience, and repentance.

In addition, Johnson's description and defence of the viability of 'death-bed repentance' in Sermon 28 conforms to his own 'conversion experience'. Johnson implored,

Fix in your minds this decision, "Repentance is a change of the heart, of an evil to a good disposition." When the change is made, repentance is complete. God will consider that life as amended if he had spared it. Repentance in the sight of man, even of the penitent, is not known but by its *fruits*: but our Creatour sees the fruit, in the blossom, or the seed. He knows those resolutions which are fixed, those conversions which would be permanent; and will receive them who are qualified by holy desires for works of righteousness, without exacting from them those outward duties which the shortness of their lives hindered them from performing.³⁰

That is, God will accept sincerity in lieu of virtuous action as repentance and conversion. In his heart an individual repents and converts himself. We must not rely on faith alone³¹ as the evangelicals, following the Reformers, insist; rather, we must alter our intent and, if possible, our actions, if God is to receive us. Johnson's 'late conversion' in no way deviates from this conception of conversion: he recognizes the error of his way and determines to amend his life. This is the essence of the Johnsonian conception of conversion.

Finally, we would do well to remember that the very day of this entry Johnson tells John Ryland that he understands that the hopes of salvation are conditional, and that he is not certain he has conformed to the *conditions*: Pierce cites Johnson's comment to Ryland that 'we have hopes given us; but they are conditional, and I know not how far I have fulfilled those conditions'.³² He would have said as much at any time in his adult life. Hence, the final prayer does not represent any alteration in his Tridentine conception of salvation as conditional, justification as processional, and absolute assurance as impossible.

Notes

1. This essay constitutes a slightly revised chapter from the author's dissertation 'The Soteriology of Samuel Johnson' written under the supervision of Matthew Curr in the postgraduate English department of the University of South Africa.
2. Maurice Quinlan, 'The Rumor of Dr. Johnson's Conversion', *Review of Religion*, xii (1948), 243-61.
3. Donald J. Greene, 'Dr. Johnson's "Late Conversion": A Reconsideration', in *Johnsonian Studies*, ed. by Magdi Wahba (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 61-92.
4. *ibid.*, pp. 60-61.
5. *ibid.*, pp. 73-79.
6. Charles E. Pierce, Jr., *The Religious Life of Samuel Johnson* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983), p. 163.
7. J. Goetzmann and F. Laubach, 'Conversion, Penitence, Repentance, Proselyte,' in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. by Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), I, pp. 353-59.
8. Greene, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
9. *ibid.*
10. In fact, in the *Dictionary* Johnson identifies conversion as regeneration.
11. David M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), pp. 195-202.

12. Samuel Johnson, *Sermons* [The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, ed. by Jean Hagstrum and James Gray, vol. xiv] (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1978), [Sermon 27], p. 293.
13. *ibid.* [Sermon 9], pp. 104-105.
14. *ibid.* [Sermon 14], pp. 157-58.
15. *ibid.* [Sermon 27], p. 293.
16. Donald Bloesch, 'Conversion', in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* ed. by Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 273.
17. Johnson, *op. cit.* [Sermon 2], p. 25.
18. *ibid.*, p. 24.
19. *ibid.*
20. R. T. Jones, 'Reformation Theology', in *New Dictionary of Theology* ed. by Sinclair B. Ferguson, J. I. Packer, and David F. Wright (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1988), pp. 565-69; Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), III, pp. 942-46.
21. Phillip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1877), II, pp. 92-93. Emphasis in original.
22. Samuel Johnson, *Diaries, Prayers, Annals* [The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, ed. by E. L. McAdam, Jr. and Donald and Mary Hyde, Vol I] (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), pp. 417-18.
23. Johnson, *Sermons*, p. 303. Sermon 28. Emphasis in original.
24. James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica [University of Chicago], 1952), p. 394.
25. Greene *op. cit.*, p. 79.
26. N. J. Hudson, *Samuel Johnson and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 203.
27. *ibid.*, p. 196.
28. Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 308-309. Emphasis in original.
29. William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), p. 6.
30. *ibid.*, p. 308.
31. *ibid.*, p. 304.
32. Pierce, *op. cit.* p. 161. Citing *Johnsonian Miscellanies* ed. by G. B. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897; reprint New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), II, p. 156.

MORE ON LADY FRANCES

A reader writes:

Professor J. P. K. Rogers (*New Rambler*, 1991/92, pp. 41-43) is quite mistaken in his supposition that the 'Lady Frances' whom Johnson reported to Hester Thrale in his letter of 2 May 1782 as 'not at home' was 'Lady Frances Manners, who was a daughter of the sixth Duke of Somerset and widow of the celebrated Marquis of Granby', son and heir of the third Duke of Rutland. Lord Granby did indeed marry (in 1750) a Lady Frances (née Seymour), eldest daughter of the sixth Duke of Somerset. Horace Walpole (to Horace Mann, 7 September 1750) discusses the marriage — the bride has four thousand pounds a year, and a reputation for extravagance. But she did not become Granby's widow. She predeceased him by ten years, dying 24 January 1760, twenty-two years before Johnson's letter — see the reports of her death in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, XXX (1760), 47, and Walpole's letters to George Montagu 28 January 1760. Moreover, she could never have been 'Lady Frances Manners'. 'Manners' is of course the family name of the Dukes of Rutland, and if Lady Frances Seymour had married a Manners without a peerage title, she would have been 'Lady

Frances Manners'. But at the time of her marriage her husband already held the 'courtesy' title of Marquess of Granby, and so she became Marchioness of Granby, or (informally) Lady Granby.

Bruce Redford has since made a plausible identification of the 'Lady Frances' of Johnson's letter. She was Lady Frances Burgoyne, née Montagu, daughter of the first and sister of the second Earl of Halifax (of the second creation) and married to Sir Roger Burgoyne, sixth baronet. When a child, Hester Salusbury had played with Lady Frances's children and knew the whole family well. Her brother, as President of the Board of Trade, was the patron of Hester's father, John Salusbury, giving him an appointment (which turned out unsatisfactorily) in the new settlement in Nova Scotia founded by him and named after him. As late as December 1782, after Hester had been widowed through the death of Henry Thrale, Lady Frances was still interested enough in her to propose that she marry the Viscount Hinchinbrook, heir to the head of another branch of the far-flung Montagu clan. The idea of eventually becoming Countess of Sandwich intrigued Hester, but as she confesses, she was by that time so much in love with her future husband Gabriel Piozzi that she could not take the suggestion seriously. On all this, see *Thraliana*, I, 286 and I, 555.

It seems unlikely that anyone will come up with a more attractive conjecture than Professor Redford's. Professor Rogers could not have known about it, since it first appeared in Volume IV of Redford's edition of Johnson's letters, published in 1994. Even without such an alternative, however, Professor Rogers's identification would have to be firmly rejected: there was a very cogent reason why his Lady Frances was 'not at home' in 1782. A small point: in his search for a suitable Lady Frances, Professor Rogers asserts that 'there were few peeresses alive in 1782 who might fill the blank'. There were, in fact, none. A peeress is the wife of a peer or, more rarely, holds a peerage in her own right. If she were a marchioness, countess, viscountess, or baroness, she would be addressed informally as 'Lady So-and-so' (the title of the peerage). But 'Lady' followed by a female given name such as 'Frances' always indicates that the holder, though the daughter of a duke, marquess, or earl, is not the wife of a peer, or possessor of a personal peerage, and is therefore not a peeress.

VERSES AFTER DR. JOHNSON

Mrs Gina Berkeley has been kind enough to offer us a sight of her prize-winning entry in a *The Spectator* competition where Johnsonian lines were invited describing the present state of the globe, based on the opening lines of 'The Vanity of Human Wishes': 'Let observation with extensive view / Survey mankind from China to Peru.' These lines have already appeared in *The Spectator*. We are pleased to reproduce them.

Behold the barren deserts of the East,
Where Famine stalks the sand while Sultans feast;
The South, where starving serfs, through flood and drought,
In hope of sons, will cast their daughters out!
What though the West presumes with warlike words
To save superfluous Cubans, Croats and Kurds?
Can all the crowded cities of the North,
With licensed Vice, escape stern Nature's wrath?
Quake, Earth! Let each wronged Longitude proclaim
That lawless Latitude must take the blame!
When population has become too dense,
It should regain a bottom of good sense;
The body must be governed by the mind
Ere Man can hope once more to love Mankind.

BOOK REVIEWS

Joseph F. A. Bartolomeo, *A New Species of Criticism: Eighteenth-Century Discourse on the Novel* (London and Toronto: University of Delaware Press, Associated University Presses, 1994), £28.00

The prose fable, of course, preceded by centuries the critical recognition of the novel genre, but the eighteenth-century insistence on 'probability' created a new self-consciousness on the part of writers and perhaps new demands from readers. Not that there were many ostensible statements. Bartolomeo examines prefaces, dedications, letters, pamphlets and periodical reviews.

It was Samuel Johnson who not only drew the first significant comparison between Richardson and Fielding, but also articulated the moral aspects of fiction. Like later periodical reviewers, Johnson 'condescended to novel readers'. As Bartolomeo points out, this stance may have been flattering to his audience, but demonstrated critical impotence. Bartolomeo offers interesting discussion of Johnson's demand for 'characters of nature', relating it to his work on Shakespeare.

I must confess that apart from Richardson's repudiation of 'the marvellous' and Fielding's claims to have originated a new species of writing, the comic epic in prose, together with *Rambler* 4, I was unaware of the volume of critical theoretical writing on the novel in the eighteenth century.

When Sterne and Fielding were deconstructing the novel form, as the author of this book lucidly and learnedly demonstrates, critical marginalia were debating the ethics of writing and reading, the boundaries of fact and fiction, narrative and gender, popular versus 'high' culture, and the role of the reader. *Plus ça change*...

Valerie Grosvenor Myer

Arthur Sherbo. *Samuel Johnson's Critical Opinions. A Re-Examination*. Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1995. ISBN 0-87413-547-8. £27.00

The sub-title is misleading. It is not Johnson's critical opinions that are being reexamined; rather we are given a reappraisal of Joseph Epes Brown's *Critical Opinions of Samuel Johnson* (1926). This lists Johnson's opinions on general critical topics and individual authors and works. The comments are taken from Johnson's writings and from remarks quoted by his biographers.

A Professor Sherbo points out, Brown's book has shortcomings. The Johnsonian canon has expanded in the last seventy years and in any case his collection was not intended to be comprehensive. Brown omits comments on 'volumes of sermons, philosophical works, obscure translations or histories, and editorial undertakings'. This sort of remark hands hostages to fortune and we note ruefully that working outside these categories means that Brown misses out Johnson on *The Wealth of Nations*, the works of Xenophon, Jeremy Taylor, and others.

But Brown's most serious limitation is in his coverage of Johnson's Shakespearean criticism. Because all his quotations are taken from Walter Raleigh's *Johnson on Shakespeare* (1915), which uses only the 1765 edition, no account is taken of the material which Johnson and George Steevens added in their 1773 and later revisions. Thus the reader of Brown would miss out on the interesting discussion on stage dialect in the notes on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Professor Sherbo has made distinguished contributions to our understanding of Johnson's Shakespeare so it is perhaps understandable that Shakespeare dominates this book, about seventy percent of its pages being given over to the subject. Much of this material can also be found in the Penguin anthology by H. R.

Woudhuysen (*Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, 1989) which also gives some Shakespeare material from the *Dictionary*. None of the selections however, nor Sherbo's complete *Johnson on Shakespeare* for Yale, gives us much of the scholarly cut and thrust between Johnson and the earlier editors, and Johnson and Steevens.

The overwhelming presence of Shakespeare in Sherbo's book emphasises how far it is an appendix to Brown. A better solution might have been a new book combining Brown's structure with Sherbo's additions. This may have been economically prohibitive, but, as it stands, the Johnson scholar still needs Brown and Sherbo open on his desk together.

Sherbo tidies up some of Brown's quotations and citations but the principal interest lies in the newly gleaned material. Not all of this comes from recently discovered works. A closer reading of Johnson throws up opinions missed by Brown: comments from the 'History of the English Language' on Translation and Robert of Gloucester, the *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of 'Macbeth'* an opinion on St Chrysostom. Much of the 'new' material comes from Allen Hazen's work on the dedications and prefaces, for instance, Johnson on Metastasio from his dedication to John Hoole's 1767 translation.

Professor Sherbo does not always clarify Brown's references. Alexandrine is given a new section but there is a fuller range of quotations on the same topic in Brown under VERSIFICATION. The *Lives of the Poets* are not individualised. More importantly, I am uneasy with the nature of some of Sherbo's additional critical opinions. Quotations about Samuel Foote and William Shenstone refer to their personal qualities rather than their literary ones.

The references to Johnson's possession of a particular book in his library are helpful, Sherbo usually drawing on Donald Greene's masterly checklist. Reference might also have been made to David Fleeman's *Preliminary Handlist of Copies of Books Associated with Dr Samuel Johnson* (1984).

Studies of Johnson's library, the books to which he subscribed, and the Brown/Sherbo work on his opinions, have placed us in a better position to assess the extent and nature of Johnson's reading. But the *Dictionary* still remains the great terra incognita, despite the pioneering work of Robert DeMaria and others. We need hard facts on the works quoted and the number of illustrative quotations from each one. A checklist of Johnson's reading for the *Dictionary* will surely yield up surprises and cast new light on the man who, in Adam Smith's words, 'knew more books than any man alive'.

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The Letters of Samuel Johnson. Edited by Bruce Redford. Vol. IV: 1782-1784; Vol. V: Appendices and Comprehensive Index. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 1994. Pp. xx + 462; xvi + 174. ISBN: 0-19-811951-8; 0-19-811952-6.

Bruce Redford's edition of Johnson's letters has since its publication found a well-deserved place on the bookshelves of Johnson scholars and enthusiasts alike. The five volume Hyde Edition, so named in honor of Donald and Mary Hyde, is intended to supersede R. W. Chapman's 1952 edition and in nearly all respects answers expectations.

In his preface, Redford argues for a reassessment of the epistolary Samuel Johnson based on the new and updated material of the Hyde Edition. A close reexamination of the original manuscripts, careful editing practice and inclusion of fifty-two previously unpublished letters support this claim. The first three volumes record the development of Johnson's epistolary career from his bold proposal to Cave and the well-known letter to Chesterfield to his charming and intimate letters to the Wartons and Mrs Thrale. The final volume covering the years 1782-84 reveals Johnson still writing to please and desirous of maintaining close friendships though hampered by age and infirmity.

Johnson observes in *Rambler* 152 on epistolary criticism that 'the purpose for which letters are written when no intelligence is communicated, or business transacted, is to preserve in the minds of the absent either love or esteem; to excite love we must impart pleasure, and to raise esteem we must discover abilities'. The 481 letters contained in volume IV — nearly a third of Johnson's recorded epistolary output — serve a variety of purposes from the purely functional regret of a dinner invitation to mediation of quarrels and the nurturing of his many friendships.

Redford's conscientious study of manuscripts and holographs has restored to these letters Johnson's original orthography, punctuation and language. Where previous editors may have been less attentive or had fewer resources available, Redford has taken great pains for accuracy. As a result Flora Macleod the celebrated beauty of Raarsa no longer 'dresses her head very high' as earlier editions read, but instead 'tosses' it as Johnson originally wrote to Mrs Thrale (II, p. 82). Numerous other minor but potentially instructive corrections abound in the edition.

Redford's notation of Johnson's corrections and substantive deletions visible in the manuscripts is likewise informative, sometimes testifying to Johnson's state of health or mind. An example of this is the letter to John Taylor written just after Johnson's paralytic stroke in June 1783 where Redford notes that 'it has proved impossible at several points to distinguish slips of the pen from considered alterations in phrasing' (IV, p. 148). Johnson's draft letter to Lord Thurlow regarding the failed attempt to procure Johnson money to travel abroad for his health is especially interesting as it reveals his process of composition when he was particularly concerned to please and raise esteem. Redford records Johnson's choice of 'advancing a false claim' over the rejected 'getting money upon false pretences', such that the delicate subject of money is alluded to without mention of the word itself (IV, p. 399).

Ideally, Johnson's personal letters are epistolary gifts proffered with the hope of recalling the writer to the mind of the absent friend. Shared experiences and mutual friends provide the resources of memory that he calls upon when writing. The Hebridean tour is remembered fondly in Johnson's letters to Boswell while Streatham associations abound in his letters to Mrs Thrale. Likewise, Johnson's frequent literary allusions are an acknowledgment of shared intellectual culture as well as compliments to his readers' learning.

Redford's notes provide indispensable background information for readers unfamiliar with Johnson's complicated network of friends and circumstances, but equally important, Redford supplies the full quotation, source and English translation of Johnson's literary allusions however fleeting. Complete translations of the Latin letters are also included in volume V. Footnote references are provided to earlier and subsequent letters that discuss the same subject, so that it is possible to read through a series of letters with a view to learning about one topic like the progress of the hot air balloon or Johnson's ailments. Another editorial addition that is particularly welcome is the reference to the present location of the manuscript in the headnote, although Redford's noting of Johnson's repeated catchwords in the footnotes serves little purpose.

Redford's style of notation is a conspicuous departure from his predecessors'. Where Hill's citations stray often into conjecture and Chapman's range from scholarly explanations to the colloquial, Redford's are invariably concise syntheses of previous criticism with valuable contributions from his own research. He has expanded on Chapman's hints, located quotations that had gone untraced and happily abandoned the complicated numbering system of previous editions. The effect of Redford's editorial approach is to give the sense that here is an entirely objective editor. Yet what is lost is Chapman's suggestion of open invitation into the editorial process. Chapman's discussion of why he has rejected or accepted a specific critical opinion and comments like 'I suppose Johnson intended "an authour" and changed his mind' referring to letter 1006.1 imply that the interpretation of Johnson's meaning lies partially with the reader.

Readers may also miss the interspersed letters of Mrs Thrale to Johnson. The inclusion of her letters — or Boswell's or the Wartons' — in a modern scholarly edition would be inappropriate, yet I still found myself returning to Chapman to discover Mrs Thrale's response to a particularly surly assault from Johnson's pen. Redford has helpfully included some important excerpts from her letters and *Thraliana* in the footnotes, and a listing of the present location of collections of letters to Johnson is found in volume V. The Johnson-Thrale exchange at the heart of the edition is explored in depth in the final chapter of Redford's *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (University of Chicago, 1986).

The recently recovered letters to Charlotte Lennox in the 1750s and those to her included in volume V to which Redford was unable to fix a date are remarkable as they illuminate the extent to which Johnson was involved in the promotion of her literary career and the regulation of her conduct. It is interesting to compare Johnson's epistolary ideal to 'impart pleasure, and to raise esteem' with the advice he gives Lennox in the first of the undated letters of volume V. Johnson cautions her to give up letter writing entirely since she can only send her peevish letters 'to two sorts of people, those whom you cannot pain, and those whom you can, and surely it is not eligible either to give mirth to your enemies or to raise anger in your friends' (V, p. 10).

After nearly forty years of discoveries and developments in Johnsonian studies since the publication of Chapman's edition, Redford's well-edited and handsome *Letters of Samuel Johnson* provides material for a welcome reappraisal of the epistolary man of letters.

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'Boswell Goes Home'

Under this title Hugh Douglas has reviewed: *Boswell, Laird of Auchinleck 1778-1782*, edited by Joseph W. Reed and Frederick A. Pottle (Edinburgh: University Press, 1993) a revised edition of the Yale Edition of Boswell's Private Papers and Pat Rogers, *Johnson and Boswell: The Transit of Caledonia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Hugh Douglas is the Ayrshire-born author of *Flora MacDonald: The Most Loyal Rebel*, and *Bonnie Prince Charlie in Love*. His latest book, *Robert Burns: the Tinder Heart* is due to be published by Sutton Publications on 27th June 1996.

It is sad to think that two of the greatest (and certainly most interesting) literary lights of that wonderful burgeoning of intellectual life in Scotland, the Scottish Enlightenment, were contemporaries and near neighbours, yet never met. This seems a great pity since they had much in common, not least a taste for a hearty drink and an eye for a pretty girl, and both would have enjoyed debating the rights and wrongs of society in which they lived.

It was not lack of desire to be acquainted that kept James Boswell and Robert Burns apart; indeed Burns was so anxious to be introduced to his fellow Ayrshireman that, in the hope of engineering a meeting, he sent Boswell one of his political ballads containing a reference to him as:

... him wha led o'er Scotland a'

The meikle Ursa Major

The poem, sent via the hand of another Ayrshire laird, was accompanied by a fulsome letter: 'There are few pleasures my late will-o'-the-wisp character has given me, equal to that of having seen many of the extraordinary men, the Heroes of Wit & Literature in my Country; & as I had the honour of drawing my first breath almost in the same Parish with Mr Boswell, my Pride plumes itself on the connection ... to have been acquainted with such a man as Mr Boswell, I could hand down to my Posterity as one of the honors of their Ancestor'.

Alas, Burns' scheming came to nothing, which is hardly surprising since, although they shared an Ayrshire heritage, they were born into very different social spheres — Boswell as heir to an ancient line of lairds and Burns the son of a struggling tenant farmer. Boswell was 19 years older than the poet and by the time Burns became famous enough to merit notice from lairds and lords in 1786, he had all but moved out of the Ayrshire orbit.

Two recent books serve to underline what was lost by the failure of these two Ayrshiremen ever to come together. A handsome new edition of the Yale Edition of Boswell's private papers, *Boswell, Laird of Auchinleck 1778-1782*, edited by Joseph W. Reed and Frederick A. Pottle (Edinburgh University Press), deals with the period when Boswell returned home to run the estate at the time his father was dying. *Johnson and Boswell: The Transit of Caledonia* by Pat Rogers (Oxford: Clarendon Press) examines the relationship of both Boswell and Dr Johnson to Scotland as revealed in their respective accounts of their journeying there.

In their introduction to the journals of this important period of Boswell's life, Professors Reed and Pottle are almost apologetic for the fact that, while the earlier journals in which Boswell had cast himself as a rake, student, suitor and lawyer, were stronger in what in fiction would be called 'plot', this Auchinleck laird volume lacks 'plot'. No apology is necessary: the role of laird, especially under his father's ever-critical eye, was so beset by the diverse problems of running an estate, not to mention organising family life, that absence of 'plot' is more than made up for by the welter of fascinating detail of life on a small Scottish estate and insights into the mind, emotions and reflections of a man nearing his fortieth birthday.

Boswell at this time is in sombre mood: 'I had hoped to live better from this day, being now forty years of age,' he wrote when this landmark birthday passed on 19th May, 1780. Shades of his countryman, Robert Burns, who four years later said, on moving into Mossgiel farm, 'Come, go to, I will be wise.' But to no avail: sobriety and good-living did not come easily to the laird or poet-tenant farmer.

Like Burns, too, Boswell's relationship with his father was often difficult and a key element in his life in Ayrshire. There may have been plenty to disapprove of in James's conduct even at the mature age of forty, but equally the old man tried his son's patience. While dining together one day, Lord Auchinleck angered James by speaking harshly of his mad son, John. Boswell wrote afterwards, 'I went to my father's at night. He spoke of poor John with contemptuous (sic) disgust. I was shocked and said, "He's your son, and GOD made him." He answered very harshly, "If my sons are idiots, can I help it?" I supped with him and was patient.'

The role of head of his own family and his extended small 'clan' of relations, runs through the pages. His wife's recurring illness is an ever-present worry, and we see him sitting at her bedside reading *Tom Jones* to her, or worrying about what will happen if she should die. Then the rash

young Boswell of earlier days re-emerges, leaving his journal lying carelessly around so that she sees it and is so shocked by his excesses that she tells him 'she would continue to live with me only for decency and for the sake of the children'.

These journals vividly portray a public figure as uncertain in the role of laird as of paterfamilias. His deep insecurity set alongside his concern that he had reached middle age, hardly fitted him for the battle which life was always to be. In this his Ayrshire countryman would have shared a fellow feeling and offered sympathy.

In *The Transit of Caledonia* Professor Pat Rogers encompasses the panorama of Johnson and Boswell's relation with Scotland, and offers us a deeper insight into the accounts both men left of their historic tour.

Professor Rogers opens with an examination of the reason for the journey, which he sees, in Johnson's case, as a reversal of the grand tour made as a kind of *rite de passage* at the onset of old age. For Boswell it was the realisation of a long-felt desire, and a testing of his own Scottish identity and facing up to the new, emerging Scotland of the Enlightenment.

It is difficult to accept wholly Professor Rogers' claim that Boswell wanted to make the journey to the Highlands and Islands as 'a fantasy recreation of Charles Edward's experiences in the Highland's during the 1745 Rising, in which his friend 'stood in for the missing Prince'. It is true that, when Prince Charles Edward Stuart stormed through Scotland, Boswell was a boy of five, just old enough to have his imagination fired by the event. However, his Jacobitism was more likely akin to that of his fellow Lowlander, Burns, who wrote of them in 1788: 'That they failed I bless my God most fervently; but cannot join the ridicule against them.'

Of course, Boswell wanted to meet those Jacobites who had been 'out' with the Prince and see the sites of their triumphs and disasters, but he had other reasons for luring Dr Johnson to his homeland. James Boswell always felt deeply insecure about his own Scottishness, so by accompanying his friend to the country's farthest shores — where he was as much a stranger as was the Doctor himself — he might lay some of the ghosts of this insecurity.

He introduced the Doctor to many of the great men of this age of Enlightenment, and must have been bitterly disappointed that Johnson took little notice of them. Nonetheless, the visit was a triumph, which Professor Rogers has turned into a fascinating account of where Scotland stood at this time of great change, of emigration and anti-Scottish feeling south of the Border and of discovery around the world. The book is a rewarding commentary on the accounts Dr Johnson and Boswell wrote of their transit of Scotland, and for Scots it also offers an illuminating insight into this glorious period.

How tantalising that the people to whom Boswell was introducing the good Doctor were the very men and women whom Burns came to know so well only a few years later.

We have been marking the bi-centenary of the deaths of these great Ayrshire contemporaries, James Boswell in 1995 and Robert Burns on 21st July this year. These two enjoyable books make one's chagrin the greater that their paths (and that of Dr Johnson too for that matter) never crossed for us to enjoy their joint commentary of the age they shared.

Charles H. Hinnant *"Steel for the Mind": Samuel Johnson and Critical Discourse*. (Newark: University of Delaware Press) (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses)

If you aren't familiar with contemporary literary theory, or if recollections of Johnson's critical opinions don't spring to mind when you hear the names of William R. Keast, Leopold Damrosch, and Jean J. Hagstrum, then you're probably better off spending your few idle hours on the golf course instead of on this book. Even if you know a little bit about Hagstrum's *Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism* or Keast's essay 'The Theoretical Foundations of Johnson's Criticism', for that matter, reading "*Steel for the Mind*" may be about as challenging as keeping abreast of political events in what used to be Yugoslavia and the U. S. S. R.: not impossible, and certainly edifying, but you're going to have to work at it.

On the other hand, if you're a committed scholar of Johnson's criticism, or if you intend to weigh in on what today's literary theorists have to say about Johnson, borrow this book from the library soon (if the local university doesn't have it, whoever is in charge of collection building has some explaining to do).

Hinnant's principal achievement with "*Steel for the Mind*" is the vigorous case he makes for Johnson's enduring critical relevance; indeed, Hinnant's basic argument is that Johnson's literary criticism informs modern theories in significant ways. In his reassessment of Johnson's commentary on language, for instance, he points out that Johnson and the deconstructionists have more in common than previously thought: 'Like Locke and other advocates of the plain style, Johnson is firmly committed to the virtues of clarity, propriety, and consistency. But this commitment is severely curtailed by his belief that words are only arbitrary signs.' Johnson's 'associationism' here, Hinnant points out, echoes Derrida's conception of 'iterability', which 'refers to the possibility, even the inevitability, that the words will be repeated and used in different senses on different occasions'.¹

In another example, Hinnant shows us how Johnson's work might be fruitfully studied by New Historicists:

One of the reigning ideas in recent criticism, fostered mainly by New Historicists and cultural materialists, has been that texts as well as their authors are products of particular cultures and can only be understood in terms of those cultures. Johnson has often been seen as an exponent of a universalism that is diametrically opposed to this approach, but his actual convictions are a good deal more complicated.²

Hinnant goes on to cite and discuss a passage from *Rambler* 106 (Yale Edition of Johnson's Works, IV, p. 202) further to illustrate his point.

To summarise, Hinnant's work is indispensable if your interests or scholarship steer you toward literary theory, Johnson's literary criticism, or what will be the case for many budding Johnsonians, some combination of both.

Come to think of it, even if you are merely a dabbler in Johnsonian studies, maybe the prudent choice is to play only nine holes and peruse a chapter or two of this innovative, thoroughly researched piece of scholarship.

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¹ Hinnant, p. 184.

² Hinnant, p. 59.

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