

**THE NEW RAMBLER**



JOURNAL OF  
THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

**1995/6 ISSUE**

## COMMITTEE

Mr Richard Thrale (Chairman)  
Miss M. Berry  
Mr. M. Bundock, LLB LLM  
Mr C. Tom Davis, BA MA  
Mrs A. G. Dowdeswell  
Dr R. G. Fricker, BA MSc RSCI LRCP and SI LDS  
Mrs A. Hopkins, MA  
Mrs Z. O'Donnell, MA

Hon Treasurer and Hon Membership Secretary:

Mr Brian Rees MA  
14 Kingsbridge Avenue  
London W3 9AJ  
0181 992 5542

Hon Secretary: Mrs Z. O'Donnell, MA  
255 Baring Road, Grove Park, London SE12 OBQ  
(Tel: 0181 851 0173)

Hon Editor of *THE NEW RAMBLER*  
Mr David Parker, MA, M Litt  
10 Beaumont Buildings, Oxford OX1 2LL  
(Tel: 01865 558795)



**THE NEW RAMBLER**  
**Journal of the Johnson Society of London**

Editor: David Parker MA, MLitt

Serial No D X I

ISSN 0028-6540

1995/6

**Contents**

Page

<b>FROM THE EDITOR</b>	2
<b>PAPERS READ TO THE SOCIETY October 1995 — April 1996</b>	
The Hertfordshire Thrales and the Streatham Family Richard Thrale	3
Foiling the Rival: Argument and Identity in Sheridan's Speeches Christopher Reid	10
An Aspect of Dr Johnson Judge Sir Stephen Tumim	18
A Man Led by a Bear: Dr Johnson's Relationship with Boswell's Wife Margaret Montgomery Brian Todd	23
Mentors Old and New; Samuel Johnson and Hannah More Mary Waldron	29
Dr Johnson's Influence on Jane Austen Claire Lamont	38
Numeracy and Dr Johnson John Craig	47
<b>THE WREATH-LAYING</b>	54
<b>IN MEMORIAM</b> Trevor Russell-Cobb 1918-1996	55
<b>OCCASIONAL PAPERS</b>	
Johnson's Contemporary Reputation Brian Hanley	56
<b>BOOK REVIEWS</b>	
Christopher Reid on John Cannon: <i>Samuel Johnson and the Politics of Hanoverian England</i>	62
Eithne Henson on <i>Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Romance Writings</i> (ed. Isobel Grundy)	63
Brian Todd on <i>Boswell's Journal of the Tour to Corsica</i>	65
Susan Catto on <i>Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Selected Letters</i> (ed. Isobel Grundy)	66

#### OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

Pat Rogers, *The Samuel Johnson Encyclopedia*

Dr. Anne McDermott has kindly agreed to review this book to appear in the next issue of the *New Rambler*. We have also been sent a list of publications of the JUVENILIA Press: the General Editor is Juliet McMaster of the Department of English at the University of Alberta. These are charming editions of the juvenile works of, among others, Jane Austen, Lady Mary Pierrepont and Charlotte Bronte. Please contact the editor for further information.

#### From the Editor:

As reported last year, the Society now has a Treasurer and Membership Secretary: these posts have been taken over by Brian Rees, and he embarks on them with our thanks and good wishes.

We are pleased to announce that Professor Donald Greene and Professor Isobel Grundy have accepted invitations to become Vice-Presidents of the Society. Donald Greene was Bing Professor of English, University of Southern California: his writing covers many years and many aspects of Johnsonian scholarship. He has been a member of our Society since 1971, and your present editor has received many proofs of his interests in this field. Isobel Grundy, after 19 years at Queen Mary College (now Queen Mary and Westfield College) University of London, is now Henry Marshall Tory Professor at the University of Alberta. She too has been a member of the Society since the seventies (1974), and her removal to Canada has not diminished her helpfulness in the Society's affairs.

It is sad to report, once again, several deaths among our membership in the course of the year. Professor M. J. C. Hodgart, of the University of Sussex had been one of our Vice-Presidents. Trevor Russell-Cobb, who died in February 1996, had been a member since 1972. He sat on the Committee for some years, and even after leaving it he was in regular and loyal attendance at meetings, frequently acting as Chairman. A memoir (to be found on page 55) demonstrates the breadth of his interests. He is much missed. We have also lost Ursula Pye; members will remember her help with the tea-ceremony at meetings, and she used generously to provide the wreath which was laid on the grave each year in Westminster Abbey. Patricia Wilmot joined us in 1987: but her main interest was the Society in Lichfield of which she was an officer and Council member. Those of us who are members of both societies remember with affection.

Our relationship with the Johnson Society of Australia was re-inforced by visits to Oxford of the Treasurer (John Byrne) and the Secretary (Brian Reid). I had the pleasure of welcoming them both.

I have also had the pleasant experience of correspondence with an Italian Johnsonian, Professor Giovanni Iamartino of the University of Milan. He has kindly sent an off-print of a recent article of his (*Textus*, VIII, no. 2) on 'Dyer's and Burke's Addenda and Corrigenda to Johnson's *Dictionary* as Clues to Its Contemporary Reception'. Professor Iamartino visited England in August, but unfortunately I was unable to meet him in person; I hope to do so on his next visit.

© Copyright subsists in the contents of this journal.

Printed by Oxonian Rewley Press Ltd., Oxford.

# THE HERTFORDSHIRE THRALES AND THE STREATHAM FAMILY

Mr. Richard Thrale — 21st October 1995

Chairman: Mrs A. G. Dowdeswell

Richard Thrale is, of course, the Chairman of The Johnson Society of London, and he still lives in the area about which he spoke in this paper. His timely intervention in the unavoidable absence, due to illness, of the scheduled speaker, was much appreciated. It is hoped that Professor James Gray may be able to give us at a future date his paper on David Garrick and the French Connection.

The central pivot of the Samuel Johnson story is Hester Lynch Salusbury, Mrs Thrale, an extraordinary woman of long Welsh descent who married Henry Thrale.

So who were these Thrales? The immediate response is that they were a family whose fortunes for better or worse were based on farming, milling, and brewing, and whose lack of mobility, except in certain outstanding cases, was remarkable. Thus this story centres on Sandridge, a village on the northern edge of St. Albans, site of Verulamium, and of a great Benedictine Abbey. Thus I will always be talking about mid-Hertfordshire, unless it is about the Southwark/Streatham family, or about the adjacent county of Bedfordshire, and it is in that county that this family history begins. The Subsidy Rolls of 1309 mention John Thral and the Bedfordshire Tax Returns for the same year show William le Thral to have been liable for 3/- and Johanne Thrale for 2/-. The whole of the story centred around the Hundred of Flitt which included many Bedfordshire parishes but especially that of Luton with its Manor of East Hyde and West Hyde which borders on the hamlet of Thrales End.

From 1329 onwards continual transactions in land are recorded. In 1355 for instance one transaction included a croft "cum vinis, sepibus et fossatis" at West Hyde, so one may assume that at that time vines were an actual crop. Through the years the family appeared to flourish strongly, and Austin in his *History of Luton* describes the Thrales as yeomen squires. Johannes Thrale is recorded as an M.P. for Bedfordshire in 1376 and Chevalier as an M.P. in 1381. The next M.P. in the family was not to be for another 160 years, in the person of Michael Thrale. Born in 1512 and living at Luton Hoo he had a life full of acrimony. While Under-Sheriff of Hertfordshire he was accused at Hertford of rigging a jury in a dispute over payment of tithes. In another case he was accused of not empanelling a jury, and on another occasion he was in conflict with a whole bevy of citizens concerning the marking of timber. His career appears full of such arguments.

I revert, however, to an earlier century, to an event of 1474: which was the granting of a licence to Thomas Rotherham, who was a member of a very influential local Luton family who owned the Hundred of Flitt. This licence was issued by Edward IV to Rotherham (who was to become Archbishop of York), and its purpose was to found a religious guild. The aims and objects of this guild were brotherly love, charity and social activity. Papers in the possession of the Marquis of Bute showed the guild to be one of the most wealthy and splendid in the kingdom. Annual lists indicate the Masters, Wardens, Brethren, Sisters, Bachelors and Maidens of the guild, many being of royal rank and others being Bishops. John Thrale was Master of the guild in 1476 and so were other members of the family during the ensuing years.

At the end of the fifteenth century two important family records come to light. One in 1493 refers to Thrales End and land called Tufnells belonging to Robert Thrale. Then 50 years later in 1543 there occurs another reference to land at Thrales End called Tufnells which was formerly belonging to Robert Thrale. It is between these two dates that the first Thrale, Robert, went to Sandridge, and it is about him we will now talk and from him there is a proven descent to the present day.

We do not know exactly when he came to Sandridge, but in 1522 he was established as a victualler to the Abbey of St. Albans and he was owed £7.13.4d during the time of the last Abbot. The Abbey was the

centre of the world for the Thrales and all those living in the area. Besides being a victualler he was a farmer-tenant of the Abbey, and he held upon lease from the Abbot of St. Albans two farms in the Sandridge area. Robert Thrale and his son Robert were also in conflict in the Star Chamber, being involved in a case concerning bondmen of the Abbey. Officers of the Abbey wished to know which men of Sandridge were bondmen, and Robert Thrale was paid twelve pence to record the enquiry. Those Sandridge men however, who were named bondmen fiercely disputed the claim at a court held at St. Albans "under the ash within the Abbey" and a general quarrel broke out.

There would appear to be some sort of relationship between the Thrales and the Abbots of St. Albans. A well-known Abbot was John Hayworth who was succeeded by John Bostock or John of Wheathampstead as he is quite often called. His mother had inherited Mackerye End made famous later through Lamb's Essays and indeed the farm was to be held by later Thrales. A nephew of John of Wheathampstead, namely Willie, had married Elizabeth Thrale and lived at Mackerye End. The brasses of the family can still be seen in Wheathampstead Church. John of Wheathampstead also enjoyed entertaining guests at the Abbey, including the highest in the land, and he reflects the same attitudes as shown by the religious guild of Luton which we have already mentioned and which was flourishing at the same time. As the abbacies of Wallingford and Ramryge came and went however and the Tudor dynasty came into power, the Tudors showed quite clearly that they had no time for monasteries, and on Ramryge's death in 1519, the Abbacy was given to Cardinal Wolsey with Prior Catton as deputy. Catton was well known for giving preference to people for personal gain and was a pawn of the powerful Thomas Cromwell, and one wonders whether the Thrales were caught up in such matters of leases with the Abbey as there were several cases occurring at that time. The last Abbot was in 1538 when Richard Boreman became the 41st and last Abbot of this great Benedictine Monastery which had dominated the religious, economic and social life of the Thrale family and the neighbourhood of St. Albans over 700 years. It was at this time that Robert Thrale was the highest-taxed (of 48 others) in Sandridge in the Hundred of Cashio and at the same time William Thrale was the highest taxed at West Hyde in the Hundred of Flitt, the original home of the Thrales.

The importance of the dissolution of the monasteries and the distribution of land to secular families in consequence cannot be over-emphasised. It revolutionised society at the time. Several families which came into Thrale family affairs were involved in this re-distribution. A former official of the Monastery was a member of a family called Gape who continued living in St. Albans until recent times and provided sixteen Mayors of St. Albans. Another man by the name of Sir Richard Lee took over the old Nunnery of Sopwell in St. Albans, and in doing so he diverted the old main road into St. Albans so that he could create a private park.

The time has now therefore come to tell the story of the descendants of the two Roberts in the various branches, but in case we feel that we are living in bad times it might be as well to recall the years 1557 and 1558 when a series of terrible things happened. There was for instance, an epidemic of Influenza which carried off hundreds of people. Trade and agriculture were terribly depressed, bad seasons contributing to the general ruin. Heavy taxation was felt by rich and poor. Storms and tempests added to the general feeling of misery. Political unrest and the war with France ending in irretrievable disgrace again added to the miseries of that time. We are therefore perhaps not doing so badly today! The only existing building in Sandridge from that period is St. Leonard's Church. Cottages were timber-framed with wattle work, loam and rubble. Chimneys had only just come into existence, and fuel for warmth and cooking was wood. Potatoes were just coming into some garden plots but were not yet grown as a crop. Dinner was at eleven or twelve and supper some five hours later. Food was served on wooden plates, but forks were not at that time used. All the men wore beards, and the horse was just replacing the ox in the field.

The Thrales at this period besides owning or farming several farms in the Sandridge area owned various hostleries in St. Albans which still can be seen as Public Houses: the Peacock and the Red Lion "over



against the cross", that cross being one of the commemorative monuments erected to mark the route of Queen Eleanor's funeral cortege. The family also farmed 91 acres at this time at a place called Batchwood in St. Albans which is now part of the municipal Golf Course. One should perhaps mention two well-known Vicars of Sandridge at the time of these Thrales, one being Steven Gosson who was a well-known writer and another William Westerman, famous for his sermons in London and brother of John who was a schoolmaster at St. Albans School which claims to be over a thousand years old. The latter donated arms to the Home Guard of Sandridge, at the time being of course the Home Guard against the Armada.

There is not really time to tell you about a very large number of wills but it might be a good example to quote from one of Elizabeth who had married Thomas Thrale of Sandridgebury and who died in 1603. She left "white cloath at the fullers coups in St. Albans to make coats, the cupboard in the hall, the best glass pot, three silver spoons, silver engraven pot, silver spoon with a lion on the top, the best red cow, a gown, a great platter, a ewe, two stone of wool, the least chest, a bushel of wheat and a latten candlestick".

Description should now be given to the branch of the family which descended from those Thrales farming Hammonds in Sandridge. Several marriages in this branch are interesting as they provide examples of the migration of people. For instance, the Thrales intermarried with the Teddar family at Hatfield, and the Teddars had of course come with many others from Wales with the Tudor dynasty. Such folk as the Teddars staffed the new royal palaces and homes in and around London. Another marriage should be mentioned for an entirely different reason, that of Richard Thrale to Martha Aylward; for it illustrates the growing influence in the area of non-conformity. Martha Aylward's father William belonged to a local St. Albans family who had farmed in the area for generations, and it was during the Commonwealth that incumbents of Churches were replaced by puritan clergy. After the Restoration, non-conformity became illicit and the non-conformists met at a place called New House in St. Albans, home of William Aylward—it was here incidentally, for many years that my brother possessed a horticultural nursery. The coming in 1672 of the Declaration of Indulgence meant that meetings were held openly, and from then on non-conformist chapels were built in St. Albans, various members of the Thrale family being Trustees at different times. Some members of the family were very much caught up in non-conformity with other influential families, and therefore one can find such entries in the Registers of Sandridge "1706—baptised by Mr. John Grew, a Presbyterian Minister, Joshua, a child of Thomas Thrale of Fairfolds."

One should now mention the last of the line of this branch who was John Thrale. Quite literally like Dick Whittington; he had gone to seek his fortune, although he had inherited Fairfolds Farm in Sandridge from his father before his 21st birthday. He indeed established his fortune but whether he found happiness is another thing. As a young man he went out to Barbados and had been manager of a farm there, during which time he sold goods to the value of £12,000 on behalf of the owners. Returning to London he married Margaret Chaplin, apparently of the same family as Sir Francis Chaplin, Lord Mayor of London in 1677 and mentioned by Pepys in his diary. While appearing in the Livery as a Citizen and Brewer in 1696, much of his business appears to be connected with overseas trading and maritime matters. In 1687 he raised between six and seven thousand pounds in order to fit out a ship to search for wrecks in the West Indies. A year later John complained that he had invested £500 in a ship called "The Constantinople Merchant" but had had no return. Another dispute with Dalby Thomas of London included bizarre matters ranging from tickets for the Million Lottery, shares in Hampstead Waterworks and postage costs from Barbados. His disputes in Chancery were constant, ranging from Vintners marks on barrels of wine to pictures and paintings. He died in 1704 leaving a most complicated will. He left most generous bequests to local churches and it is interesting to note that a favourite legacy to many people took the form of silver spurs. His daughters inherited the farms back in Sandridge, and then sold the farm of Fairfolds to a kinsman, Thomas Thrale, in 1765. John Thrale's monument can be seen in the South Choir of the Abbey together with his wife Margaret who died in 1708. The Thrale

arms are displayed, a paly of ten or and gules impaled with those of the Chaplin family, and the whole monument is similar to that erected 80 years later to Henry Thrale in Streatham Church about which more will be said later.

We will now pass on to the story of a branch called the No Mans Land family. The latter location lies between Wheathampstead and St. Albans very close to Sandridge and still is a very beautiful open space. The earliest No Mans Land Thrales owned Astwick Manor nearby which later became part of the old De Havilland Aerodrome and factory but which is now British Aerospace. The Court Roll references at the Church Commissioners in Millbank record the first Ralph in 1683 as occupying No Mans Land farm, and from that time on for seven generations No Mans Land was held by Ralph Thrale to Ralph Thrale and so on. From the time when the Thrales first farmed No Mans Land there comes a legendary history of some fascination. In 1890 the antiquary, Dr. John Griffith, recorded that he had seen an ancient document which was possessed by Mrs. Syrett, the draper's wife at St. Albans. It recounted the legendary history of the Arms of the Thrales of No Mans Land and it read:

In ye last year or two of Queen Mary's reign, from 1556 to 1558 Elizabeth was under the necessity of making her escape from Ashridge to Hatfield. Being pursued by and nearly taken by Queen Mary's emissaries, she dismounted her palfrey or horse and escaped into the bar or house of Mr. Thrale of No Mans Land, where she was concealed for several days and escaped. As a reward Queen Elizabeth, on coming to the throne gave to the Thrale family, as a token of her regard amongst other things, arms and a broad arrow.

Diligent research cannot throw much light upon this matter, but it is a fact that during the time of Wyatt's Rebellion Mary did order Elizabeth to return from Ashridge to London under semi arrest. She was sick and carried in a litter and passed through Redbourn just north of St. Albans where she stayed at Sir Ralph Rowlatt's house, and we are told that she tarried there that night "all heavy, feeble in body and comfortless in mind". She finally arrived in London, after having stopped at Mimm and Highgate, on the 28th of February 1554. This route would of course, have taken her very close indeed to No Mans Land. A curious element in this whole story is that for generations after the Thrales branded their cattle with a broad arrow mark. It was only at the time of the Napoleonic Wars that they ceased to brand their cattle in this manner, as the Government adopted a broad arrow as the Government mark.

The day-to-day life of the No Mans Land branch is very fully documented, but we have only time to mention one or two main points. Many members of this branch were especially diligent in parish work. Although some were Dissenters as we have already seen, the Thrale family as an example of their fidelity to St. Leonard's church and to Sandridge, filled between 1677 and 1860 one hundred and sixty six positions as Churchwardens, Stonewardens, Overseers, Observers of poor names and Constables. In the Sandridge Parish Officers Register one can see the first fly leaf inscription "Thomas Thrale, his book 1687", and it can be seen that the Thrales farmed every farm in the parish. Their tasks ranged from dealing with unmarried mothers to the making up of roads in the parish.

The common land known as No Mans Land was always an area used for many types of sport. At the beginning of the eighteenth century there were daily meetings of Harriers kept by Ralph Thrale at No Mans Land which the fifth Earl of Salisbury attended. On one occasion at the Meet, Lord Salisbury told Ralph Thrale that the rooms were not large enough for their accommodation. Larger rooms were therefore built at the rear of the house which was later to house the locally well-known Thrale collection about which I shall say more later. There were also race meetings on this common including the time when the King's horse won the Gorhambury Stakes and also bare-fist fights, a well known one being when Deaf Burke knocked out Simon Byrne, the champion of Ireland, in the 99th round.

Although I said I would not over-load you with genealogical detail, it is interesting perhaps to report that in 1774 Ralph Thrale of No Mans Land married the widow of his kinsman Thomas Thrale which

therefore after seven generations linked up two branches of the family again. It also resulted in the curious situation of there being shown in a will the following statement.

'I, Ralph Thrale leave to my brother Ralph Thrale'. Incidentally, this last-mentioned Ralph Thrale had at one time been accused of being a highwayman on Bushey Heath, being a notorious spot for such activity, but I am happy to report that his accuser was obliged to make a public apology in one of the local newspapers. No doubt some of you here today will recall that Henry Thrale was robbed in the same place at one time.

We have only time now to mention the last of the line of No Mans Land. These were two brothers Ralph Norman and William Thrale, who lived to a good old age and were both bachelors. It was they who filled those back rooms, previously mentioned, with Thrale's collection, which consisted of all sorts of strange things. By hearsay one item was a preserved lady's hand in a black glove. Another item was a Bengal tiger, which had been shot on No Mans Land by one of the Thrales, having escaped from a zoo. Every sort of indigenous vermin from the field mouse up to the big dog fox was represented and every flower and grass that the farm ever grew. There were also cannon balls dug up from the common which had come from the battles of St. Albans. One brother was reputed to be accurate with a catapult, and the other with a bow and arrow, and both were crack shots with the rifle.

We must now turn our attention to another branch of the family whose descent comes from the first two Roberts down to Richard Thrale, who farmed locally in Sandridge and was the first to hold the outlying area of St. Albans known as Marshalswick, which is now covered with dense housing. He died in 1711 being possessed of a very considerable estate, but his son Thomas although always described as a gentleman was obviously on the decline and throughout the years surrendered various parts of the family holding in Marshalswick. Three other brothers of Thomas occupied another local farm in St. Albans called Cell Barns where there is now a large Mental Hospital. In 1699 one of the brothers, William, had taken a lease from Sir Samuel Grimston of Gorhambury, and the other two brothers John and Thomas had become involved. The latter promised to provide for William at a cost of 2/6d per week providing that he could take over the lease. Terrible trouble ensued, one brother accusing another of not obeying the cropping clauses of the lease, which were most concise, and thus making the brothers liable to a fine of £800 to Grimston. These cropping clauses and general conditions of the lease are most interesting and throw very clear light upon agriculture at that time. Eventually, however, Thomas moved on and became possessed of the main farm at Sandridge called Sandridge Street Farm or Pound Farm as it was later called, and it is from this time onwards that the Manorial Rolls of Sandridge kept by Earl Spencer provided the greatest possible detail.

It would be timely here to describe briefly the Lords of the Manor with whom the Thrale family had to deal, and indeed to describe the Lords of Sandridge Manor is to describe the family of Sir Winston Churchill. It would be as well to choose Sarah Jennings as the focal point, for the fiery Sarah is one of Hertfordshire's best known daughters, being descended from the very foremost gentry, and who of course became Duchess of Marlborough. Two well-known local families had intermarried, the Rowllatts and the Jennings, and from this union Sarah was descended being born to a local Mansion called Holywell House on the 29th of May 1660 and was baptised in the local Abbey church which was later to become the Cathedral of St. Albans. Besides Holywell House the Jennings also had Waterend House on the River Lea, and as Royalists they lived quietly at this House during the Civil War. On the death of Mrs. Jennings only two daughters remained alive, Frances and Sarah, and from this beginning the story of Queen Anne, Sarah Jennings and Abigail Hill evolved. Time only allows me however to relate how she became a maid of honour to the Duchess of York, fell in love with and married John Churchill when she was 18. After the death of Sarah's father the rights of her sisters in the manor of Sandridge were bought by Churchill who thus acquired the whole manor. Marlborough's brilliant generalship at Blenheim, Ramillies and Oudenarde can only be mentioned, but it is thus that Sarah became the landlady of the Thrales, and what a landlady she was, hard as nails. Smollett recorded upon her

death "that the old Duchess of Marlborough resigned her breath in the 85th year of her age immensely rich and very little regretted either by her own family or by the world in general"; such an epitaph is perhaps rather harsh for this remarkable woman whose personality stamped itself upon the pages of history, and her selfishness and hardness are perhaps mellowed by the fact that she truly loved and adored her Duke from the time of their meeting to the time of his death, and he reciprocated this love.

There is a most interesting series of letters by Mr. Feeling, Steward to Duchess Sarah which gives an example of her dealing with her tenants and in particular with the Thrale family. Typical of Sarah's attitude was a letter of 1728 to one of her Stewards.

I send a messenger on purpose to St. Albans with my resolution concerning Fairfolds and Mrs. Thrale's fine. What you find upon the Books in 1705 is no rule that I will go by because the people employed at that time proved themselves notorious knaves as appears by the paper I send you. Mrs. Thrale's is reckoned at 53 acres less than it is; which showed that they thought it necessary to set down the number of acres wrong to justify the fine. Mrs. Thrale has had the advantage of the interest of this money for so many years that she must be very unreasonable if she is not satisfied.

This is the sort of vigorous language that Sarah used that sometimes she could be very tough indeed. In 1737 she wrote in connection with her quarrel with the Duke of St. Albans (who incidentally had nothing to do with St. Albans) over the rangerships of Windsor Park—"you can lose nothing by being in the right but a family of idiots, some of which it is very probable may never pay you. The Duke of St. Albans is an idiot". That is Sarah in a typical moment as she became older.

In this branch about which we are talking the descent continued though Ralph Thrale the man we have already mentioned as being accused as a highwayman; he became a miller at Wheathampstead as did his son and grandson. At the end of the 19th century however, the Thrales ceased to be farmers, brewers and millers, and went to live in St. Albans and carried on with other forms of work.

We now come to the next chapter of our story which of course, concerns the Streatham family. It will be recalled that there was a prosperous Richard Thrale who was the first to hold Marshalswick just beside St. Albans. You have already been told that this man had five sons of whom one was Ralph. Now Ralph went off to live at Offley four parishes to the north of Sandridge and in 1693 he married Anne Halsey in London. All the records indicate that he was a keen churchman, but at the same time we have to record that in 1697 Elizabeth, wife of one Francis Zarvite was attacked by other women for breaking vows by consorting with Ralph Thrale.

Attention must now be turned in this story, to the Anchor Brewery at Southwark. This Brewery had been started in 1660 by James Monger and was on a site adjacent to where the Old Globe Theatre used to stand. A son of a miller of St. Albans, one Edmund Halsey obtained possession of the Brewery, worked hard and by 1702 was extremely prosperous. His only child, however, was a daughter Anne who married Richard Temple, Lord Cobham, for whom succession to the brewery created problems; and as a family solution Edmund Halsey looked towards his old home and considered the marriage of his sister Anne Halsey to Ralph Thrale of Offley. It was therefore Anne Halsey's son Ralph Thrale who came to work at the Brewery; he worked for 20 years at 6/- per week according to Boswell, but one rather queries the veracity of this. It was not long before Lord Cobham sold the Anchor Brewery to Ralph for £30,000, and to this day no one really knows where Ralph got the money. He lived until 1758, amassed a large fortune and became M. P. for Southwark in 1741. In his will he leaves a bequest to his sister Mrs. Anne Smith, Anne having married Richard Smith of Kingsbury and St. Albans, and who always remained in this part of the story as a permanent link between Streatham and St. Albans.

Ralph had various daughters who made very good marriages, one Mary marrying Sir John Lade M. P. for Camelford. Thus one finds the entry in 1802 in the *Gentleman's Magazine*:



In St. Michaels, St. Albans, aged about 69 Mary, Lady Dowager Lade, daughter of Ralph and brother of Henry Thrale formerly Member for the Borough of Southwark and widow of Sir John Lade of Warbleton in Sussex, who died 21st of April 1759 of a mortification arising from an amputation of his leg which had been broken by a fall from a horse leaving her with child, of a son who was born a Baronet August 1st following and now succeeds to the whole of his mother's property.

Such an entry indicates the continued association between St. Michaels and St. Albans which was constant throughout this period.

Ralph Thrale's son Henry succeeded his father at the age of 30. As everyone here knows he inherited the Anchor Brewery, Deadman's Place, which was the Southwark home, and the Streatham Villa called Thrale's Place. The marriage between Henry Thrale and Hester Lynch Salusbury was one of convenience rather than a love affair. By sheer coincidence Hester often stayed with her grandmother Lady Cotton at East Hyde overlooking Thrale's End, and it is to be wondered whether she ever thought of this in later years. The first years of Hester's marriage were rather difficult for she did not like Deadman's Place but eventually began to love Thrale Place, and their first daughter Hester, whom we all know as "Queeney" was born in 1764. The family kept a pack of fox hounds near Croydon but women were not then allowed to hunt. Actually, it was Queeney's only daughter Georgina, later to be Mrs. Jack Villiers, who was one of the first women to take to the hunting field. It will be recalled that it was in January 1765 that Johnson was introduced by Murphy to the Thrales, and he rapidly became domesticated, staying frequently at Streatham over a period of 16 years. You will note that this splendid house possessed what were thought at the time to be some of the finest gardens in England, and Fanny Burney in her diary recorded her astonishment at the quantity of grapes, melons, peaches and nectarines she saw daily at table. It is not the purpose of this talk today to describe the visitors who came to Streatham during this period but as we all know Reynolds, Goldsmith, Garrick, Burney and Burke were often among them.

Henry Thrale's interest in politics was considerable, and like his father he had been M. P. for Southwark. One letter written by Mr. Toombes of St. Michaels in 1761 to James West, who was M. P. for St. Albans at that time, reads:

I was last night with one Mr. Smith who is a near relation of Mr. Thrale the Brewer and he let a word drop concerning his election. That he had some thoughts of coming to canvas to know how many people stood absorbed. I hope that you have sounded the gentlemen that have votes in London, for Mr. Smith assured me that Mr. Thrale has twenty-five. Whether true or false I cannot say but whether he intends standing or not but only by his own distortions. I apprehend that you have seen or heard from Mr. Thrale what his intention is.

Politics in eighteenth century St. Albans seemed to centre on the small hamlet of St. Michael's which is just outside but now attached to the city. West, to whom this letter was written was a most efficient M.P. and was responsible for bringing the Post to St. Albans; he was supported by the noble family of Grimston of Gorhambury who led the Tories, whilst Sarah Jennings' family, the Spencers, led the Whigs. Then, Duchess Sarah, even though 80 years old, opposed him. Dr. Johnson often helped Henry Thrale with his political pamphlets, one being named *The Patriot* which supported the attempt to reduce his fellow subjects in America to unconditional surrender. During this period there also occurred the Gordon Riots when John Perkins, Henry Thrale's supervisor at the Brewery, acted with extraordinary initiative in dealing with a mob attacking the Brewery. It was in 1776 that the tragedy occurred which affected the lives of all those in Streatham. Thrale's only son, young Harry, who was as bright as a button, was ill, then aged 10. In a family book Hester records his sudden death — he was desperately ill and she found him struggling for a moment, and then he spoke very distinctly to his nurse "Don't scream so—I know I must die". Hester's family book also records Henry's fondness for beautiful Sophia Streatfield, but she resolved "I will not fret, no I won't". Henry squandered a fortune trying to manufacture an anti-fouling compound for preserving ships' bottoms and another for trying to brew beer.

without hops. It would seem, however, with the death of his son that Henry Thrale went to pieces. Both he and Johnson were lovers of the table, but Henry literally killed himself by overeating and in 1781 died of convulsions. Johnson, we are told, felt the last flutter of his pulse and looked "for the last time upon the face with respect and benignity". Thus in 1782 the old man bade farewell to Streatham. He was one of the executors responsible for selling the Brewery for the fantastic sum of £135,000, and his words are well-known "we are not here to sell a parcel of boilers and vats but the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice".

It is not part our story here to relate Hester's later marriage to Gabriele Piozzi and the anguish that was caused to both herself and Johnson as a result. Anna Smith who had always been the connecting link between St. Michaels and Streatham died herself in 1770. Indeed the Smith family had been visited by Henry and Hester Thrale with Dr. Johnson in July 1774 when the party embarked on a journey to Wales in order to inspect Mrs. Thrale's inheritance in Flintshire. On setting out from Streatham the party stopped for forty minutes at the "Mitre" in Barnet and then went on to a good cold dinner at St. Albans with the Smiths. This is the only time reported when Johnson visited St. Albans. They then went on to Lichfield. The decline and eventual disappearance of Thrale Place is only too well known.

As I mentioned at the beginning, I will briefly describe the Arms of the family. As I told you, both the monuments of both John and Henry Thrale bore the arms of a paly of ten or and gules. All they had done was to purloin the Arms of the Thrale family of Sussex with whom they had no connection. It was decided some years ago when the Abbey monument was restored to regularise the matter with the College of Arms and the family now legally bears Arms.

And so the line carried on with the prosperous Richard Thrale at Sandridge farming three farms, the Pound Farm, another called Childwickbury (where J. B. Joel used to live) and Sandridgebury, where I am currently living. Richard's altar tomb can still be seen in St. Leonard's churchyard, although the yard was levelled in 1966, at one time there being twenty-two Thrale memorials. The line continued on with Ralph Thrale, the man accused of being a highwayman, who became the miller at Wheathampstead, a village two miles northwards of Sandridge, but at the end of the nineteenth century, the family turned their hand to other forms of family business rather than farming, milling and brewing, and it was this year that the last section of the three generation firm ceased trading after one hundred years—but that is another story.

#### FOILING THE RIVAL: ARGUMENT AND IDENTITY IN SHERIDAN'S SPEECHES

Dr Christopher Reid — 18th November 1995

Chairman: C. Tom Davis BA MA

Dr Reid is an old friend of the Society and has given us several excellent papers in the past. He is Senior Lecturer in the School of English and Drama at London University's Queen Mary and Westfield College. He specialises in eighteenth-century studies, with a particular interest in the theory and the practice of persuasive discourse.

To contemporary observers the House of Commons in the late eighteenth century was a theatre of great personal confrontations. At a time when the majority of members were, at best, occasional speakers, and when by nineteenth-century standards party organisations were undeveloped, the role of the relatively few regular participants in debate was heightened, and their contests sharpened. In April 1794 Philip Francis warned the House that the practice of 'confining every discussion, on subjects of importance, to three or four individuals' was a threat to the freedom of debate.<sup>1</sup> Surviving reports of the period tend to confirm the dominance of the same handful of speakers. In the confined and intimate space of St. Stephen's Chapel, where the House then sat, the assembled members witnessed a clash of rhetorical opposites: Pitt, Dundas, and Canning on one side of the Chamber, and Fox, Grey, and Sheridan facing them on the other.

In the parliamentary memory these pointedly adversarial exchanges establish precedents and, in turn, excite expectations. They foreground what classical rhetoricians, following Aristotle, called *ethos*, the construction of character through the medium of speech. In his *Rhetoric* Aristotle classes *ethos*, together with *pathos*, the raising of emotions, and *logos*, rational argument, as one of the three primary means of persuasion. In fact, in an early comment he goes so far as to suggest that character 'is almost . . . the controlling factor in persuasion'.<sup>2</sup> In order to gain the audience's approval and trust the speaker is required 'to construct a view of himself as a certain kind of person'. (p. 120) The speaker cannot rely on the persuasive authority of an existing reputation for virtue. Aristotle insists that the right to such a reputation must be won in and through acts of address. Whilst it may be objected that in a political and print culture as highly developed as that of late eighteenth-century Britain an established reputation probably counted for a good deal in the minds of the audience, Aristotle's insight nonetheless points valuably to the dynamics of character: to character as established through verbal interaction and hence to character as a process of rhetorical unfolding rather than as a realisation of a pre-existing political self.

In the course of the *Rhetoric* Aristotle catalogues both the topics of praise from which a favourable *ethos* might be derived and the topics of blame which might form the basis for a hostile construction of a political adversary. Significantly, he argues that given attributes of character may be made to serve either end. If, for example, we wish to condemn those noted for their caution we should call them 'cold and designing' rather than, say, prudent and responsible. If, on the other hand, we wish to praise 'those given to excess' we should speak, Aristotle suggests, of 'the rash one as "courageous," [and] the spendthrift as "liberal"' (p. 83). Such prescriptions are closely applicable to the constructions and counter-constructions of character exchanged between Sheridan and Pitt. They alert us to the double-sidedness of early rhetorical theory. If, as the leading sophists maintained, every question can be argued on contrary sides, the persuasive process necessarily involves the discovery of the opposite case. Every argument develops out of a dialogue and a critical engagement with this experienced or anticipated other.

It is evident from contemporary reports that these principles were strikingly realised in Sheridan's speaking. When, very early in his parliamentary career, he for once crossed swords with his ally Fox, the latter observed that 'his honourable friend Mr. Sheridan had so much ingenuity of mind, that he could contrive to give an argument what turn he pleased'.<sup>3</sup> This was to prove an enduring image of Sheridan as a speaker. More than a decade later the rebuke that was perhaps concealed within Fox's compliment was made explicit when Pitt remarked that Sheridan, in his view a rhetorical opportunist, 'is possessed of such ingenuity as to bring together every argument, however incongruous, that may suit his purpose, and give it an appearance of connexion with the question' (*PH*, XXXI, p. 640). Throughout his parliamentary career he was regarded with a mixture of apprehension, respect, and disdain for his skill in finding the other side of an argument, in turning his adversary's metaphors in a new direction, and in applying another speaker's allusions and citations in an unexpected way.

As much as from statements of principle, it is out of such rhetorical contests that the speaker's *ethos* emerges and takes shape. In a broad sense these practices may be understood as forms of quotation. The interactive character of parliamentary discourse, where every member of the addressed audience is at least in theory a potential interlocutor, necessarily involves speakers in repeatedly citing, paraphrasing, and summarising the words and arguments of other members. Even an opening statement introduced by a speaker moving a motion may embody quotation in the sense of voicing the known or anticipated arguments of an adversary in order to refute them in advance or to 'discover' one's own position. *Replies* more obviously embrace quotation, at once echoing and contesting a rival's utterance, perhaps by means of a counter-argument or, as so often in Sheridan's case, through techniques of diminution such as ridicule and parody.

Sheridan's work as a playwright is clearly relevant here. John Loftis has argued that Sheridan's major plays are best understood as belonging to the genre of burlesque,<sup>4</sup> a mode of comedy which, so to speak 'quotes' and enters into an ironic dialogue with a precursor text, and by so doing measures its difference from it predecessor. Many of Sheridan's replies to his parliamentary opponents are constructed along similar lines. In the tense and distrustful political atmosphere of the 1790s he typically mixed high seriousness and burlesque in his assaults on Pitt's campaign of repression against organised radical opinion. Sternly denouncing Pitt's 'system of terror' (IV, p. 146), as he came to call it, as an encroachment upon English liberties, Sheridan also ridicules it for lacking any foundation in political reality. Where the Commons Committee of Secrecy, chaired by Pitt, claimed to have unearthed an elaborate plot against the constitution, Sheridan found only 'fabulous plots and conspiracies . . . originating solely in the foul imagination of His Majesty's ministers' (III, p. 380). On 5 January 1795, following the acquittal of the accused radicals at the recent treason trials, he ridiculed the evidence brought forward by the prosecution to prove the existence of a conspiracy:

On the first trial, one pike was produced; that was afterwards withdrawn from mere shame. A formidable instrument was talked of to be employed against the cavalry; it appeared on evidence to be a te-totum in a window at Sheffield. There was a camp in a back shop, an arsenal provided with nine muskets, and an exchequer containing nine pounds and one bad shilling; all to be directed against the whole armed force and established government of Great Britain. (IV, p. 17)

In *The Camp* (1778) and *The Critic* (1779) Sheridan had satirised the atmosphere of rumour and alarm which had been excited by the intervention of France on the American side in the War of Independence. In his speeches of the 1790s, following this precedent, he travesties the ministerial narrative of conspiracy and insurrection, reproducing it as mere bombast and hearsay. Pitt and his fellow alarmists are cast as the Puffs, or perhaps the Snakes, of the political world, authors of a bad tragedy of plot and counter-plot which Sheridan reworks and returns to its originators in the form of political burlesque.

Burlesque of this sort exhibits on a large scale Sheridan's characteristic practice of finding the other side of, and then turning, an opponent's position. When he engaged in a point-for-point reply to a speech he often sought to undermine an argument by taking apart his rival's metaphors. On 30 April 1792 Charles Grey raised the issue of parliamentary reform on behalf of the Society of Friends of the People, a recently established group of Whig reformers to which Sheridan belonged. Those opposed to Grey's proposals (the vast majority of the House) argued that the present time of crises, with France apparently in turmoil and with growing discontent at home, was hardly an appropriate one at which to risk such metaphors in which this opposing case had been put:

one gentleman had talked of their nourishing a young lion, and another of a storm. Those metaphors might be applied either way. If they were at sea in a ship, and were to see a storm rising, it would be more natural for a good seaman to say of the vessel, 'there is a storm coming, let's examine the tackle, and see that her bottom is sound;' than to say, 'the ship is going on her regular course; let her proceed, without any fear for her safety.' (III, p. 36)

We might think of this kind of rejoinder as a dispossession or 'capture' of a rival's voice which is at once quoted in order to be appropriated. It is an assertion of mastery over discourse comparable to repartee in conversation or scripted dialogue. Such dexterity in reply, a core-element, I would suggest, of Sheridan's political identity, is not well represented in published collections of his speeches. It emerges more clearly, though no doubt still in diluted form, from reports of entire debates. Read in this context it becomes easier to understand why Sheridan's ripostes should have moved a rueful Burke to say in 1794 of his erstwhile ally that, 'He admired and feared that gentleman's talents, and regretted that he should meet with opposition from him.' (PH, XXXI, p. 381)

The styles of reply I have been discussing involve Sheridan in quotation in an extended (and I think valuable) sense of the term. It encompasses the various means by which he seizes power over the other side's language, subjecting rival voices to his coolly monological control. Quotation in the more orthodox and restricted sense was much favoured by eighteenth-century parliamentarians. The textual functions



and cultural meanings of quotation of this sort are worth considering. To some extent they would depend upon the nature of the quoted source. The contemporary commentator, Nathaniel Wraxall, suggested in his memoirs that some speakers (including Pitt) were sparing in quotation from classical sources for fear of losing the attention of the less learned members. Yet as Wraxall himself conceded, other leading figures (including Burke) quoted frequently and liberally from classical texts.<sup>5</sup> More frequent still were citations from English poets and dramatists, although speakers did not confine themselves entirely to 'polite' sources: lines from comic songs and popular tags were also occasionally recited in the House.

Quotation of the more serious sort, involving an appeal to textual precedent and an assertion of cultural authority in support of a particular case, is of special importance in a relatively closed political culture. In the late eighteenth century House of Commons, for instance, the ability to cite an approved authority at once signified one's right to belong to an élite group and solicited the cultural sympathies of its members. Quotation was a demonstration of a special kind of knowledge, and of the ability to apply it; it was an affirmation of the cultural identity of the polite classes and by the same token a cultural exclusion of the unenfranchised mass 'out of doors'. Within the Commons Chamber contemporary speakers saw that to quote accurately and, more to the point, to quote appositely, was to wield a certain kind of power. If a test of the poet's skill in the eighteenth-century genre of imitation was to find in contemporary life a close equivalent to the classical original, then in political discourse the worth of a quotation would be judged by the quality of the correspondence between the context of the original and the argument of the 'host' text.

That quotation of this sort was understood as a bid for prestige, and consequently for power, is evident from the efforts made by speakers to cap, challenge, or otherwise turn quotations made by their opponents. This kind of contest is well illustrated by surviving reports of the debates on Fox's East India Bill in November and December 1783. According to Wraxall, 'History, ancient and modern, poetry, even Scripture, all were successively pressed into the service, or rendered subservient to the purposes of the contending parties.' (III, p. 169) He singles out Sheridan as the most resourceful of the textual combatants and his speech of 8 December, though imperfectly reported, was by all accounts a *tour de force* of contested quotation. The sketch in Sheridan's *Speeches* describes how he

took up the several quotations from Shakespeare, Milton, and the book of Revelations; of

Mr. Wilberforce, Mr. Arden, and Mr. Scott, foiling them each with their own weapons, and citing, with the most happy ease and correctness, passages from almost the same passages that controverted their quotations, and told strongly for the bill. (I, p. 72)

When Fox and the seven commissioners appointed by his bill were caricatured by Scott as Revelation's Beast with seven heads, Sheridan returned the text in kind by quoting 'three more verses from the Revelations, by which he metamorphosed the beast with seven heads, with crowns on them, into seven angels, clothed in pure and white linen'. As Puff remarks in *The Critic* with reference to another kind of debate, 'Egad, the *pro & con* goes as smart as hits in a fencing match.' (*The Critic*, II, ii)

The point that Sheridan challenged his adversaries on the ground of their own choosing, and quoted 'from almost the same pages', is important. Although he apparently managed to consult some pages of the book of Revelations in the course of the debate, he could not have known in advance the authorities which would be cited against the bill. His achievement in successively capping his rivals' quotations was as much a triumphant display of his presence of mind as of his knowledge. The apparent spontaneity he displayed at such moments was susceptible to antithetical constructions. If interpreted as signs of sincerity, the unfeigned indicators of true feeling, they might contribute to the formation of a positive ethos. In turn, if interpreted as signs of shallowness and theatricality, they might offer materials from which his opponents could construct a more hostile image. Obviously there were times when Sheridan was able to undertake extensive and careful preparation (when he was introducing a motion, for example), and there were many others when his stance was studied, collected, and responsible: when his chosen ethos was one of statesmanlike gravity rather than ingenuity in debate. Yet his practice as a speaker (and also, it would appear, as a playwright) seems to embody

improvisation and spontaneity as important cultural ideals. In the course of his celebrated oration on the Begums of Oude during the impeachment of Warren Hastings he gives an indication of his respect for the truth value of unpremeditated speech. Hastings's counsel had explained that certain deficiencies in the defence his client had delivered to the Commons were owing to hasty preparation. Sheridan retorted mockingly

I do not suppose it to be taken for granted that, when Mr. Hastings speaks in a hurry, he necessarily speaks falsehood; as if the truth lay deep, but the falsehood came of course; as if to shape a truth required labour, pain, and caution, but when he is off his guard, the falsehoods float on the surface and come of themselves all at once.<sup>6</sup>

Sheridan's favoured self-image as a spontaneous speaker, impassioned or witty, is played off again and again in his confrontations with Pitt.

In parliamentary discourse the speaker's character, potentially a powerful instrument of persuasion, is never possessed with absolute security. It emerges from exchanges with an adversary who is cast as the political and ethical opposite against whom the speaker may be positively defined. These constructions, however, rarely go uncontested: the adversary's character is discovered and projected as part of the same process, through counter-constructions of rival and of self. Such struggles over identity, in which real ideological and cultural differences are involved, are of signal importance in the period of Sheridan's political activity.

At the age of twenty-one William Pitt (b. 1759) delivered his maiden parliamentary speech, just three months after Sheridan (b. 1751) had delivered his. For the next twenty years they were to be commonly regarded as political and temperamental opposites. In their frequent clashes in the Commons they certainly projected themselves as such, whatever the truth of the biographical record may have been. In their early confrontations Sheridan adopted the unflappable demeanour of a man experienced in social intercourse and public affairs, in contrast to the youthful Pitt whom he represented as petulant, callow, and unworldly. Thus, in the most celebrated of these incidents, he figured his rival as Ben Jonson's 'Angry Boy in the Alchemist' (I, p. 47) in retaliation for allusions Pitt made to his theatrical connections, then still regarded in polite circles as 'low' and vaguely disreputable.

An otherwise forgettable debate of May 1785 on Pitt's proposal to levy a tax on female servants further illustrates the argumentative ends to which such a contrast could be put. Sheridan objected to Pitt's plan, seeing it as a threat to the integrity of the family itself. If the proposal were to be accepted, he argued, then the tax

ought at least to be balanced with a tax on single men, who certainly were a description of persons less useful to the community than men who were married, and had families. . . . the tax on female servants could be considered in no other light than as a bounty on bachelors, and a penalty on propagation. (I, p. 154)

The assembled members would certainly have understood this as a personal allusion to Pitt. Unattached when Sheridan spoke, he was to remain unmarried throughout his life. More importantly, perhaps, he reputedly betrayed few signs of a sexual interest in women.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary reports indicate that his reputation for chastity could be made to serve quite different rhetorical ends, confirming Aristotle's insight that the same elements of character can be made to support opposing conclusions in an argument.

Pitt's reputed celibacy was interrupted by his opponents as a sign of his unnaturalness rather than of his purity or self-control. 'The immaculate continence of this British *Scipio*, so strongly insisted on by his friends, as constituting one of the most shining ingredients of his *uncommon* character, is only alluded to here as a received fact, and not by any means as a reproach' was a typically sly observation made by an anti-Pittite commentator during the Westminster campaign of 1784.<sup>8</sup> As James Morwood has shown, Pitt's adversaries, including Sheridan, sometimes suggested, through innuendo and allusion, that Pitt was homosexual.<sup>9</sup> In the Commons the scope for introducing personal reflections of this sort was

necessarily constrained by the conventions of parliamentary decorum, yet references to Pitt's sexuality (or the alleged lack of it) were nonetheless made. Wraxall records an incident when Pitt's temporary absence from the Chamber prevented opposition members from moving an adjournment at a time when their eagerness to see Sarah Siddons perform her celebrated role as Belvidera in *Venice Preserved* made them particularly anxious to suspend business for the day. 'As soon as the door opened and he made his appearance', recalled Wraxall, 'one of them, a man of classic mind—it was Sheridan—exclaimed, "Jam redit et virgo!"'<sup>10</sup> Wraxall's text interestingly reveals how Pitt's sexual character was susceptible to both positive and negative readings. On the one hand Wraxall argues that 'the correctness of his deportment and regularity of his private life . . . which, under Charles II, would have counted for little in the scale, operated with decisive effect in his favour under a prince such a George III'. Yet by the same token he goes on to concede that 'he was not . . . attached to the commonwealth by those endearing ties which blend the statesman with the husband and the father, thus giving a species of compound pledge for exemplary conduct to the country.' (III, pp. 323-3)

Sheridan may have had little personal interest in Pitt's private character but his speeches show that he understood how to exploit it in political argument. In his repeated confrontations with his younger rival, but with special urgency in the 1790s, he produces a critical construction of the minister as one who is chaste, chilly, and austere, whose haughtiness and remoteness from the world and its ordinary sympathies render him incapable of understanding the people, and consequently disqualify him from governing them wisely. The favoured image of Sheridan and his Foxite allies was this construction's other side; they represented themselves as sociable, gregarious, and spontaneously good-natured, and bound to the people, whose parliamentary spokesman they considered themselves to be, by unbreakable bonds of sympathy and concord. In turn Pitt and his lieutenants sought to contest this image, producing a different version from similar materials. In place of sociability, they found dissoluteness; in place of patriotism they found a bid for 'popularity' in the narrow and negative eighteenth-century sense: a factious appeal to the people, motivated by self-interest and ambition alone. And finally the Pittites saw in the chastity of their leader a positive image of moral correctness, incorruptibility, self sacrifice, and unusual dedication to public duty.

In the 1790s this rhetorical contest within Parliament was part of a larger struggle for national identity. The remote and unsociable Pitt of Sheridan's speeches was also represented as somehow unenglish: he was so out of touch with the current of national feeling that he had erroneously come to suspect the people of harbouring sentiments of disloyalty. In an important speech of 5 January 1795 Sheridan alluded to Pitt as 'a haughty and stiff-necked minister, who never mixed in a popular assembly' and concluded that 'such a minister can have no communication with the people of England, except through the medium of spies and informers; he is unacquainted with the mode in which their sentiments are expressed, and cannot make allowance for the language of toasts and resolutions adopted in an unguarded and convivial hour.' (IV, p. 25)

To reverse this picture is to discover Sheridan's ideal political self-image. The Foxites, for whom he was a leading spokesman, prided themselves on being the one reliable channel between Parliament and the people; their very conviviality and the breadth of their social contacts made them in their own minds the authentic representatives of the mass of the people 'out of doors'. When a petition for parliamentary reform was presented to the House in 1793 by the Sheffield Constitutional Society, Sheridan was one of the very few members to defend its artisan authors against those who objected to the supposed indecency and lowness of its address (PH, XXX, pp. 775-7). Pitt, according to the counter-image industriously disseminated by Sheridan, could only communicate with the people through intermediaries. Personally aloof and austere, he did not understand their language, their customs, or their political culture.

Whatever other faults they may have committed, Sheridan and the Foxites could hardly have been charged with lacking conviviality. Sheridan's election to Parliament in September 1780 was followed

shortly after, and almost as significantly, by his election as a member of Brooks's, the fashionable London club favoured by the Whig élite. Membership of Brooks's assured him of access to Fox's social circle which was at the same time a highly important political network. Foxite social life, in which Sheridan was by all accounts an enthusiastic participant, had a distinctive, not to say notorious, style, the principal ingredients of which were sociability, prodigality, infidelity, inebriation, recklessness, and debt. Fox himself was the very embodiment of this culture of aristocratic excess. The younger son of an exceptionally wealthy peer, he was a spectacularly extravagant gambler who was said to stake a thousand pounds on a single turn of a card. Yet, like Sheridan, he also fostered a reputation as a man of the people; not only as one who was a defender of popular rights and cause in the parliamentary arena but also, and just as importantly, as one who had a special sympathy for, and understanding of, the temper of the people at large.

Although he is now often described as a political failure, Fox seems to have carried off with considerable aplomb what may strike us as an exacting rhetorical task: to claim to serve the true interests of the people while continuing to enjoy a lifestyle of immense privilege and indulgence. Doubtless there were among the crowds he courted some who took exception to his conspicuous prodigality. Yet as Sheridan's generally affirmative characterisation of Charles Surface suggests, for much of the eighteenth century prodigality could be read, and projected, as generosity of spirit and an invigorating freedom from restraint. As such, it could also play a part in the shaping of a popular political identity. In this context Fox has been proclaimed as the true heir of John Wilkes, the foremost eighteenth-century practitioner of politics of excess. Foxite triumphs such as the Westminster campaign of 1784 certainly lend themselves to such an interpretation. Contemporary representations of the election depict it as a carnivalesque event which occasioned an extraordinary, if temporary, breaking down of the barriers which separated the popular from the polite. Fox's ally, and Sheridan's intimate friend, the Duchess of Devonshire, was lampooned in the prints for canvassing for the votes of the tradesmen of Westminster, while the carriage conveying the Prince of Wales, the Foxites' royal supporter, was reportedly prominent in a triumphal procession headed by twenty-four butchers bearing marrowbones and cleavers.<sup>11</sup>

In often adverse political circumstances Sheridan did more than any of the Foxite (Fox himself excepted) to shape a distinctive parliamentary character for his party as the Friends of the People. That character, however, proved increasingly difficult to sustain convincingly. In the 1790s it was being exposed on two fronts. In the Commons the remote and frigid Pitt of Sheridan's construction was successfully inventing himself as incorruptible and purposeful: as one whose ethos of administrative efficiency, financial rectitude, and public service was arguably more attuned to the temper of the times.<sup>12</sup> Outside Westminster their essentially aristocratic conception of their role as Friends of the People was being challenged by the development of radical organisations representing the interests of tradesmen, artisans, and the dissenting professionals who did not want the assistance of such 'friends' or who at any rate did not trust them.<sup>13</sup>

Considered against this background the stance of the Foxites, articulated so ably by Sheridan in his rhetorical contests with Pitt, seems a precarious one. In such circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that Sheridan's political identity and parliamentary voice were commonly regarded as unstable.

Sheridan's acquaintance, the young George Canning, was an astute and unforgiving observer of such instability. In June 1795 he recorded his impressions of the most recent in a series of parliamentary debates on the Prince of Wales's debts. The debate, he noted in a somewhat garbled entry in his journal, was somewhat livelier than usual—being diversified by a speech from Sheridan, the strangest and most incongruous and unconstruable that ever fell from the mouth of man—toadying, republican, full of economy and generosity, and in short a medley of sentiments irreconcilable in themselves, but which it was business to court the Prince and keep well with the people by endeavouring to reconcile.<sup>14</sup>



Although Canning found the speech entertaining it was evidently in his view a serious rhetorical failure. And that failure, we might infer from his analysis, was the consequence of contradictions within Sheridan's political self.

During the Regency Crisis of 1788-9 Sheridan had been closer to the Prince of Wales personally and politically than any other parliamentarian, and despite a subsequent cooling in their relations his association with the Prince was still widely regarded as the key to his political fortunes. Yet as we have seen, Sheridan's political stance as a Foxite Whig, was that of an upholder of the rights and interests of the people at large against the encroachments of Crown prerogative. Canning's commentary demonstrates how difficult it could be to reconcile these roles. Sheridan the intriguer and habitué of the royal closet was always potentially at odds with Sheridan the reformer and self-proclaimed Friend of the People. His rhetorical dilemma was especially acute in June 1795, for the crises of the Prince's debts coincided with a period of severe scarcity in the country. To have rewarded the Prince for his profligacy when the high price of provisions was causing real hardship would have been impolitic and, one might think, distasteful. In this context the logic of an amendment moved by Sheridan in the debate of 5 June becomes clear. Arguing that the sum required to clear the Prince's debts should not be taken from the public purse Sheridan moved that 'it becomes the house to consider whether this additional provision may not be made without laying any additional burden on the people, by the reduction of useless and inconvenient places' (IV, p. 85). Canning read this revival of the old opposition cry against placement and Crown patronage as Sheridan's cynical attempt to reassert his popular credentials. It appeared to him to confirm the impression that Sheridan's political conduct was unusually duplicitous and self-serving. According to the analogy that was predictably drawn by hostile commentators, there was at least as much of Joseph as of Charles Surface in his political composition.

The debate on the Prince's debts, while of no great importance in itself, allows us a glimpse of a complex and elusive political identity. Sheridan's theatricality, his tendency to shift between different roles, and his capacity to invent himself rhetorically were much noted by contemporary observers, and were generally ascribed to some deep-seated defects of personality. Yet ultimately such explanations seem insufficient, if not actually reductive. In many ways Sheridan's instability was also that of his chosen party, the Foxite Whigs, and of a political style of which he was both a producer and a product.

#### Notes

1. *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, comp. by William Cobbett, 36 vols (London, 1806-20) I, p. 206. Hereafter cited as PH.
2. *On Rhetoric*, trans. by George A. Kennedy (New York and Oxford, 1991), p. 38.
3. *Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, 5 vols (London, 1816), I, p. 21. Unless otherwise stated all subsequent references to Sheridan's speeches are to this edition.
4. *Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England* (Oxford, 1976).
5. *The Historical and Posthumous Memoirs of Sir Nathaniel Wraxall*, ed. by Henry B Wheatley, 5 vols (London, 1884), III, p. 12.
6. *Speeches of the Managers and Counsel in the Trial of Warren Hastings*, ed. by E. A. Bond, 4 vols (London, 1859-61), I, p. 491.
7. See John Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt: The Years of Acclaim* (London, 1969), pp. 108-9.
8. *History of the Westminster Election*, 2nd ed. (London, 1785), p. 280.
9. *The Life and Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (Edinburgh, 1985), p. 110.
10. *Memoirs*, III, p. 219. Sheridan's allusion is to the predicated return of Astraea in Virgil's fourth Eclogue.
11. Loren Reid, *Charles James Fox: A Man for the People* (London, 1969), p. 204.
12. See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 189-93.
13. See P. J. Brunson, 'The Association of the Friends of the People', unpublished MA thesis, University of Manchester (1961).
14. *The Letter Journal of George Canning*, ed. by Peter Jupp (London, 1991), p. 265.

## AN ASPECT OF DR. JOHNSON

Judge Sir Stephen Tumim — 9th December 1995

Chairman: Richard Thrale

Judge Sir Stephen Tumim, educated at St. Edward's School and Worcester College, Oxford, was called to the Bar in 1955 becoming a Circuit Judge in 1977. His personal interests and his public life are well-known, and his term of office as HM. Chief Inspector of Prisons had, at the date of this paper, recently finished. He has since been elected Principal of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford. His publications include *Great Legal Disasters* and *Great Legal Fiascos*.

Shakespeare, the Authorised Version, Boswell's Johnson: 'It is pleasant to see', wrote Johnson, 'great works in their seminal state, pregnant with latent possibilities of excellence.' But these great works are now solemn in maturity, heavily edited and annotated, utterly secure on the shelf, perhaps a little smug.

Boswell's *Life of Johnson* is two hundred years old. How did it achieve the most-favoured shelf? It is not a considered study of a man's development, like Professor Bate's and Professor Clifford's admirable lives. It is—like it or not—a huge collection of ana, a long series of anecdotes, springing into proper life when it reaches 18 May 1763, the first meeting between Boswell and Johnson, in Mr Davies' book shop in Covent Garden. We could do with Johnson's *Life of Boswell*.

The message follows. Social man can be fully perceived only in his relationship with another. Johnson needed Boswell as Holmes needed Watson. The tragedy of William Morris—a potential Johnson—is that he had no shadow. 'Of course,' said Max Beerbohm of Morris, 'he was a wonderful all-round man, but the act of walking round him has always tired me.' You can, with the aid of Boswell, walk round Johnson without effort, as Max Beerbohm's own essays and drawings quite often demonstrate.

From the first meeting there is always someone with whose performance Johnson's can be compared. Sometimes, with Johnson in full blast, his opponent carping, it all crumbles. 'The Socratic manner', Max Beerbohm wrote in another context, 'is not a game at which two can play'. But Johnson, the magic hulk, the compassionate pachyderm, emerges from the *Life* almost every time he is portrayed in a relationship, either with the author or with anybody else round.

An example of the pachyderm, or perhaps of the old bull being teased in the ring, is when Johnson is shown with Wilkes. Nobody could have been less attractive to him than John Wilkes. The squinting lecher who wrote the *Essay on Woman*, the radical populist who lampooned Johnson's *Dictionary* in the *Public Advertiser*—was no likely friend for Johnson. 'But I conceived', writes the artist Boswell, 'an irresistible wish, if possible, to bring Dr. Johnson and Mr. Wilkes together. How to manage it, was a nice and difficult matter'. Wilkes was to dine with Mr Dilly, the bookseller.

'Pray (said I,) let us have Dr. Johnson.'—'What, with Mr. Wilkes? not for the world, (said Mr. Edward Dilly:) Dr. Johnson would never forgive me.'—'Come, (said I,) if you'll let me negotiate for you, I will be answerable that all shall go well.' DILLY. 'Nay, if you will take it upon you, I am sure I shall be very happy to see them both here.'

The plot develops.

'Mr. Dilly, Sir, sends his respectful compliments to you, and would be happy if you would do him the honour to dine with him on Wednesday next along with me, as I must soon go to Scotland.' JOHNSON. 'Sir, I am obliged to Mr. Dilly. I will wait upon him —' BOSWELL. 'Provided, Sir, I suppose, that the company which he is to have, is agreeable to you.' JOHNSON. 'What do you mean, Sir? What do you take me for? Do you think I am so ignorant of the world, as to imagine that I am to prescribe to a gentleman what company he is to have at his table?' BOSWELL. 'I beg your pardon, Sir, for wishing to prevent you from meeting people

whom you might not like. Perhaps he may have some of what the calls his patriotick friends with him.' JOHNSON. 'Well, Sir, and what then? What care I for his patriotick friends? Poh!' BOSWELL. 'I should not be surprized to find Jack Wilkes there.' JOHNSON. 'And if Jack Wilkes *should* be there, what is that to *me*, Sir? My dear friend, let us have no more of this. I am sorry to be angry with you; but really it is treating me strangely to talk to me as if I could not meet any company whatever, occasionally.' BOSWELL. 'Pray forgive me, Sir: I meant well. But you shall meet whoever comes, for me.' 'Thus', says Boswell, in a Sheridan-like aside to the reader, 'I secured him.' But security was incomplete.

'I called on him about half an hour before dinner, as I often did when we were to dine out together, to see that he was ready in time, and to accompany him. I found him buffeting his books . . . covered with dust, and making no preparation for going abroad. 'How is this, Sir? (said I.) Don't you recollect that you are to dine at Mr. Dilly's?' JOHNSON. 'Sir, I did not think of going to Dilly's: it went out of my head. I have ordered dinner at home with Mrs. Williams.' BOSWELL. 'But, my dear Sir, you know you were engaged to Mr. Dilly, and I told him so. He will expect you, and will be much disappointed if you don't come.' JOHNSON. 'You must talk to Mrs. Williams about this.'

Talk he did. And they waited upon Mr Dilly, where Johnson asked Boswell: 'And who is the gentleman in lace?'

'Mr. Wilkes, Sir.' This information confounded him still more. (He had just been told that another dinner-guest was an American).

He had some difficulty to restrain himself, and taking up a book, sat down upon a window-seat and read, or at least kept his eye upon it intently for some time, till he composed himself. . . . The cheering sound of 'Dinner is upon the table,' dissolved his reverie, and we *all* sat down without any symptom of ill humour.

Mr Wilkes placed himself next to Dr Johnson, and behaved to him with so much attention and politeness, that he gained upon him insensibly. No man ate more heartily than Johnson, or loved better what was nice and delicate. Mr Wilkes was very assiduous in helping him to some fine veal:

'Pray give me leave, Sir:—It is better here—A little of the brown—Some fat, Sir—A little of the stuffing—Some gravy—Let me have the pleasure of giving you some butter—Allow me to recommend a squeeze of this orange;—or the lemon, perhaps, may have more zest.'—'Sir, Sir, I am obliged to you, Sir,' cried Johnson, bowing, and turning his head to him with a look for some time of 'surlly virtue,' but, in a short while, of complacency.

The pachyderm has been pricked. Much of the *Life* is a comedy of manners in the tradition of the Age, and no part more so, than when Johnson begins to rumble a tease by Wilkes and Boswell.

Did we not hear so much said of John Wilkes, we should think more highly of his conversation. Jack has great variety of talk, Jack is a scholar, and Jack has the manners of a gentleman. But after hearing his name sounded from pole to pole, as the phoenix of convivial felicity, we are disappointed in his company. He has always been *at me*: but I would do Jack a kindness, rather than not. The contest is now over.

The compassionate aspect of the pachyderm calls inevitably for a group of two. The Reverend Dr William Dodd, known as the macaroni parson, preached in a silk robe and a diamond ring, often to a congregation of reformed prostitutes, who would sob and wail as he spoke. He was flash in a thoroughly 20th century style. He and Johnson never met. Again not a man, I would conjecture, to attract Johnson's goodwill.

Yet when Dodd forged a bond for £4,200 in the name of a former pupil, the young Earl of Chesterfield; when he was caught—as was inevitable; and sentenced to death—as was equally inevitable when Chesterfield did not protect him, it was Johnson who came to his help. When first approached, Johnson

(said Boswell) 'seemed much agitated: he said he would do what he could'. He drafted for Dodd a sermon and a flood of petitions and letters.

Sir,—May it not offend your Majesty, that the most miserable of men applies himself to your clemency, as his last hope and his last refuge; that your mercy is most earnestly and humbly implored by a clergyman, whom your Laws and Judges have condemned to the horror and ignominy of a publick execution.

I confess the crime, and own the enormity of its consequences, and the danger of its example.

Nor have I the confidence to petition for impunity; but humbly hope, that publick security may be established, without the spectacle of a clergyman dragged through the streets, to a death of infamy, amidst the derision of the profligate and the profane; and that justice may be satisfied with irrevocable exile, perpetual disgrace, and hopeless penury.

Johnson had written two days before to a politician:

He is, so far as I can recollect, the first clergyman of our church who has suffered publick execution for immorality; and I know not whether it would not be more for the interest of religion to bury such an offender in the obscurity of perpetual exile, than to expose him in a cart, and on the gallows, to all who for any reason are enemies of the clergy.

When the plea for mercy failed, Johnson wrote a memorable letter to Dr Dodd.

Dear Sir,—That which is appointed to all men is now coming upon you. Outward circumstances, the eyes and the thoughts of men, are below the notice of an immortal being about to stand the trial for eternity, before the Supreme Judge of heaven and earth. Be comforted: your crime, morally or religiously considered, has no very deep dye of turpitude. It corrupted no man's principles; it attacked no man's life. It involved only a temporary and reparable injury. Of this, and of all other sins, you are earnestly to repent; and may GOD, who knoweth our frailty, and desireth not our death, accept your repentance, for the sake of his Son JESUS CHRIST our Lord.

In requital of those well-intended offices which you are pleased so emphatically to acknowledge, let me beg that you make in your devotions one petition for my eternal welfare. I am, dear Sir,—Your affectionate servant,

SAM. JOHNSON.

Why did he go to such pains? Was it simply from compassion for a fellow-man? Was it influenced by memory of his brother, Nathaniel, who may have died under the threat of a prosecution for forgery? Was it to protect the Church from scandal? Or was it out of distaste for capital punishment?

Of such distaste there can be no doubt. In Number 114 of the *Rambler*, Johnson expressed very unfashionable views.

(a) The learned, the judicious, the pious Boerhaave relates, that he never saw a criminal dragged to execution without asking himself, 'Who knows whether this man is no less culpable than me?' On the days when the prisons of this city are emptied into the grave,—[—what a description of Georgian London—] let every spectator of the dreadful procession put the same question to his own heart.

(b) The gibbet, indeed, certainly disables those who die upon it from infesting the community; but their death seems not to contribute more to the reformation of their associates than any other method of separation.

(c) If those whom the wisdom of our laws had condemned to die, had been detected in their rudiments of robbery, they might by proper discipline and useful labour, have been disentangled from their habits, they might have escaped all the temptations to subsequent crimes, and passed their days in reparation and penitence; and detected they might all have been, had the prosecutors been certain, that their lives would have been spared.



(d) This scheme of invigorating the laws by relaxation, and extirpating wickedness by lenity, is so remote from common practice, that I might reasonably fear to expose it to the publick, could it be supported only by my own observations: I shall, therefore, by ascribing it to its author, Sir Thomas More, endeavour to procure it that attention, which I wish always paid to prudence, to justice, and to mercy.

So Johnson was no enthusiast for hanging. Temperamentally he was always in revolt against authority. He felt, as Professor Bate points out so clearly, a horror of slavery, seen by him as an inevitable and unacceptable extension of the uncontrolled pursuit of wealth, the undesirable growth of empire. He detested cant: 'How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?'. Boswell records all this fairly though with disapproval: 'Upon one occasion, when in company with some very grave men at Oxford, his toast was, "Here's to the next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies".'

Boswell included in the *Life* his own views of such matters, so that it might not be thought he shared in these eccentricities of Johnson.

To abolish a *status*, which in all ages GOD has sanctioned, and man has continued, would not only be *robbery* to an innumerable class of our fellow-subjects; but it would be extreme cruelty to the African Savages, a portion of whom it saves from massacre, or into terrible bondage in their own country, and introduces into a much happier state of life.

But as always, Boswell the artist is concerned to compare and not to conceal. Johnson's radical views on hanging and slavery are best exposed by comparison with those of Boswell, the die-hard conservative. Occasionally he does conceal. Boswell could not tolerate the idea of Hester Thrale as Johnson's closest friend: it subordinated Boswell in a fashion he could not accept. But concealment is rare and perhaps here it is not entirely conscious.

Understandably Boswell wanted to illuminate the Johnson he knew. His introductory manifesto in the *Life* is often repeated (most recently in Mr Richard Holmes' brilliant Ernest Johns lecture, 'Biographers' Footsteps'):

I will venture to say that he will be seen in this work more completely than any man who has ever yet lived. And he will be seen as he really was; for I profess to write, not his panegyrick, which must be all praise, but his *Life*.

Boswell's Dedication of the book to Sir Joshua Reynolds is less often repeated.

The world, my friend, I have found to be a great fool, as to that particular, on which it has become necessary to speak very plainly. I have, therefore, in this Work been more reserved; and though I tell nothing but the truth, I have still kept in my mind that the whole truth is not always to be exposed. This, however, I have managed so as to occasion no diminution of the pleasure which my book should afford; though malignity may sometimes be disappointed of its gratifications.

He wanted to illumine, but not, I think, at the risk of a libel action. Anecdotal biography provides a useful barrier. If Boswell accurately transcribes, he cannot be blamed if Johnson says something outrageous. Somewhere in the *Life*—and this is only one of its primary charms—Johnson is cited on almost every aspect of his moral, social, political world. This makes Volume VI of the Hill-Powell edition—the Index volume—in itself one of the most companionable of books.

But there are some unexpected near-omissions. Johnson, as he aged, became more and more in style a rather grand Lord Chancellor, and he never lost his concern with Boswell's legal briefs. Prison and punishment are subjects where you would think he would always be ready with careful sententiousness.

But very little is said in the *Life*. Johnson undoubtedly deplored capital punishment, save perhaps after a desperate murder or some unendurable tyranny. He defined punishment in the *Dictionary* as 'pain imposed in vengeance of a crime'. It suggests a lack of enthusiasm for punishment; he did not care much for vengeance.

Is the comparative lack of concern for these subjects a defect in Boswell's *Life*, or did Johnson turn his mind very little to prison and punishment? I believe the *Life* gets the balance right. Johnson died in 1784, having lived too early for the great era of prison reform. Until American Independence in the 1770s, convicts who were not hanged, were mostly transported to the colonies. Prison sentences here were short and prisons squalid and corrupt. Only in 1777 did John Howard expose a scandal, when he published *The State of the Prisons*. For some ten years after Independence, convicts went mostly to the hulks, which lay infested with disease at the approaches to our ports. The rate of crime began steadily to rise in the 1780s despite the invention of many new capital offences. Transportation to Botany Bay began in the 1780s, but was passionately resisted by prisoners to whom Australia was more repellent than the gallows. At this stage the Government looked for counsel—rather as nowadays we look for alternatives to custody—and a group of Whigs and Methodists centred around Lord Shelburne's house, Bowood, with Priestley and Jeremy Bentham among the leaders, began to develop the idea of the Penitentiary prison, where by discipline, training and a regime of silence, prisoners could be brought to penitence and prepared for a return to serve in the community. Johnson met both Bentham and Shelburne, but there is no evidence that the old man—for such he then was—concerned himself with these Orwellian proposals for prison reform. The first penitentiary was built in the new century, long after the death of Johnson.

When in the *Life*, Johnson talks of prison, he tends to be talking for effect and perhaps to provoke. Talking of the Justitia hulk at Woolwich, in which criminals were punished, by being confined to labour, he said, 'I do not see that they are punished by this: they must have worked equally had they never been guilty of stealing. They now only work; so, after all, they have gained; what they stole is clear gain to them; the confinement is nothing. Every man who works is confined: the smith to his shop, the tailor to his garret'. BOSWELL. 'And Lord Mansfield to his Court.'

Boswell praised somewhat extravagantly the keepers and chaplain of Newgate. Johnson's one recorded response was very remarkable and perhaps a trifle flippant.

Talking of the religious discipline proper for unhappy convicts, he said, 'Sir, one of our regular clergy will probably not impress their minds sufficiently: they should be attended by a Methodist preacher, or a Popish priest.'

And writing, many years earlier, of the devious Richard Savage confined in a debtor's prison at Bristol, Johnson does not record what one might expect. In some metaphorical way, Johnson seems to be writing partly about himself.

He was treated by Mr Dagg, the keeper of the prison, with great humanity; was supported by him at his own table, without any certainty of recompense, had a room to himself, to which he could at any time retire from all disturbance, was allowed to stand at the door of the prison, and sometimes taken out into the fields; so that he suffered fewer hardships in prison than he had been accustomed to undergo in the greatest part of his life.

His time was spent in the prison for the most part in study, or in receiving visits; but sometimes he descended to lower amusements, and diverted himself in the kitchen with the conversation of the criminals; for it was not pleasing for him to be much without company, and though he was very capable of a judicious choice, he was often contented with the first that offered; for this he was sometimes reproved by his friends who found him surrounded with felons; but the reproof

Prison, for Johnson, inspired firstly his compassion, but it is a subject often touched by him with a blackish humour.

There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,

Toil, envy, want, the patron and the jail.

Boswell brought out such humour—which makes the book such a perpetual entertainment, but he sees the *Life* in his introduction not only as a comedy of humours and manners, but as a tract against what we would nowadays call 'whinging'.

Should there be any cold-blooded and morose mortals who really dislike this Book, I will give them a story to apply. When the great Duke of Marlborough, accompanied by Lord Cadogan, was one day reconnoitring the army in Flanders, a heavy rain came on, and they both called for their cloaks. Lord Cadogan's servant, a good humoured alert lad, brought his Lordship's in a minute. The Duke's servant, a lazy sulky dog, was so sluggish, that his Grace being wet to the skin, reproved him, and had for answer with a grunt, 'I came as fast I could,' upon which the Duke calmly said, 'Cadogan, I would not for a thousand pounds have that fellow's temper.'

The compassionate, the pachydermous, the robustly humoured: all these aspects of the mature Johnson emerge more sharply from Boswell's *Life* than from anywhere, save perhaps from Johnson's own *Lives of the Poets*.

But where is the most intimate Johnson? The guilty moralist who feared Death. The publicist in no way deluded by public values. The author of that complicated and internally-rhymed couplet included in Goldsmith's 'Traveller':

How small of all that human hearts endure

The part which laws or kings can cause or cure

The final skill of Boswell is to impel us to go on reading Johnson.

#### A MAN LED BY A BEAR: DR JOHNSON'S RELATIONSHIP WITH BOSWELL'S WIFE, MARGARET MONTGOMERIE

Mr Brian Todd — 20th January 1996

Chairman: J. M. Leicester MA FRSA

Mr Todd is currently lecturing in Politics and Literature on an American Studies Course at the University of Wolverhampton, while completing his Ph.D. thesis on The Political Thought of Enoch Powell and its relationship to the Tory tradition. One of his main outside interests is local drama, and he has acted with the Lichfield Players and at Lichfield's outdoor *Shakespeare in the Park* Theatre Festival.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you on such an important anniversary. It is 200 years since the death of James Boswell, and we all share, not only an objective interest in what he said and wrote, but also a genuine love and engagement with the character and charm of the man as revealed through his work. Have you ever heard it said that Margaret Boswell did not exactly share her husband's enthusiasm for Johnson? I certainly have and, indeed, in looking for evidence to support the theory, I have acquired most of the information which I have included in my paper to you. Hesitant in disclosing his thoughts about his wife, Margaret Montgomerie, Boswell does present in *The Life of Johnson* a telling witticism that shows her in her prime: 'I have seen many a bear led by a man; but I never before saw a man led by a bear.'<sup>1</sup> And yet Boswell is honest enough to present her remark when the joke is quite as much on him as it is on Johnson.

At the age of 28, Boswell wanted, despite his constant philandering with women of all classes, a rich wife, and was on a journey to court an Irish heiress, his cousin Mary Ann Boyd, accompanied by Margaret Montgomerie, another cousin two years older than he. Four days into the trip, he writes in his journal that he is strongly attracted to Margaret, whom he has known for many years. He wrote to his friend Temple: 'When I was not in love with some one or other of my numerous flames, I have been in love with her, and during the intervals of all my passions Margaret has been constantly my mistress as well as my friend.'<sup>2</sup> His proposal to Margaret was as follows:

I think I may trust to the generosity of a noble-minded woman, as Dempster calls you. I therefore make you this proposal. You know my unhappy temper. You know all my faults. It is painful to repeat them. Will you, then, knowing me fully, accept of me for your husband as I now am—not the heir of Auchinleck, but one who has had his time of the world.<sup>3</sup>

She replied on 25th July, 1769, 'I accept of your terms'<sup>4</sup>. Boswell wrote; 'For a minute or two my habits of terror for marriage returned. I found myself at last fixed for ever; my heart beat and my head was giddy.'<sup>5</sup> From this time he referred to her, even before the marriage, as his wife. For better or worse, he had finally committed himself as a husband. Boswell married in 1769; his wife was a witty, diligent woman of 30. Boswell says of her,

She is not what is called a beauty, but she is well built, has a very agreeable countenance, and without boasting of being a '*bel esprit*', has a great deal of good sense and the most engaging vivacity. Besides having the most affectionate heart, my cousin has also the best principles of religion.<sup>6</sup>

Her life with Boswell was understandably stormy. Guilt about his infidelities did not seem to interfere with his attitude toward sexual relations with his wife. He managed conveniently to separate his relationship with other women from his strong emotional and physical attraction to Margaret. There is no evidence that he resorted to prostitutes when she was available. Once, following a period of promiscuous behaviour, he writes that his wife 'was averse to hymeneal rites', and that

when I was sure that she was in earnest to allow me to go to other women without risk either of hurting my health or of diminishing my affection for her, I would go. I consider indulgence with women to be like any other indulgence of nature.<sup>7</sup>

However, his sexual promiscuity cost Boswell dear, if only in terms of his health. Margaret Boswell seems to have escaped Gonorrheal infection because she knew of her husband's ill health and proclivities and because he did have enough good sense to forswear marital relations with her when there was a possibility that she could be infected. His wife was truly understanding. Her health would not permit her to be in London with her husband, but the result of his 'riot' would be obvious. Boswell was given to compulsive and detailed confessions. Margaret hated these journals in which he chronicled his sexual escapades using a Greek-letter code which, unfortunately for her, she could decipher. He invited himself when he was young to 'think if God really forbids girls', but was never able to decide. As his wife said, His 'spirits [were] like brandy set on fire. If not constantly stirred the flame will go out'.<sup>8</sup>

What was notable was not Boswell's philandering but the steadfast nature of his love for his wife. Boswell had long been keen to have his distinguished friends visit him in Scotland. Given Johnson's signature on the marriage contract, it was fitting that Johnson's response to the invitation on July 5th, 1773, was:

I hope your dear lady and her dear baby are both well. I shall see them too when I come; and I have that opinion of your choice, as to suspect that when I have seen Mrs. Boswell, I shall be less willing to go away. I am, dear sir, your affectionate humble servant,  
Sam. Johnson.<sup>9</sup>



It is likely that Mrs. Boswell had disliked the Doctor long before she met him for his strange influence over her husband, to whom he represented the lure of London, and periodical escapes from domesticity. Boswell describes how he and Johnson walked arm-in-arm up the High Street, to his house in James's Court; people still threw excrement from the windows there.<sup>10</sup>

Johnson grumbled in Boswell's ear: 'I smell you in the dark'.<sup>11</sup> Boswell's words of welcome to Johnson were, 'I'm glad to see you under my roof', to which Johnson replied, 'and 'tis a very noble roof'.<sup>12</sup> The impact of the Doctor's visitation on Mrs Boswell, waiting anxiously at her tea table, was immense and irritating. Boswell tells us that she had tea ready for him on his arrival, and that she insisted on giving up her own bed-chamber to him, to show all respect for the Sage;<sup>13</sup> she knew her place, and knew that this enormous, dishevelled creature was her rival. Politeness, Johnson certainly got from Margaret Boswell, but no more, and he always knew it. Boswell tells us that, 'his conversation soon charmed her into a forgetfulness of his external appearance. We sat till near two in the morning, having chatted a good while after my wife left us'.<sup>14</sup>

Other women found him enchanting: his conversation enthralled and entranced Fanny Burney, Mrs Thrale, and Hannah More. Johnson was not an engaging figure to those who did not have a strong affection for him. A portrait of him by Boswell at the time of his visit describes Johnson as wearing, 'a full suit of plain brown clothes, with twisted hair-buttons of the same colour, a large bushy greyish wig, a plain shirt, black worsted stockings, and silver buckles.' His 'very wide brown cloth great-coat, had pockets . . . which 'might almost have held the volumes of his folio Dictionary. He supplemented this outfit, when travelling, with boots and a 'large English oak stick'.<sup>15</sup>

Mrs. Boswell thought he resembled a bear, a lumbering, stumbling, grumbling, bumbling, bear. (We should remember Lord Auchinleck's description at this time: he referred to Johnson as 'Ursa Major'—i.e. the Great Bear.)<sup>16</sup>

Let's explore Johnson's letter of November 27th, 1773, in which Boswell acknowledges that Margaret must have been glad to see the last of Johnson after his stay in Edinburgh. Boswell admits that Johnson had been a difficult guest and that Margaret, although attentive as always, did not much like him. We learn of this from a footnote to this letter by Boswell.

My wife paid him the most assiduous and respectful attention, while he was our guest; so that I wonder how he discovered her wishing for his departure. The truth is, that his irregular hours and uncouth habits, such as turning the candles with their heads downwards, when they did not burn bright enough, and letting the wax drop upon the carpet, could not but be disagreeable to a lady. Besides, she had not that high admiration of him which was felt by most of those who knew him; and what was very natural to a female mind, she thought he had too much influence over her husband. She once in a little warmth, made, with more point than justice, this remark upon that subject: 'I have seen many a bear led by a man; but I never before saw a man led by a bear'.<sup>17</sup>

Margaret thought the trip around Scotland unimportant but bade them farewell on 18th August with anxiety. Boswell noted on the same day:

He [Johnson] left in that drawer one volume of a pretty full and curious *Diary of his Life*, of which I have a few fragments; but the book has been destroyed. I wish female curiosity had been strong enough to have had it all transcribed, which might easily have been done; and I should think the theft, being *pro bono publico*, might have been forgiven. But I may be wrong. My wife told me she never once looked into it.<sup>18</sup>

Margaret Boswell was not interested in his journal or in biography. She did not understand or want his journals preserved for all posterity. This is the quiet protest of a private woman.

So what went wrong? Margaret Boswell treated Johnson with politeness and overlooked his behaviour. Johnson took an immediate liking to Mrs Boswell, a fine, sensible woman. But Margaret also felt Johnson had too great an influence over her husband, always taking him away—they were rivals for his attention if not also for his affection. So Peggie did not reciprocate Sam's warmth. She appeared to him rather colourless. It is almost certain that she took little part in the general conversation and treated him with a formality which he reciprocated.

What are we to make of Boswell's resigned allusion to Margaret? The very fact that it is there at all suggests that Boswell wanted to express his feelings about her, to leave some imprint of her in his work. Johnson wrote: 'Make my compliments to Mrs Boswell and tell her that I do not love her the less for wishing me away. I gave her trouble enough, and shall be glad in recompense, to give her any pleasure.'<sup>19</sup> From this we can be sure that Johnson was in no doubt about how Margaret regarded him. Later, he even tries to convey his concern to Boswell about his own part in the underlying rivalry between himself and Margaret. On 15th March, 1774, Johnson advises Boswell:

What improvement you might gain by coming to London, you may easily supply, or easily compensate, by enjoining yourself some particular study at home. I need not tell you what regard you owe to Mrs. Boswell's entreaties; or how much you ought to study the happiness of her who studies yours with so much diligence, and of whose kindness you enjoy such good effects. She permitted you to ramble last year, you must permit her now to keep you at home.<sup>20</sup>

I make no apology for including the following entry from Boswell's Journal because of what it reveals of the abrasive, yet tender relationship between Boswell and his wife.

Sunday, 10th July, 1774  
Though I was neither sick nor hardly any headache, I was, as it were, half boiled with last night's debauch, and I was vexed to think of having given my valuable spouse so much uneasiness; for she had scarcely slept any the whole night watching me. The reflection, too, of my having this summer so frequently been intoxicated, galled me. A circumstance occurred this morning which I hope will have a lasting impression upon me. There had come a letter to me from Mr. Samuel Johnson last night. My wife improved it well. She said she would not give me it, as I did not deserve it, since I had put myself into a state of incapacity to receive it when it came, and that it would not have been written to me had the writer of it known how I was to be. She would therefore send it back. She thus made me think how shocking it was that a letter from Mr. Samuel Johnson should find me drunk. She then delivered it, and it was a more than ordinary good one. It put me in the best frame, and I determined vigorously to resist temptation for the future.<sup>21</sup>

As usual, James's good intentions probably evaporated with his headache, but at least he understood why he had caused her concern, and had the grace to regret it. I think Mrs. Boswell may have cried when she got a letter from the innocent Johnson on May 16th, 1776 containing the words,

You will now have Mr. Boswell home; it is well that you have him; he has led a wild life . . . Pray take care of him and tame him. The only thing in which I have the honour to agree with you is, in loving him . . .<sup>22</sup>

She may have cried, because she realised that Johnson's love for Boswell was as genuine as her own, and because, despite her resentment of what Johnson represented, she recognised that her own feelings for her husband were not unlike Johnson's. When Margaret gave birth to their first son, Alexander, Johnson wrote:

I am glad that the young Laird is born, and an end, as I hope, put to the only difference that you can ever have with Mrs. Boswell [(ie. the feudal principal of male succession)]. I know she does not love me; but I intend to persist in wishing her well till I get the better of her.<sup>23</sup>

Compliments continue, but she still doesn't love him. Then, on Monday, 24th February, 1777, Boswell writes, 'My wife is much honoured by what you say of her. She begs you may accept of her best compliments. She is to send you some marmalade of oranges of her own making.'<sup>24</sup> What did she mean by this gift? We will never know her motives, because she was a private woman, and did not comment on it. Even Johnson had his suspicions:

Tell Mrs. Boswell that I shall taste her marmalade cautiously at first. *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes* [Beware of Greeks bearing gifts]. Beware, says the Italian proverb, of a reconciled enemy. But when I find it does me no harm, I shall then receive it and be thankful for it . . . She is, after all, a dear, dear lady.<sup>25</sup>

And later, Johnson to Mrs Boswell:

Madam, Though I am well enough pleased with the taste of sweetmeats, very little of the pleasure which I received at the arrival of your jar of marmalade arose from eating it. I received it as a token of friendship, as a proof of reconciliation, things much sweeter than sweetmeats, and upon this consideration I return you, dear Madam, my sincerest thanks. Mr Boswell will tell you that I was always faithful to your interest, and always endeavoured to exalt you in his estimation.<sup>26</sup>

(He's laying it on a bit thick, and I don't mean the marmalade.) In another letter, we learn that Johnson never opened the marmalade! 'I believe it was after I left your house that I received a pot of orange Marmalade from Mrs. Boswell. We have now, I hope, made it up. I have not opened my pot!'<sup>27</sup>

Mrs Boswell, though herself far from well, was prepared, even, to endure another visit from the Doctor if it would keep her husband at home, and wrote to Johnson herself. The Doctor, now in his seventy-fourth year and his illness steadily increasing, replied to his enemy with pathetic gratitude. He understood the real dependence of Boswell on Margaret, and tried to make a friend of her in order to bring about a reconciliation to ease both her own mind while she was ill, and James's conscience about the rivalry he had caused between them. Johnson replies to the invitation with an intention to accept, but saying that his own health would not allow him to travel.

I have not often received so much pleasure as from your invitation to Auchinleck. The journey thither and back is, indeed, too great for the latter part of the year; but if my health were fully recovered, I would suffer no little heat and cold nor a wet or a rough road to keep me from you. I am, indeed, not without hope of seeing Auchinleck again; but to make it a pleasant place I must see its lady well, and brisk, and airy. For my sake, therefore, among many greater reasons, take care dear Madam, of your health, spare no expence, and want no attendance that can procure ease, or preserve it. Be very careful to keep your mind quiet; and do not think it too much to give an account of your recovery to, Madam, your, &c.

Sam Johnson.<sup>28</sup>

Margaret writes without sarcasm or irony to thank him for his solicitations, and to wish him well.

Dear Sir,

I was made very happy by your kind letter, which gave us the agreeable hopes of seeing you in Scotland again.

I am much flattered by the concern you are pleased to take in my recovery. I am better, and hope to have it in my power to convince you by my attention of how much consequence I esteem your health to the world and to myself. I remain, Sir with grateful respect, your obliged and obedient servant,

Margaret Boswell.<sup>29</sup>

She is economical with words, but is sincere and kind.

From this period, 1777, his wife began to develop consumption, it was rife by 1779, and finally she was ill most of the time. Boswell's Journal and his letters are full of tender thoughts to her and her children, and thankfulness for her help and tolerance. Johnson died in December, 1784. Peggie's affection for

Jamie remained. 'My Dearest Mr Boswell', she writes to him a little before her death. 'My dearest life', Boswell replies. Margaret died on the 4th June, 1789. In 1786 Boswell made an unwise move to leave the Edinburgh bar, however, he pulled in no clients in London, and this caused depression to set in which led to him drinking too much. He missed Margaret very much and could not in truth contemplate another wife. In December, 1794, he wrote: 'Tis o'er, 'tis o'er, the dream is o'er And life's delusion is no more.'<sup>30</sup> While attending an engagement at the Club on 14th April, 1795 Boswell collapsed and had to be taken home. After a painful illness, lasting five weeks, he died. It was the 18th May, 1795, and he was only 54 years of age.

#### Notes

1. James Boswell *Life of Johnson*, ed. by R. W. Chapman and introduced by Pat Rogers (World's Classics, 1980), p. 554, note. (27th November, 1773). All subsequent references to the *Life* are to the page and date in that edition.
2. Boswell in *Search of a Wife*, 1766-1769, ed. by Frank Brady and Frederick A. Pottle (Yale, 1956), p. 214. All subsequent references to *Search* are to the page and date in that edition.
3. *Search*, p. 252 (20 July, 1769).
4. *Search*, p. 255 (22 July, 1769).
5. *Search*, p. 255 (24 July, 1769).
6. *Search*, p. 278 (21 August, 1769).
7. Charles Ryskamp and Frederick A. Pottle, eds., *Boswell: The Ominous Years, 1774-1776* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963), p. 74.
8. Mary Hyde *The Impossible Friendship: Boswell and Mrs Thrale* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 169. [Boswell to Malone, 3 October, 1785, MS. Letter: Yale (L923)].
9. *Life*, pp. 550-1 (5 July, 1773).
10. James Boswell *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, ed. by Peter Levi, in *Samuel Johnson and James Boswell A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland and The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 166-7 (14 Aug., 1773). All subsequent references to *Tour* are to that edition.
11. *Tour* p. 167 (14 Aug., 1773).
12. *Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, 1773, ed. by Frederick A. Pottle and Charles H. Bennet, (Yale, 1961), p. 16 (15 Aug., 1773).
13. *Tour* p. 167 (14 Aug., 1773).
14. *Tour* p. 167 (14 Aug., 1773).
15. *Tour* p. 165.
16. *Tour* p. 398 (6 Nov., 1773).
17. *Life*, p. 554 (27 Nov., 1773).
18. *Tour*, p. 184.
19. *Life*, p. 556 (29 Jan., 1774).
20. *Life*, p. 560 (Mar., 1774).
21. *Boswell for the Defence*, 1769-1774, ed. by William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Frederick A. Pottle, Yale, 1959, p. 235 (10 July, 1774).
22. *Life*, p. 781 (17 May, 1776).
23. *Life*, p. 643 (16 Nov., 1775).
24. *Life*, p. 797 (24 Feb., 1777).
25. *Life*, p. 800 (3 May, 1777).
26. *Life*, pp. 818-9 (22 July, 1777).
27. Samuel Johnson *The Letters of Samuel Johnson* ed. by Bruce Redford (Clarendon Press, 1992), III, p. 46. (Letter to Hester Thrale, 4 Aug., 1777).
28. *Life*, pp. 1188-89 (7 Sept., 1782).
29. *Life*, p. 1190 (20 Dec., 1782).
30. Roger Craik, *James Boswell 1740-1795: The Scottish Perspective*, The Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh: HMSO, 1994, p. 178.



# MENTORS OLD AND NEW: SAMUEL JOHNSON AND HANNAH MORE

Dr. Mary Waldron — 17th February 1996

Chairman: Mr. Richard Thrale

Dr. Waldron teaches literature part-time in the Department of Continuing Education at Essex University. Her research interests are mainly among women writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with particular emphasis on Ann Yearsley, Hannah More and Jane Austen. Her published works relate principally to these writers.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that, though Dr. Johnson was remembered with respect during the nineteenth century, especially for the *Dictionary*, his writings, particularly the periodical essays, with their peculiar mixture of brooding melancholy, stern chastisement, indulgent sympathy and common sense, gathered dust rather than readers. He survived almost entirely through the recollections of James Boswell and Hester Piozzi, mainly as an oddity, whose views had little contemporary relevance. Novelists reflect this attitude—the familiar opening phrase of this paper will have been recognised as a reference to Jane Austen's gently satirical parody of the Johnsonian manner; later, in *Vanity Fair*, Miss Pinkerton's attachment to Dr. Johnson—even to the 'Dixonary'—is regarded as ludicrously outdated; and later still, in *Middlemarch*, Mary Garth laughs over Piozzi to enliven a dreary hour; we are not told what she reads for serious intellectual or spiritual refreshment, but it is certainly not Johnson. The great moralist of the previous century now no longer seemed to have anything useful to say.

I would like in this paper to reflect on some of the reasons for the rejection of Enlightenment rationalism and the transition to a mindset which we now think of as typically Victorian. The interaction of a few people, including Johnson, in the last years of his life and the first decade of the nineteenth century may serve to identify the initial stages of a process which led to the dismissal of Johnson's moral stance as full of gloom and pessimism. It is true, of course, that there was plenty of both about in the later nineteenth century, but I want today to concentrate on the very strong thread of optimism and complacency which underpinned the certainties of the era.

One of Johnson's successors as moral mentor of a generation—indeed, several generations—was Hannah More.<sup>1</sup> She lived from 1745 to 1833, and for a large part of her long life she wrote with unrelenting energy on the whole duty of man and woman, reaching an enormous readership at every level of society. Her works, with such titles as *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great*, *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*, *Village Politics* (for the potential revolutionary in 1792), *Strictures on the Present System of Female Education*, *Hints on Forming the Character of a Young Princess* (aimed at the Prince Regent), *Practical Piety*, *Christian Morals*, etc., were reprinted again and again, in large leather-bound sets, single volumes, and tiny pocket editions for consultation by those with good eyesight at moments of particular moral uncertainty.

More met Johnson in 1774, ten years before his death, and they grew to know each other well. At the age of 28 she had already come to prominence in Bristol, where she had been engaged in running a school for girls with her four sisters. She was well known there as a poet, and had published locally in 1766 a closet drama, called *The Search after Happiness*,<sup>2</sup> a moral but cheerful piece, originally intended for private performance by the pupils. Her introduction in London literary circles came about partly as a result of a broken engagement to a local gentleman of property which left her with a compensatory annuity of £200; from about 1767, when the engagement was formed, she had relinquished her continual involvement with the school, and was free from 1773 to live at moderate expense in London for part of the year. The school had given her introductions to various local worthies, including Frances Boscawen, wife of the admiral, Mrs. Gwatkin, whose son had married a niece of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Dr. John Stonhouse, who knew David Garrick. The introduction to the Reynolds family resulted in her acceptance into an exalted inner literary circle

which included Elizabeth Montagu and the Bluestockings, Edmund Burke, Giuseppe Baretti,—and Dr. Johnson. Garrick and his wife, Eva Maria, were also to be found at gatherings there. Attractive, intelligent and well-read, More was an immediate success, and began a career of social prominence, invited everywhere, and encouraged to pursue a literary career. It should be said that at this time we must perceive a very different Hannah More from the author of the later moral works. Though devoutly religious and what Garrick called on one occasion 'a Sunday woman', she then wore her piety lightly (though it was always respected) and saw no sin (as she later did) in the theatre and other popular diversions, though she often dismissed some of them as frivolous and castigated herself mildly for taking part.<sup>3</sup> Under Garrick's influence she was convinced that the theatre could become a force for public good, and she was at that time involved in the production in Bath of her first tragedy, *The Inflexible Captive*, a celebration of the courage of the ancient Roman hero, Regulus, for which Garrick wrote an epilogue and attended the first night.<sup>4</sup> He was also closely involved in the writing of her second play, *Percy, a Tragedy*, set this time in Scotland, produced in 1777 at Drury Lane. Both the Garricks were charmed with her—Garrick teased her and called her 'the Nine' indicating that for him she personified all the Muses. After 1775 she spent her time in London as a valued guest in their new, elegant house in the Adelphi, on the Thames waterfront.

Her early meetings with Johnson are well documented in *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, published in 1834 by William Roberts. The first was at Sir Joshua's where, says Roberts, Johnson came to meet her quoting one of her own poems.<sup>5</sup> In London with her was her sister, Sally More, who writes home in 1774:

We have paid another visit to Miss Reynolds. She had sent to engage Dr. Percy (Percy's collection,—now you know him,) who is quite a sprightly modern, instead of a rusty antique, as I expected. He was no sooner gone, than the most amiable and obliging of women (Miss Reynolds,) ordered the coach to take us to Dr. Johnson's *very own house*; yes, Abyssinia's Johnson! Dictionary Johnson! Rambler's, Idler's, and Irene's Johnson! Can you picture to yourselves the palpitation of our hearts as we approached his mansion. The conversation turned upon a new work of his, just going to the press, (the *Tour of the Hebrides*,) and his old friend Richardson. Mrs. Williams, the blind poet, who lives with him, was introduced to us. She is engaging in her manners; her conversation lively and entertaining. Miss Reynolds told the doctor of all our rapturous exclamations on the road. He shook his scientific head at Hannah, and said, 'She was a *silly thing*.'<sup>6</sup>

This may have been an apt description of her manners at this early stage of her public life, but there was nothing really silly about Hannah. The girlish enthusiasm concealed a powerful if submerged and unacknowledged ambition. A later comment in the same letter seems to bear this out:

I forgot to mention, [says Sally] that not finding Johnson in his little parlour when we came in, Hannah seated herself in his great chair, hoping to catch a little of his genius; when he heard it, he laughed heartily, and told her it was a chair on which he never sat.<sup>7</sup>

It is almost as if she had made up her mind then that she would be fit to take his place—and there is a sort of poetic truth in Johnson's response. She was indeed to occupy a very different throne.

Meanwhile, the friendship developed; they met continually, always with pleasure. Johnson seemed genuinely to admire her *verse*—to please her he several times quotes from her poems, ballads in the fashionable primitive manner, called 'Sir Eldred of the Bower' and 'The Bleeding Rock', now (1776) being published by Thomas Cadell. Sally clearly sees them as equals in everything but age: 'the old genius was extremely jocular' she says in another letter home in 1775 'and the young one very pleasant'.<sup>8</sup> Jokes about a possible Scotch elopement between 'the mother of Sir Eldred and the father of much-loved Irene' are bandied about by Sally More and Elizabeth

Montagu, now a close friend.<sup>9</sup> But as the years went by and More gained in confidence there were areas of mild discord—she did not always agree with him, particularly on the subject of religion. It is clear that in spite of her rather hectic social life and her involvement with the theatre, she leans more and more, especially after the death of Garrick in 1779, towards a puritanical interpretation of Christianity which, predictably, Johnson did not care for. 'I was very bold' she writes home in 1780 'in combating some of his darling prejudices: nay, I ventured to defend one or two of the Puritans, whom I forced him to allow to be good men'.<sup>10</sup> Significantly for her later position, one of these Puritans was Richard Baxter, a seventeenth-century divine who defended the interests of dissenters and non-jurors from the attacks of Restoration Anglicans and believed that religion should be more than a matter of ritual observance. As yet, though, her views were by no means fixed, for she is sternly rebuked by Johnson for investigating Pascal 'alleging that as a good Protestant, I ought to abstain from books written by Catholics'.<sup>11</sup> Pascal, a Jansenist, upheld the Augustinian doctrines of the corruption of man and the need for salvation by grace which are well known to have ruled Johnson's life; why was he so worried about More's reading? Later, in another discussion with Johnson about Roman Catholicism, she again defends the Jansenists 'He took the part of the Jesuits . . . I continued sturdily to vindicate my old friends at the Port-Royal'.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps he saw in the combination of Baxter's brand of Puritanism, which emphasised private conviction over submission to authority, and Pascal's Augustinianism an explosive mix, ending in 'enthusiasm'—or, in his own words in his 'Life of Samuel Butler': 'perplexed doctrine, disordered practice and [the disturbance of] public and private quiet'. He is looking back to the seventeenth century, when individual interpretations of Christianity led inevitably to political unrest. But the affecting conclusion to the first of these conversations shows his characteristic generosity and tolerance: perhaps also his own indecision in these matters: 'I was beginning to stand upon my defence', says Hannah More, 'when he took me with both hands, and with a tear running down his cheeks, "Child," said he, with the most affecting earnestness, "I am heartily glad that you read pious books, by whomsoever they may be written."'

By the time Johnson spoke those words to Hannah More in 1781, three years before his death, he knew that changes were being wrought in the Anglicanism which he knew and loved. Methodism had been tolerated within the church for years, although it operated within its own structure and had its own places of worship; the close personal relationship with the Creator which it offered was attractive even to those who found its emotionalism out of place and embarrassing. Outright dissenters were no longer regarded with horror (even their widely-held belief that the Americans should be allowed to choose their own government was coming to be accepted as the unsuccessful war wound to its dismal close); the religious energy displayed by many outside the traditions of the church was admired and respected, not least by Johnson himself. At the time non-conformists apparently posed no political threat. It was no longer necessarily a question of a choice between traditional Anglicanism and dissent; more and more it seemed possible and indeed desirable to cease to regard the popular appeal of Methodism with suspicion and also to bring the best ideas of Dissent within the church itself. The most impressive of these ideas to many, in what they saw as a period of falling moral standards, was the involvement of religion in the day-to-day business of life, which was conspicuously rare in the practices of the established church. A movement, later identified as Anglican Evangelicalism, began among prominent churchmen and laypeople to incorporate some of these more acceptable aspects of Methodism and dissent into the general teachings of the church.<sup>13</sup> It was intended rigorously to exclude the 'enthusiasms' or vulgar emotionalism associated with Methodism and other sects and sift out the most useful of their tenets. More was closely involved with the movement, chiefly through her friendship with Beilby Porteus, Bishop of London from 1787 and with William Wilberforce, both dedicated to the root-and-branch moral reform of English society through the right kind of religion. Their influence was far more positive than that of Johnson and very different; they encouraged her to make up her mind and stick to it, a process alien to the discursive philosophical stance of Johnson. What is more, they perceived in More, with her easy, profuse style, a perfect propagandist. She became

the Evangelical spokesman and eventually by far the most influential of them all. Their general conviction that reform had to begin at the top, among the rich and powerful sections of society, produced the first real document of the movement—More's pamphlet *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society*, attacking, not the vicious, but the 'good kind of people' who gambled, frittered away their time in useless amusements, disregarded the fourth commandment and set a bad example to their servants.<sup>14</sup> This went into innumerable editions in its first year, its simple straightforward message having immediate appeal to readers not given to complex thought. But it predictably led to accusations of rigidity and Methodism by some. Typical of this reaction, and symptomatic of the attitude so much deplored, was that of Horace Walpole, another close friend of More, but often the object of her severe disapproval. He stoutly maintained that the fourth commandment was invented 'for the ease and comfort of the hard-labouring poor, and beasts of burden; but that it was never intended for persons of fashion, who have no occasion to rest, as they never do any thing on the other days'. More took his half-serious teasing in the spirit in which it was meant: 'we parted mutually unconverted' she says in a letter to one of her sisters in Bristol; 'he lamenting that I am fallen into heresy of *puritanical* strictness, and I lamenting that he is a person of fashion, for whom the Ten Commandments were not made.'<sup>15</sup> But 'puritanical strictness' was not the only charge; there were many who were prepared to use the dread word 'enthusiasm' of Evangelicals like More. This accusation was to some extent justified because from the first it proved difficult to exclude charismatic preaching along Wesleyan lines, which was soon found to be the most effective way to break through the religious indolence seen as such an evil.

One such clergyman whom Johnson, as far as we know, never met, was the reformed slave-trader and popular preacher, John Newton. He had had a dramatic conversion in 1748, and had as a result abandoned slave-dealing. He was at first much influenced by the Methodists, but never joined them; he was ordained in the Church of England and, with the poet Cowper, began to domesticate Anglicanism and bring some of the Methodists' populism to the established Church's pulpits. In 1780 he became the incumbent of St. Mary Woolnoth in London, and the focus of the nascent Evangelical party (he was an important influence on Wilberforce from about 1785). In 1787, three years after the death of Johnson, he met Hannah More for the first time, although in her letters she mentions having read and admired some of his writings as early as 1782, and having heard him preach shortly before their acquaintance began.<sup>16</sup> She was at this time anxious about her immortal soul—by no means as sure of her destiny as Wilberforce had by this time become. She was much involved with London society, where she moved in a whirl of Duchesses, politicians, courtiers and somewhat worldly churchmen. In 1788, in spite of her recent success in propagation of what the Evangelicals came to describe as 'serious' religion, she was concerned that she lived without proper reference to God. In Newton she found a new father-figure with whom she could discuss her problems. He had all the certainty which Johnson's native honesty would not allow him to nurture for himself and was less sophisticated than Porteus and Wilberforce. It should be acknowledged that, though she apparently moved very easily in the highest circles, her origins were relatively humble. She may have felt at times more at ease with the simple approach of the 'old African blasphemer' as he called himself.

In 1788 we find her writing to Newton from her country retreat near Bristol, Cowslip Green, seeking advice. Here we perceive a very different Hannah More from the slightly flippant critic of Horace Walpole. She was worried about her addiction to gardening:

I am certainly happier here than in the agitation of the world, but I do not find that I am one bit better; with full *leisure* to rectify my heart and affections; the disposition unluckily does not come. I have the mortification to find that petty and (as they are called) innocent employments can detain my heart from heaven as much as tumultuous pleasures. If to the pure all things are pure, the reverse must be also true when I can contrive to make so harmless an employment as the cultivation of flowers stand in the room of a vice, by the



great portion of time I give up to it; and by the entire dominion it has over my mind. You will tell me that if the affections be estranged from their proper object, it signifies not much whether a bunch of roses or a pack of cards effects it. I pass my life intending to get the better of this, but life is passing away, and the reform never begins.<sup>17</sup>

Such doubts remind one of Johnson, although his self-disgust was somewhat more seriously based on what he considered to be real vices, not 'innocent employments'. He never found an answer to the tendency of the human mind to indulge itself in matters irrelevant to the salvation of the soul; Newton however has one, which would no doubt itself have disgusted Johnson in its encouragement to rely on grace while abandoning reason:

... I may say, it is not that which surrounds us, it is not anything in our outward situation (provided it be not actually unlawful,) that can prevent or even retard our advances in religion; we are defiled and impeded by that which is within. So far as our hearts are right, all places and circumstances, which his wise and good providence allots us, are nearly equal. ... Our first thought when we begin to be displeased with ourselves, ... is to attempt to reform. ... It seems reasonable to ask, what can we do more? but while we think we can do as much as this, we do not fully understand the design of the gospel. ... As sinners, the first things we need are pardon, reconciliation, and a principle of life entirely new. Till then we can have no more success or comfort from our endeavours than a man who should attempt to walk whose ankle was dislocated; the bone must be reduced before he can take a single step with safety. ...<sup>18</sup>

Later, in another letter, he becomes even more explicit:

... we bring with us into this world, no more than a capacity, or rather a capability of a second birth. ... Till this happy moment arrives, our understandings, affections, and noblest powers are cramped and confined. ...

The *rational* life is not more superiour to the *animal*, nor more distinct from it, than the *spiritual* is superiour to them both.<sup>19</sup>

Newton's peace of mind proceeded from a somewhat modified version of Calvinism. He clearly believed that there was nothing one could do to be saved but accept the irreversible divine ordinance. This in itself would cause one to live the good life with hope. Here is another aspect of the doctrine of salvation by grace, which had so fascinated More in the writings of Pascal. But Newton's Calvinism has none of the stern rigour of the original—it is moving close to Wesley's 'assurance' of personal salvation; there is an admixture of individual reasonability, a cosy personal contact with a merciful deity which bypassed ecclesiastical authority, and which would have called up alarming memories of the seventeenth century 'when every man might become a preacher' in the mind of Johnson. More was still Johnsonian enough to feel wary of Newton's—and Wesley's—doctrines of personal salvation. Her responses to his letters are grateful, but equivocal; she never once commits herself in her replies, and subtly tones down his enthusiasm even as she agrees with it. There is no sign whatever that she ever experienced the 'happy moment' of second birth, ever felt, as Wesley describes in his journal, 'the heart strangely warmed'. The evidence is that she would have considered such things fanciful.

Nevertheless, while she and other leading Evangelicals rejected the emotionalism, they saw some value in the effects of the doctrine; it made people happy, and practical minds like More's could perceive that happiness and hope were a more fertile ground for reform of morals than misery and despair. But the central question—whether one can be both happy and virtuous—worried them. More's anxious questioning of Newton confirms this—her recent publication had certainly very clearly promised reward on this earth for right action. 'Action is the life of virtue, and the world is the theatre of action' she says in *Thoughts*; and the religious person 'will be anxious to increase the stock of human virtue and of human happiness'.<sup>20</sup> Religion need not be gloomy, she insists, and it

can bring more 'positive happiness' than all seven of the deadly sins. But she was clearly bothered by the idea that in some minds 'positive happiness' might be interpreted as virtue without reference to the rightness of the action, and her next publication, *Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*, stresses the teachings of the church as the basis of virtue and therefore of happiness: 'No happiness can be fully and finally enjoyed but in the solid basis of Christianity'.<sup>21</sup>

It is the emphasis on the possibility of happiness here and now which separates More from Johnson, and it is perhaps as much as anything connected with personality. Johnson was naturally sceptical of the possibility of anything but fleeting moments of happiness, rescued, as it were, from a prevailing melancholy; More was naturally cheerful; 'I am not (I thank God) what is called low-spirited' she says in 1791 in a letter to Newton discussing her spiritual state;<sup>22</sup> in fact she was healthy, vigorous, enjoyed her work and her social life, and because she bore any crosses she encountered with ease (she was by this time travelling miles across country on horseback in all weathers in support of her Mendip Sunday Schools for the children of the poor) she felt she was getting undeserved approval. Her chief problem was that she felt *too* certain that she was doing God's will. She did not feel sinful enough. Newton helped her to resolve this doubt, and though she did not take on board all his advice, a judicious selection convinced her that her instinctive optimism was virtuous—you could be happy without endangering your hopes of eternity, and that wherever you found yourself to be, there was God's plan for you—and all this without the dreaded enthusiasm! As teaching it worked both ways: if you were comfortable, wealthy and surrounded by the good things of this world, you need not feel guilty provided you lived in the assurance of God's goodness; if you were uncomfortable, poor and hungry, you could ignore your circumstances and be happy in the spiritual warmth of acceptance. Though Calvin thought wealth or poverty irrelevant to the question of salvation, it is fairly clear that he did not sanction outright enjoyment of what money could buy. But More and the other Evangelicals had no use for any kind of asceticism. They were explicit in stating that enjoyment in this life was no sin provided it took proper account of the life to come. It was an adroit adaption, for it vastly increased access to those whose possessions made them the only people with enough power in the land to effect genuine reform of morals and behaviour. The parable of the camel and the needle's eye was quietly laid aside. Correctly used, wealth could, as the Evangelicals saw it, do immense good, especially in the control of the activities and aspirations of the less fortunate and the poor.

The poor themselves were by no means neglected by the Evangelical propaganda machine. In 1792, armed with new and stronger convictions and encouraged by the growing success of the movement in recruiting many of the rich and powerful, More turned her attention directly to the problem of political unrest among the lower classes stimulated by the very wide distribution of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*. Her pamphlet *Village Politics* preached submission in simple language for the have-nots.<sup>23</sup> Evangelicalism of the Anglican brand was not originally a political movement, but with its doctrine of contentment and its emphasis on social stability it inevitably became so as a result of the French Revolution and the ensuing European wars. This dialogue between Tom, the village radical, and Jack, the 'reasonable man' emphasises worldly happiness in the light of Christianity; 'What is it to be an *enlightened* people' asked Tom, using Paine's word for a reformed society; Jack answers 'To put out the light of the gospel, confound right and wrong, and grope about in pitch darkness . . . we have as much liberty as can make us happy . . .' The success of this pamphlet was phenomenal and More and her sisters were encouraged by the clerical establishment to produce more of the same. Accordingly, the Cheap Repository was created in 1795 and funded by wealthy Evangelicals; for three years innumerable tracts by the Mores were printed, little moral tales, exhorting the poor to accept hardship for the sake of their immortal souls, and, incidentally so to win the approval of the upper classes, that they might also be worthy of reward on earth. Because the Shepherd of Salisbury Plain is contented with a subsistence wage, a leaky two-roomed cottage, eight children and an invalid wife, this situation being what God had designed for him, he is finally rewarded with a better house and a clerkship of the parish. His wife also gets

medical help, but only after having been reduced to the ultimate in physical suffering without murmur: 'The poor soul was very bad indeed' says her husband, 'and for several weeks lost the use of all her limbs except her hands: a merciful providence spared her the use of these; so that, when she could not turn in her bed, she could contrive to patch a rag or two for her family. She was always saying, that had it not been for the goodness of God, she might have had her hands lame as well as her feet ...'<sup>24</sup> It is impossible to believe that Johnson would have thought this anything but great nonsense, but it is a measure of the distance travelled by More, and apparently the reading public, in the ten or so years since his death, for her work had a far greater sale than the *Rambler* or *Idler* had ever done. The teaching was penetrating deep into contemporary society.

Success had its dangers, of course, and More's policies in her writing and later in her organisation of the Mendip Sunday Schools had a backlash during the years of relatively little success against France and consequent war-hysteria. Her views still had sufficient of the Calvinistic and Wesleyan to look at least eccentric—and eccentric religion, or indeed any deviation from the narrowest interpretation of Anglicanism, took on the colouring of subversive politics—curiously, since the whole Evangelical movement was dedicated to social stasis rather than change. The movement came in for bitter criticism from the right-wing press in the first years of the new century, but More herself was especially a target. Her operations in the Somerset villages during the nineties, bypassing the local clergy in her zeal for the spiritual reform of the underclass, gave anti-Evangelicals (most of whom were clergymen who preferred to collect their tithes and leave the souls of the poor to take care of themselves) a chance to hit back in the pamphlet war known as the Blagdon Controversy, which took place from about 1798, in which she was accused of everything—'intrusion', or interfering with the duties of parish priests, Calvinism, 'enthusiasm', jacobinism, republicanism, and ultimately giving comfort to a hostile foreign power, namely, France. How she survived is a matter for conjecture—as a leading Evangelical she had friends in high places who probably silenced the uproar in the interests of political stability—another story altogether.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps it was also partly a result of success against France and a decline in the paranoia which had led to the attacks. It is certainly a sign of the durability of her doctrines that by 1805 (the year of Trafalgar) she was back on track with another educational work which was very widely read and attended to—*Hints on Forming the Character of a Young Princess*.<sup>26</sup> The princess was the unfortunate Charlotte, only child of George, Prince of Wales and Caroline of Brunswick, and heir presumptive to the throne, who was being more or less ignored by her parents in their conflict with each other. Whether or not the work helped to form her character and would have assisted her to govern wisely it is impossible to assess; she died at twenty-one. But the book had a wider currency and more influence, perhaps, than the earlier *Strictures on the Present System of Female Education*, because it was more particularly prescriptive about the details of the proposed curriculum.

It is in this work that More's rejection of Johnson become explicit. The young person had much better read Addison for

the interesting lessons of life and manners ... It is true, that every sentence of the more recent moralist is an aphorism, every paragraph a chain of maxims for guiding the understanding and guiding the heart. But when Johnson describes *characters* he rather exhibits vice and virtue in the abstract, than real existing human beings; while Addison presents you with actual men and women; real life figures, compounded of the faults and the excellences, the wisdom and the weaknesses, the follies and the virtues of humanity.

Thus *The Rambler* is damned with faint praise, and later further castigated for its style, for which it had earlier been so much admired: 'A forbidding stateliness, a rigid and yet inflated style, an almost total absence of ease and cheerfulness, would too probably bring neglect on the great and various excellencies of these volumes, if they had been the single work of their author.'<sup>27</sup> *Rasselas*, she asserts, should be used only to instruct how life should *not* be led: '*Rasselas* ... paints human life in too dark shades, and dwells despondingly on the unattainableness of human

happiness . . . these defects will afford excellent occasions for the sagacious preceptor to unfold through what pursuits life may be made happy by being made useful; by what superinduced strength the burdens of this moral state may be cheerfully born, and by what a glorious prospect its termination may be brightened'; from which we may adduce that More really, by this time, had no use whatever for anything which Johnson thought about 'our present state'.<sup>28</sup>

I do not wish to suggest that More was the originator and sole spokesperson for this attitude to Johnson. She was certainly not alone; as early as 1802 William Mudford in an account of Johnson's oeuvre says very much the same: 'the young mind, rising from a perusal of *The Rambler* would conceive the most melancholy ideas of human nature and human events. Mankind would appear to him as an undistinguished mass of fraud, perfidy and deceit.'<sup>29</sup> A brisk exertion to an energetic and positive approach to life had clearly taken the place of a common eighteenth-century emphasis on anguish and doubt. There are probably all sorts of reasons for this change, but some of them were certainly social and political. Social stability became very important in the wake of the French Revolution; an underclass with hope in its heart and a clear moral message, and an establishment unracked by guilt and sure of its duty made for that stability. Hannah More and the Evangelicals were very keen on self-examination, but it had to be positive—if you did it right, you would always come to the right conclusion, and continue to be happy. Dwelling on moral complexities and agonised self-questioning were not encouraged and as time went on, began to look like inappropriate self-indulgence. As Evangelicalism's chief propagandist Hannah More set about out summarising this new set of attitudes. In 1808 she published her first and only novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*—a sort of latter-day *Pilgrim's Progress* without the allegory.<sup>30</sup> The story is a vehicle for all the facets of Evangelical thinking, including the duty to be happy. Lady Aston, for instance, adopts the popular Evangelical expedient of keeping a diary to record her 'sins, and . . . their mercies' but 'spent so much time in weighing the offences of one day against those of another, that before the scruple was settled, the time for action was past. She brought herself into so much perplexity by reading over [her] journal of her infirmities, that her difficulties were augmented by the very means she had employed to remove them . . . she had 'too much of the scrupulosity of the ascetic'.<sup>31</sup> She is finally persuaded that human pleasures are not sinful in themselves, and that happiness in this life is not only possible, but can be virtuous. More's old problem about gardening is solved by the central female character, Lucilla Stanley. Having decided, on moral grounds, to 'give it up', she hits on 'the expedient of limiting her time, and hanging up her watch in the conservatory, to keep her within her prescribed bounds.' She sticks conscientiously to this rule, and, says her mother: 'a treble end is answered. Her time is saved, self-denial is exercised, and the interest which would languish by protracting the work is kept in fresh vigour.'<sup>32</sup> More had now become an adept at having it all ways, and while her books were selling at phenomenal rates to almost the end of the century, by 1886, Mowbray Morris can say with confidence, that though Johnson is 'probably the most familiar to us of all dead men . . . yet [he] remains one of the Great Unread.'<sup>33</sup>

But, you will undoubtedly say, and with truth, that Hannah More has now taken Johnson's place in this non-illustrious company. Victorian morality underpinned Victorian success and self-confidence, and as these waned More's certainties began to look ridiculous. Indeed, quite early in the period they were questioned by novelists—Dickens lampoons More in *Bleak House* in the character of Mrs. Pardiggle, and one can certainly recognise a version of the redoubtable Evangelical woman in Trollope's Mrs. Proudie. But it is history that finally decides. Today it is More's work that has to be rescued from the 'dustiest shelves of libraries' to which Leslie Stephen, in this biography of 1878, consigned Johnson's.<sup>34</sup> Johnson, on the other hand, has had a renaissance which is not confined to the world of academia. What to the Victorians was unacceptable pessimism, has in the moral chaos of the twentieth century come to look more like honest and courageous contemplation of a reality that provides no reliable or reassuring answers.



## Notes

1. See the best and least biased of the many biographies, M. G. Jones *Hannah More* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952).
2. Bristol: Farley, 1766.
3. Garrick's phrase is reported by More in a letter from London to one of her sisters in Bristol in 1777. See William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More* (London: Seeley and Burnside, 1834) Second Edition I, p. 113.
4. See A. M. Broadley, 'A Famous Bath Premiere, 1776' *Bath Herald*, 4 March 1909.
5. Roberts, I, p. 48.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
13. See Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: the Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), for an exhaustive investigation of this movement.
14. Hannah More, *Works* (London: T. Cadell, 1830) XI
15. Roberts, II, p. 111.
16. Roberts I, p. 235; II, p. 54.
17. Roberts, II, p. 88.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
20. More, *Works*, XI, p. 50.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
22. Roberts, II, p. 277.
23. More, *Works*, III, pp. 365-84.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 397-439.
25. See Brown, pp. 187-233, for a full treatment of this episode.
26. More, *Works*, VI.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 323.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 329.
29. William Mudford, *A Critical Enquiry into the Moral Writings of Dr. Samuel Johnson* (London, 1802), cited in Edward Tomarken, *A History of the Commentary on Selected Writings of Samuel Johnson* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994) p. 46.
30. More, *Works* (T. Cadell, 1830) VIII. A 1880 edition of this work has recently (1995) been reprinted in paperback by Thoemmes Press, Bristol, with an introduction by Mary Waldron.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
33. Mowbray Morris, 'The Terrific Diction' *Macmillan's*, 54, (September 1886) pp. 361-68.
34. Leslie Stephen, *Samuel Johnson* (London: Macmillan, 1878) cited in Edward Tomarken, *A History of the Commentary on Selected Writings of Samuel Johnson* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994) p. 49.

## DR JOHNSON'S INFLUENCE ON JANE AUSTEN

Miss Claire Lamont — 16th March 1996

Chairman: Miss Stella Pigrome M.A.

Miss Lamont is a particularly loyal friend of the Society. She is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Literary and Linguistic Studies in the University of Newcastle. Her research interests are in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with particular reference to Johnson, Jane Austen, Scott, Boswell and Blake. She is, at the time of this journal going to press, working on her edition of Scott's *Chronicles of the Canongate*.

Jane Austen was eight years old when Samuel Johnson died at the age of seventy-five. The years between the death of Johnson in 1784 and Austen's entrance into adult consciousness probably effected a greater intellectual change than most such short spans of time, because those years saw the intellectual ferment associated with the French Revolution. Austen knew, what Johnson might only suspect, that in Europe a hierarchical society based on Christian values could be challenged with violence. One aspect of that hierarchical society was that intellectual achievement belonged to men. Dr Johnson was one of the most learned men in eighteenth-century England. Jane Austen was a woman novelist who once concluded a letter, 'I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible Vanity, the most unlearned, & uninformed Female who ever dared to be an authoress.'<sup>1</sup> Why should these two have anything in common? Yet Austen referred to Johnson as 'my dear Dr Johnson'.<sup>2</sup> So something needs to be explained.

Jane Austen's appreciation of Samuel Johnson has been well known since 1818. In that year, the year after Austen's death, her brother Henry oversaw the publication of her unpublished novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, and prefaced the volumes with a 'Biographical Notice of the Author'. In the course of it Henry wrote: 'Her reading was very extensive in history and belles lettres; and her memory extremely tenacious. Her favourite moral writers were Johnson in prose, and Cowper in verse.'<sup>3</sup> Comparison between Johnson and William Cowper seems to have been common among Austen and her family. Writing to her sister Cassandra, on the subject of a servant who had left Henry's service, Jane Austen made this comparison:

I am glad William's going is voluntary, & on no worse grounds. An inclination for the Country is a venial fault. - He has more of Cowper than of Johnson in him, fonder of Tame Hares & Blank verse than of the full tide of human Existence at Charing Cross.<sup>3</sup>

The view that emerges from such passages is that while both are moral writers Cowper is a poet and Johnson a prose writer, and that Cowper writes about the country whereas Johnson is associated with the city. Cowper came closer to Jane Austen's personal life than Johnson. In 1798 she told her sister, 'My father reads Cowper to us in the evening, to which I listen when I can.'<sup>4</sup> When new plants were to be bought for the garden in Southampton in 1807 Austen insisted on a syringa (philadelphus) because of a line in Cowper which referred to 'syringa, iv'ry pure.'<sup>5</sup> Johnson was less likely to impinge on her daily life - we do not hear of the family reading Johnson out loud - but he was probably more influential on her writing.

Which works by Johnson did Austen know? She knew the periodical essays, *The Rambler* (1750-52) and *The Idler* (1758-60),<sup>6</sup> and *Rasselas* (1759), and of course the *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). She appears to make no explicit reference to his poems. She knew Johnson also from Boswell. In a letter of 1798, when she was twenty-two, she wrote 'We have got Boswell's "Tour to the Hebrides", and are to have his "Life of Johnson" . . .'<sup>7</sup> She seems to have read Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) and Mrs Piozzi's *Letters to and from the late Samuel Johnson* (1788).<sup>8</sup> Austen's association of Johnson with 'the full tide of human Existence at Charing Cross' is an allusion to a passage in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*:

I [Boswell] talked of the cheerfulness of Fleet-street, owing to the constant quick succession of people which we perceive passing through it. JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, Fleet-street has a very animated appearance; but I think the full tide of human existence is at Charing-cross.'<sup>9</sup>

A more recondite reference to Johnson is in a letter to Cassandra of 1807 which Austen humorously concludes, 'There, I flatter myself I have constructed you a Smartish Letter, considering my want of Materials. But like my dear Dr Johnson I believe I have dealt more in Notions than Facts.'<sup>10</sup> That is a reference to a letter from Johnson to Boswell in 1774 concerning his *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* which had just gone to press. Johnson wrote, 'I suspect some mistakes; but as I deal, perhaps, more in notions than in facts, the matter is not great. . . .'<sup>11</sup> It is appropriate to add here that Mary Lascelles, a Vice-President of this Society who died shortly before this paper was given, used that phrase, *Notions and Facts*, as the title of a collection of critical essays published in 1971, alluding at once to both Johnson and Austen.

We have already collected some ideas about Austen's response to Johnson. She considered him as representing London and 'the full tide of human Existence'. She may have been indebted to him for intellectual distinctions like that between a fact and a notion. And there is all that is conveyed by what Mary Lascelles referred to as 'the exceptionally caressing tone of the references in her letters to "my dear Dr. Johnson".'<sup>12</sup>

Before turning to Austen's novels to see where we can trace Johnson in them I should say something about what critics have said on this topic. Ever since Henry Austen pointed the way it has been common for critics to comment on Austen's indebtedness to Johnson. This debt is usually claimed to be of two sorts, moral and stylistic. Austen shared with Johnson an orthodox Anglican Christianity. Austen, the daughter of a clergyman, would not need to go to Johnson for her religion, but might through him have access to the Christian humanist tradition of moral writing. That is writing, usually in prose, in which moral and religious issues are displayed in action in the context of the daily circumstances of life. Johnson, particularly in his periodical papers, was the great eighteenth-century exponent of this tradition, able to weigh equally the claims of the general principle at stake and the needs of the struggling human being whose difficulties had to be matched to that principle. Johnson was particularly respected for his pragmatism, and for his psychological penetration. Austen's novels may be in a much lighter tradition, that of romantic comedy, but the element of intellectual strength in them is that they judge human conduct by the ideals of the Christian moralist, even though the theme is allusively handled. As Johnson is in such matters a spokesman for a great tradition it is not easy to prove instances of a specific debt to him in particular, but critics as astute as A. C. Bradley and C. S. Lewis in an earlier generation and Claudia Johnson is ours have sensed that his influence is pervasively there.<sup>13</sup> These critics have seen traces of Johnson in Austen's use of abstract nouns. C. S. Lewis commented that in her novels

the great abstract nouns of the classical English moralists are unblushingly and uncompromisingly used: *good sense, courage, contentment, fortitude, 'some duty neglected, some failing indulged,' impropriety, indelicacy, generous candour, blameable distrust, just humiliation, vanity, folly, ignorance, reason.* These are the concepts by which Jane Austen grasps the world. In her we still breathe the air of the *Rambler* and *Idler*.<sup>14</sup>

By this criterion Austen is Johnsonian when she gives her novels abstract titles, inviting readers to discriminate between sense and sensibility, to see the ways in which pride and prejudice overlap and reinforce each other, and to consider the proper scope of persuasion. Observations on abstract nouns seem to be stylistic comments, except that the style reflects the moral and mental outlook that provokes it. The critic who has said most about Austen's stylistic debt to Johnson and his age is Mary Lascelles:

To us Jane Austen appears like one who inherits a prosperous and well-ordered estate - the heritage of a prose style in which neither generalization nor abstraction need signify vagueness, because there was close enough agreement as to the scope and significance of such terms.<sup>15</sup>

Once abstractions are accepted they can be used not only seriously, but also ironically and antithetically. And the delight in Austen is that sentences which sound Johnsonian, which are often the narrator's, come to the reader interspersed with dialogue in which each character has his or her own particularities of speech.

If these are respects in which Austen is influenced by Johnson there are others where she plainly is not. She described Johnson as representing 'the full tide of human Existence at Charing Cross.'<sup>15</sup> Alluding to her own work, however, she remarked that '3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on'.<sup>16</sup> London, if not specifically Charing Cross, features occasionally in Austen's novels and the references are usually pejorative. Characters go there to suffer: in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) Willoughby's heartless rejection of Marianne takes place in London; and in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) Lydia Bennet's elopement to Gretna leads her only to obscure lodgings in London. In *Mansfield Park* (1814) London is a wicked, materialistic place outside the setting of the novel, where the Crawfords have received their mischievous education and where Maria Bertram enacts her frustrated passion. It is not as if the immensity of London were unavailable as subject-matter for a woman novelist. Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, brought up in a country vicarage, plunges into the social life of London. The subtitle of *Evelina* is 'The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World' (1778). When Austen uses that formula the young lady is Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, and her world is found not in London but in Bath.

For Austen Johnson represents a larger, masculine, metropolitan, intellectual world. Although she alludes to it she is not part of that world herself. And the literary form she uses, that of the novel, is not a form that Johnson used. Although, therefore, we might not be surprised to find Johnson's influence in her work we would expect her to select carefully what she used. In what follows I shall try to trace what use Austen made of her inheritance from Johnson, concentrating on two novels. They are *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*, the two of Austen's novels in which there is the largest amount of explicit reference to Johnson.

I shall start with the typically Johnsonian topic of the danger of being too much influenced by one's imagination. Johnson's *Rasselas* and several of his *Rambler* papers are on this subject, of the individual who (to quote the beginning of *Rasselas*) listens 'with credulity to the whispers of fancy'.<sup>(7)</sup> It is one of Austen's themes too. She takes heroines whose usually balanced outlook on life is upset by the dominance of fancy, or of some favourite idea. Such heroines are Catherine Morland, Marianne Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse. The novels in which these heroines occur all have the theme of the uncontrolled imagination, and each heroine learns to temper her imagination by the end. This is a Johnsonian theme, and Austen shares with Johnson not only the diagnosis of this mental weakness but also the narrator's wish, after penitential suffering, to forgive and allow a new start. Of the four heroines who are dominated by their imagination two, Catherine Morland and Marianne Dashwood, are influenced by contemporary cultural fashions. Catherine Morland might have remained her sensible self if Isabella Thorpe had not introduced her to Gothic novels. Marianne Dashwood was of her time in espousing the doctrines of sensibility. Marianne's ideas are what I suspect Johnson would have dismissed as 'cant', but I daresay even he would have found them attractive in Marianne.

Austen seems to have found her bearings as a novelist by reference to current fashions in novel writing. *Northanger Abbey*, an early draft of which was the first of her novels to be finished, relies for its plot on the Gothic novel; *Sense and Sensibility*, the first of her novels to be published, is in a tradition of novels taking the theme of the dangers of excessive sensibility. The heroines of both these early works have their minds biased by reading and fashionable ideas. That is not true of Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse. The capacity to be swayed by one's own preconceptions is not attributed in their case to too much reading of popular fiction, but arises from causes in the politics of the family and the deeply-rooted egotism of the self. We have come to the mature Austen when she does not need popular fiction to launch her heroine's imaginative flights; sheer wilfulness will do it.

Austen's early theme, the danger of popular fictions, is a good area for an examination of the similarities between Johnson and Austen. Johnson as a critic had observed the newly-developing novel tradition. He diagnosed what we should call the 'realistic' novel developing out of the prose romances



of previous ages. He recognised a particular difficulty with the realistic novel: that if the novelist strove to reproduce contemporary life, the reader would naturally be tempted to read the novel as just that, a mirror of life. This could have harmful consequences for the inexperienced reader who did not have sufficient knowledge of life to judge the accuracy of the picture being presented. Johnson's *Rambler* no. 4 stands in the critical tradition, still with us, of expressing fear at the damage done to the young by popular fictions:

These books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life. They are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account. (III, 21)

Where would one find a better description of Catherine Morland when introduced to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*?

Johnson was a novel reader, and he was open to novels written by women. He encouraged Charlotte Lennox, author of *The Female Quixote* (1752), and he enjoyed Fanny Burney's *Evelina*. In the latter novel he enjoyed the character of the Branghtons, the vulgar cousins whose kinship was such a trial to the heroine. The domestic novel of the late eighteenth century replaced more lurid forms of oppression with the domestic oppression of vulgar relations. Austen is in that tradition, and surely Johnson would have enjoyed her embarrassing relations as much as he did Burney's. The vogue for the Gothic novel did not take off until the 1790s so Johnson was not called upon to respond to Ann Radcliffe, but his *Rambler* paper has already predicted what damage her novels might do to the mind of young Catherine Morland, on her first visit to Bath with that necessary accessory to a young lady's entrance into the world, an inadequate chaperone.

'No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine.' That is the first sentence of *Northanger Abbey*. The narrator is in mocking conspiracy with the reader over what constitutes a heroine, a question of which the young Catherine is entirely ignorant. The concept of heroic female behaviour is derived from romantic fiction and conduct books, and the infant Catherine fails the qualification on every count. She is not much better qualified when as a young lady of seventeen she goes to Bath. It is in continuation of that vein of humour that the narrator writes the following after Catherine returns from a visit to the Lower Rooms where she had danced with Henry Tilney:

Whether she thought of him so much, while she drank her warm wine and water, and prepared herself for bed, as to dream of him when there, cannot be ascertained; but I hope it was no more than in a slight slumber, or a morning doze at most; for if it be true, as a celebrated writer has maintained, that no young lady can be justified in falling in love before the gentleman's love is declared, it must be very improper that a young lady should dream of a gentleman before the gentleman is first known to have dreamt of her. (29-30)

That is an allusion to *Rambler* no. 97 which, in the course of a lament on the decline of female modesty and reticence, mentions the impropriety of a woman's falling in love with a man before he is in love with her. (IV, 156) *Rambler* 97 takes the form of a letter written to the Rambler, and the 'celebrated writer' was not Johnson himself but the novelist Samuel Richardson, as Austen knew. Austen is probably mocking the prescription, as much as her heroine, by extending its prohibition from falling in love to so much as dreaming of a gentleman.

An explicit reference to Johnson occurs a little later in the novel when Catherine is walking with Henry Tilney and his sister Eleanor. The conversation turns to books and Catherine says, "'do not you think Udolpho the nicest book in the world?'" (107) Henry Tilney replies

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

Eleanor Tilney reproves her brother for his impertinence and explains to the puzzled Catherine

"The word "nicest," as you used it, did not suit him; and you had better change it as soon as you can, or we shall be overpowered with Johnson and Blair all the rest of the way." (108)

This is a reference to Johnson as compiler of the *Dictionary of the English Language*; it offers no illumination to Catherine who innocently replies

"I am sure . . . I did not mean to say anything wrong; but it is a nice book, and why should not I call it so?"

Henry goes on to explain the history of the word 'nice', in a small episode which presents both Henry Tilney and Johnson as censors to Catherine. She, although earnestly wishing to oblige, does not understand.

The most Johnsonian theme in the novel — the danger of seeing the world through seductive fictions — establishes itself without direct reference to Johnson. After Catherine has been enthralled by the Gothic novel she is invited to stay with the Tilneys at Northanger Abbey. Northanger Abbey is a medieval abbey now modernised to make a gentleman's residence. Catherine's adventures in the house are based on her Gothic expectations. Her imagination is aroused by a heavy chest in her bedroom; she expects a black cabinet to contain an ancient manuscript in which are preserved 'some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun.' (141) The fact that these pieces of Gothic furniture turn out to contain homely objects, a folded counterpane and a laundry list, does not chasten her imagination for long and her next fantasy is that Henry's father, General Tilney, must have oppressed his wife. He must have either kept her a prisoner or murdered her, and the evidence of the awful crime would remain in her bedroom. Catherine makes a lonely journey to see Mrs Tilney's bedroom which she finds to be a pleasant modern room. As she leaves she bumps into Henry Tilney. With that honesty which is such an attractive feature of Catherine she betrays what her thoughts had been. His reproof brings an end to her Gothic fantasies:

Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. . . . Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting? (197-8)

That sounds like Henry the Johnsonian censor, reproving the foolish girl who had consulted not her own understanding or her own observation, but the clichés of the Gothic novel. (He takes no responsibility for having fed her fantasies on the journey to Northanger.) If this is the ending, the freeing of the heroine from the consequences of her uncontrolled imagination, it may be a Johnsonian conclusion, but it is odd that it takes place in chapter 24, when the novel has thirty chapters. That thought prepares the reader for the possibility that Austen might not be content with a Johnsonian conclusion. As many recent critics have pointed out, Henry's reproof of the heroine constitutes a false conclusion to the novel. Shortly afterwards General Tilney dismisses Catherine from the house, in an act of summary will appropriate to a Gothic villain. Modern readers, especially feminist readers, are as critical of Henry's reproof as earlier readers were of Catherine's Gothic follies. For them General Tilney is a Gothic villain, as such people manifest themselves 'in the midland counties of England' (200), and Henry Tilney is as deceived as Catherine was if he thinks that the fact that we are English and Christian is an adequate guarantee against domestic tyranny. For such readers of the novel Catherine's Gothic imaginings are as much a response to the atmosphere in Northanger Abbey as to her reading, and her being treated as a Gothic victim frees Henry from the domination of his father — he disobeys General Tilney in searching her out in her parents' home.

So what about Johnsonian influence in *Northanger Abbey*? Austen seems to be playing games with eighteenth-century ideas about female propriety, about language, and about the danger of allowing the imagination to be swayed by fiction. One might notice that the happy ending of the novel contradicts the prescription in *Rambler* 97, that a woman should not fall in love with a man before he has declared his love for her. This is the account of the declaration of love between Henry Tilney and Catherine:

She was assured of his affection; and that heart in return was solicited, which, perhaps, they pretty equally knew was already entirely his own; for, though Henry was now sincerely attached to her . . . I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own.(243)

Similarly Catherine cannot live up to eighteenth-century linguistic prescription: she is of her own age in using the word 'nice' as a term of general commendation. These examples seem to imply that some eighteenth-century rules of conduct are simply not going to be observed by ordinarily unheroic young women of Austen's generation. But what about the important theme of the control of the imagination? In *Northanger Abbey* just when Catherine, and probably the reader, have renounced Gothic fantasies a plot twist requires that the issue be reconsidered. The end of the novel complicates the apparent Johnsonian lesson. For Austen it appears that the imagination has a wisdom of its own, even if it finds expression only in the exaggerated language of the Gothic. Catherine is correct in detecting something oppressive in the atmosphere of the Abbey. And as to novels, *Northanger Abbey* is remarkable for containing its narrator's defence of them as works 'in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, [and] the happiest delineations of its varieties . . . are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.'(38) That is fighting stuff, and one cannot imagine it being written by Samuel Johnson.

I should now like to turn to the Austen novel which makes the most explicit reference to Johnson. It is *Mansfield Park*. That will not surprise, as it is usually regarded as the most grave and morally preoccupied of the novels. It is unlike *Northanger Abbey* in that it does not take a heroine who needs to be cured of too great a reliance on her own mental fantasies. The young Fanny Price lacks the confidence to trust to any self-nourished idea. Fanny Price is the most Johnsonian of Austen's heroines in that she is the only one who is described as reading Johnson, and the only one who herself uses Johnsonian language.

Fanny is unusual among Austen heroines in the seriousness of her reading. More than that she is a book collector 'from the first hour of her commanding a shilling'.(151) While *Lovers' Vows* is in rehearsal she retires to her East Room where Edmund follows her with the news that he had yielded to persuasion to join the actors. As he leaves Edmund comments

You in the meanwhile will be taking a trip into China, I suppose. How does Lord Macartney go on? — (opening a volume on the table and then taking up some others.) And here are Crabbe's Tales, and the Idler, at hand to relieve you, if you tire of your great book.(156)

The 'great book' is the journal of Earl Macartney's *Embassy to China* first published in 1807. Fanny's intellectual voyage to China is in marked contrast to the mental world of *Lovers' Vows* which has gripped the rest of the household. We notice that Johnson's *Idler* papers were a relaxation from that voyage. Fanny Price's reading contrasts with the literary attainments of Catherine Morland, who does 'not dislike' travels, but greatly prefers novels.(108) As for periodical essays, at the end of *Northanger Abbey* Mrs Morland thinks that her daughter's discontent with home might be cured by reading an essay in Henry Mackenzie's series called *The Mirror*.(241) Luckily for Catherine the hero reappears before she is compelled to take this medicine.

The imprint of Fanny Price's reading of *The Idler* is present in *Mansfield Park*. After the marriage of Maria Bertram Fanny and Mary Crawford are thrown into an ill-matched friendship. Sitting together in a recently-grown shrubbery Fanny reflects what it had been like three years before and then remarks

If any one faculty of our nature may be called *more* wonderful than the rest, I do think it is memory. There seems something more speakingly incomprehensible in the powers, the failures, the inequalities of memory, than in any other of our intelligences.(208-9)

Among the *Idler* papers there are three on the subject of memory, nos. 44, 72 and 74. The topic left Mary Crawford 'untouched and inattentive'. When Mary is about to leave Mansfield she says to Fanny

"Good, gentle Fanny! when I think of this being the last time of seeing you . . . I feel it quite impossible to do any thing but love you." (359)  
The narrator continues

Fanny was affected. She had not foreseen anything of this, and her feelings could seldom withstand the melancholy influence of the word "last."  
The final essay in Johnson's *Idler* series (no. 103) is a meditation on the sadness associated with the last of anything: 'There are few things not purely evil, of which we can say, without some emotion of uneasiness, "this is the last".' (314) It is interesting to note in these allusions that instances where Fanny Price appears the most romantic of Austen's heroines in her apprehension of feeling are places where she is particularly indebted to Johnson. On another occasion Fanny borrows from Johnson an antithetical manner of expression which is not native to her. When she is sent back to her Portsmouth home by Sir Thomas Bertram, keen that she should learn to value the proposal of marriage she had received from the wealthy Henry Crawford, she reflects on the poverty and disorder of her parents' house compared with Mansfield Park. The chapter ends thus:

In a review of the two houses, as they appeared to her before the end of a week, Fanny was tempted to apply to them Dr. Johnson's celebrated judgment as to matrimony and celibacy, and say, that though Mansfield Park might have some pains, Portsmouth could have no pleasures. (392)  
Fanny is alluding to Nekayah's remark in *Rasselas* arising from her study of domestic life, 'Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures.' (99) One cannot escape the feeling, however, that the Johnsonian voice in Fanny Price has not helped her with the modern reader. Modern readers may find that reflections of Johnson's sort do not fit with their picture of a socially-oppressed young woman, as Mary Crawford reveals that they did not interest one who enjoyed social advantage.

Johnson is a pervasive influence on Austen's work. He is not presented as an intimidating figure, except perhaps to Catherine Morland. On most occasions when Austen alludes to him it is for his wise discriminations about human situations and the movements of the mind. The fact of there being a two generation gap between them did not matter, not because Austen is old-fashioned, but because the psychological insights she appreciated in Johnson have value on a time-scale longer than that between the mid-eighteenth century and the early nineteenth. Where she finds his views local to his time and inappropriate to hers, however, she does not hesitate to revise them.

Austen's selective use of Johnsonian themes may be illustrated again from *Mansfield Park*. We remember *Mansfield Park* as a novel in which the young Fanny Price, from a poor family, is taken at the age of ten into the home of a wealthy aunt and uncle. The adoption of children from poor families by wealthy relations was probably commoner then than now. Jane Austen's brother Edward was adopted by a rich, childless aunt and uncle to whom he became heir. That arrangement seems to have been happy and Austen made frequent visits to the grand house at Godmersham which was her brother's home. There is little similarity there with the situation of Fanny Price. There is some similarity, however, between Fanny Price's situation and that of a character in Johnson's *Rambler*.

*Rambler* 170 takes the form of a letter written by a woman to the Rambler, and it recounts a childhood story similar to that of Fanny Price:

I am of a good family, but my father was burthened with more children than he could decently support. A wealthy relation, as he travelled from London to his country seat, condescending to make him a visit, was touched with compassion of his narrow fortune, and resolved to ease him of part of his charge by taking the care of a child upon himself. Distress on one side and ambition on the other, were too powerful for parental fondness, and the little family passed in review before him, that he might make his choice. I was then ten years old, and without knowing for what purpose, I was called to my great cousin, endeavoured to recommend myself by my best courtesy, sung him my prettiest song, told the last story that I had read, and so much



endeared myself by my innocence that he declared his resolution to adopt me, and to educate me with his own daughters. (V, 135-6)

The child comes into the wealthy household; as she grows up the family ensures that she is not treated in a way to imply equality with the daughters of the house, and in her dependent state all she could offer to justify her existence there was 'little services and active officiousness'. (137)

Rambler 170 is usually headed 'The history of Misella debauched by her relation'. In it and the following paper Johnson pursues the story of this child, who signs herself Misella, as she is seduced by the wealthy relation who had taken her into his home, and is then abandoned and finishes up destitute on the streets. The difference between this story and *Mansfield Park*, despite the similarity of their openings, is a measure of the difference between Austen and Johnson. The two writers share a lot in mental and moral outlook, but they do not share a generation, nor the genre in which they write.

Johnson's tale is a fiction, but it is generalised. Misella is a representative character, not an individual. She is a warning, a warning about what we should now call sexual abuse within the family, and about the destitution to which a woman could be driven by a society that put a hypocritical value on 'reputation'. Rambler 171 exposes the personal tragedies that lie behind street prostitution. *Mansfield Park* starts with a similar situation, a ten-year-old girl being brought into the house of rich relations, but proceeds quite differently. Fanny Price makes the same nervous start as Misella, but finishes up as the representative of the values *Mansfield Park* sought to uphold. There are many reasons why the two stories differ so much. The periodical essay is making a moral and social point, which is not the procedure of fiction like that of Austen. Also the plot element of seduction in Misella's story is one that Austen eschews.

That is not just the delicacy of the lady novelist. In the early chapters of *Northanger Abbey* when the narrator is measuring the young Catherine against the reader's expectations of a heroine we find this passage about her last days with her mother before she sets off for Bath:

Cautions against the violence of such noblemen and baronets as delight in forcing young ladies away to some remote farm-house, must, at such a moment, relieve the fulness of her [Mrs Morland's] heart. Who would not think so? But Mrs. Morland knew so little of lords and baronets, that she entertained no notion of their general mischievousness, and was wholly unsuspecting of danger to her daughter from their machinations. Her cautions were confined to the following points, "I beg, Catherine, you will always wrap yourself up very warm about the throat, when you come from the Rooms at night . . ." (18)

Austen's plots take place in the bathos of everyday life, and seducers are therefore scarcer than in the works of a professed moralist. Her heroine cannot be so totally a victim; she must contribute by her limitations to her own fate. There is only one seducer in Austen's published novels: in a rather awkward plot development in *Sense and Sensibility* Willoughby turns out to have seduced and abandoned the young daughter of Colonel Brandon's beloved Eliza. The theme might be appropriate for Johnson, but is unsuitable as a plot motif for Austen: it is tragic and Austen, even in the dark passages in *Mansfield Park*, writes within the genre of comedy; and it is too lurid a theme for Austen's everyday world. There is probably another reason, and it relates to Johnson's and Austen's view of women.

Johnson's presentation of Misella implies a view of women in which their social existence is determined by their sexual reputation. Although Misella's experiences are not her fault her life is nonetheless ruined. Johnson condemned the wickedness done to her and its social consequences, but he seems to have accepted the view that her sexual reputation was a woman's most valuable attribute. Boswell records this conversation on the subject:

I asked him [Johnson] if it was not hard that one deviation from chastity should so absolutely ruin a young woman. JOHNSON. 'Why no, Sir; it is the great principle which she is taught. When she has given up that principle, she has given up every notion of female honour and virtue, which are all included in chastity.'<sup>17</sup>

This severe limitation as to what was valuable in a woman was challenged by revolutionary feminist writers of the next generation, in particular Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). By natural affinity one would not expect Austen to align with Wollstonecraft, against Johnson, but on this question she probably did. More is required of Austen's heroines than chastity. They are not only allowed mental and moral development, they are criticised if they do not embark on that journey.

That contrast between Johnson and Austen, however, does not reckon with the full range of Johnson's writing. He may have claimed in conversation that the chief thing a woman in eighteenth-century England had to do was protect her reputation, but when he came the nearest he ever came to writing a novel, in *Rasselas*, he created a woman of an entirely different sort. In that tale, with an oriental setting, he created in Nekayah a woman whose thirst for experience was not much less than her brother's, and who when asked to choose her future life proposed this: 'She desired first to learn all sciences, and then purposed to found a college of learned women, in which she would preside...' (175). The narrator tempers this optimism with the comment, 'Of these wishes that they had formed they well knew that none could be obtained.' Austen's heroines stick to wishes that can with luck be obtained; but none of them nurses such an ambition as to found a college of learned women.

Austen recognised in Johnson philosophical ideas arising out of common life suited to her meditations on her world. There were, however, respects in which she could not follow him, prevented by her temperament, her generation and the genre in which she wrote. What is remarkable is her apparent ease with what she took and what she did not. Johnson is like a literary grandfather to Austen: he is of an earlier age and a masculine world, but she seems to have relished ideas and expressions which she inherited from him. That may be what she meant when she referred to him as her 'dear Dr. Johnson'.

#### Notes

1. 11 December, 1815. *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. by Deirdre Le Faye, (Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 306. Quotations from Johnson's works are taken from the following volumes of the Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Vol. II, *The Idler and the Adventurer*, ed. by W. J. Bate, John M. Bullitt and L. F. Powell, (Yale University Press, 1963), Vols. III-V, *The Rambler*, ed. by W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, (1969) and Vol. XVI, *Rasselas and Other Tales*, ed. by Gwin J. Kolb, (1990). Quotations from Austen's novels are taken from *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. by R. W. Chapman, 5 vols, (Oxford University Press, 1923). Page references to these editions are in brackets after the quotations.
2. 8-9 February, 1807. *Letters*, p. 121.
3. 3 November, 1813. *Letters*, p. 250.
4. 18-19 December, 1798. *Letters*, p. 27.
5. 8-9 February, 1807. *Letters*, 119, p. 386.
6. Two of Austen's brothers while at Oxford launched a paper with the Johnsonian title *The Loiterer* to which it is thought that she contributed a paper. (Sir Zachary Cope, 'Who was Sophia Sentiment? Was she Jane Austen?', *Book Collector*, XV, (1966), 143-151; Park Honan, *Jane Austen: Her Life*, (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1987), pp. 60-61.)
7. 25 November, 1798. *Letters*, p. 22.
8. *The Works of Jane Austen*, ed. by R. W. Chapman, Vol. VI, *Minor Works*, (Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 459 and *Letters*, pp. 44, 369.
9. *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. by G. B. Hill and L. F. Powell, 6 vols, (Clarendon Press, 1934-50), II, p. 337.
10. 8-9 February, 1807. *Letters*, p. 121.
11. *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, II, p. 279.
12. Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art*, (Clarendon Press, 1939), p. 43.
13. A. C. Bradley, 'Jane Austen', *Essay and Studies*, II, (1911), 7-36; C. S. Lewis, 'A Note on Jane Austen', *Essays in Criticism*, IV, (1954), 359-71; Claudia L. Johnson, 'The "Operations of Time, and the Changes

of the Human Mind": Jane Austen and Dr. Johnson Again', *Modern Language Quarterly*, XXXIV, (1983), 23-38.

14. C. S. Lewis, 'A Note on Jane Austen' (1954) reprinted in *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Ian Watt, (Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 25-34(28).

15. *Jane Austen and Her Art*, p. 107.

16. 9-18 September, 1814. *Letters*, p. 275.

17. *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, II, p. 56.

# NUMERACY AND DR JOHNSON

Mr John Craig — 20th April 1996

Chairman: Anthea Hopkins MA

Mr Craig is a member of our Society and also of The Royal Statistical Society.

Thank you for that kind invitation and introduction. I must start by saying I am not a Johnson expert although I have read quite a lot. So I am hoping that what I say will stimulate some of you to add to what I have to say. I shall be happy if this session becomes more of a workshop than a lecture!

How I got into this topic was that I started to read the *Life*. I didn't get far, I was startled once, twice with remarks which you find in today's textbooks. So I went back to the beginning and made notes. This talk is the eventual outcome; I found enough material for another on economics!

For many numeracy is a frightening word and I suppose I ought to start by defining it. But, like the response of the person asked to define an elephant, my approach is 'hard to define though I know it when I see it'. Numeracy is more than arithmetical dexterity—just as literacy is more than spelling or vocabulary. It has to do with elegance and style rather than brute force.

So I start from the position that true numeracy is an art; but it is difficult to give simple yet worthwhile examples because the statistical techniques and subject matter are a barrier to many. This is where Dr Johnson comes in because he was numerate in having the desire and ability to use data effectively and concisely. Moreover, his examples are at such a simple level that it is almost as if we can get back to a statistical Garden of Eden—before the word statistics was even part of the language—and be shown the simple basic principles. We can start with a conversation Boswell recorded on the subject of hospitality. This illustrates the essence of numerate thinking:

Boswell—Sir Alexander Dick tells me, he remembers having a thousand people in a year to dine at his house . . .

Johnson—That, Sir, is about three a day.

Boswell—How your statement lessens the idea.

Johnson—That, Sir, is the good of counting. It brings everything to a certainty, which before floated in the mind indefinitely. (Boswell, *Life*, II, p. 456)

I have just mentioned that Johnson was in the statistician's Garden of Eden. Well the fall soon came; when we get to Trollope we have Lady Glencora saying:

You would always have had a pocket-book ready to write down the figures, . . . As for me I can't do it. If I see a hungry woman, I can give her my money; or if she be a sick woman I can nurse her; . . . but I cannot take up poverty and crime in the lump. I never believe it all. My mind is not big enough. (*Can You Forgive Her*, Penguin p. 767)

At least this is neutral. Unlike, say, Dickens and his campaign, in *Hard Times*, against those who would reduce everything to figures. Then we get the 'lies . . . ' quote. To which the proper response is 'Figures can't lie but liars can figure'.

Anyway to return Johnson's enthusiasm for counting. His contrast between certainty and indefiniteness is remarkably like Lord Kelvin's dictum that 'when we can measure something we know something about it; when we cannot measure it our knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind'. That this was a strong principle with Johnson is confirmed by this remark: 'Of Fort George I shall not attempt any account. I cannot delineate it scientifically and a loose and popular description is of use only when the imagination is to be amused.' (Johnson, p. 23) This desire for quantification is an aspect of Dr Johnson's character not often stressed. It is most obvious in Johnson's account of his *Journey to this Western Islands of Scotland*; this is not surprising for the account is, among other things, a one-man social survey, even if 200 years ago the levels of technology and administration were such that the interviews were spaced out over time, unstructured, and all carried out by one person. Indeed this understates what he did. As Professor Pat Rogers has put it, he achieved results 'which today would require the combined services of a sociologist, an economist, an anthropologist, a cultural historian and a folklorist.' (*18th Century Britain: Cambridge Cultural History*, ed. by Boris Ford, 1992, p. 192)

In a survey or a census, or indeed any kind of scientific investigation, there are usually problems in collecting data. This seems a trivial stage of an enquiry to the uninitiated—what could be easier than to ask a few questions or take a few measurements? There are stories of apocryphal politicians who considered it enough to ask the views of those in their favourite pub. High as Dr Johnson's opinion was of taverns, visiting a pub is no way to canvas public opinion, and there would have been no need to persuade him of the value of properly conducted censuses and surveys. 'The true state of every nation is the state of common life . . . . The great mass of nations is neither rich nor gay: they . . . are found in the streets, and the villages, in the shops and farms; and from them collectively considered must the measure of general prosperity be taken' (Johnson, p. 20). Nor did he swing to the other extreme and become a mindless fact and opinion collector taking whatever he was told as the truth. He was well aware of the importance of checking the information.

In discussing these exceptions from the course of nature, the first question is, whether the fact be justly stated. Accuracy of narration is not very common and there are few so rigidly philosophical, as not to represent as perpetual, what is only frequent, or as constant, what is really casual. (Johnson, pp. 26-7)

Boswell himself was ready to acknowledge Dr Johnson's exceptional qualities as an observer. He wrote: 'My easiness, to give credit to what I heard in the course of our tour was too great. Dr Johnson's peculiar accuracy of investigation detected much traditional fiction, and many gross mistakes . . . of this there were innumerable instances' (*Journal*, p. 387).

The danger of relying on memory is something that is taught to all social and natural scientists. Dr Johnson was also fully aware of this:

An observer deeply impressed by any remarkable spectacle, does not suppose, that the traces will soon vanish from his mind, and having commonly no great convenience for writing, defers the description to a time of more leisure, and better accommodation. He who has not made the experiment, or who is not accustomed to require rigorous accuracy from himself, will scarcely believe how much a few hours take from certainty of knowledge, and distinctness of imagery. (Johnson, p. 133)

These examples show that the basic principles of data collection were familiar to Dr Johnson. Turning now to using the data, the circumstances in which the data were collected must never be forgotten. Again this is something he seems to have realized intuitively. In the next example, some observations on the population of the island of Coll, Johnson is careful to tell us the source of the information before making an important reservation and his own evaluation of the quality of the data. 'The minister told us, that a few years ago the inhabitants were 800, between the ages of



seven and of seventy. Round numbers are seldom exact. But in this case the authority is good, and the error likely to be little' (Johnson, p. 114). Or again traveling on a rainy day towards Inverary he remarked on the quality of his data: 'The streams . . . were so frequent that after a while I began to count them; and in 10 miles, reckoned 55, probably missing some, and having let some pass before they forced themselves on my notice.' (Johnson, p. 144) And he was willing to use what today would be called a social indicator: 'Where the religion of a country enforces consecrated buildings, the number of those buildings may be supposed to afford some indication, however uncertain, of the populousness of the place' (Johnson, p. 59); and then he meticulously goes on to note when the indicator may be useless: 'but where, by a change of manners a nation is contented to live without them, their decay implies no diminution of inhabitants'. (Johnson, p. 59)

Nor does Johnson neglect the importance of defining exactly what he is measuring. Here, when estimating the heights of mountains he first describes alternative methods, then makes his choice: 'The height of mountains philosophically considered is properly computed from the surface of the next sea; but as it affects the eye or imagination of the passenger, as it makes either a spectacle or an obstruction, it must be reckoned from the place where the rise begins to make a considerable angle with the plain. In extensive continents the land may, by gradual elevation, attain great height, without any other appearance than that of a plain gently inclined, and if a hill placed upon such raised ground be described, as having its altitude equal to the whole space above the sea, the representation will be fallacious. (Johnson, p. 34)

Note too that admissions of personal limitations, which could easily have been glossed over, are often pointed out. After his visit to what he calls 'two convents' on Iona he wrote:

I brought away rude measurements of the buildings, such as I cannot much trust myself, inaccurately taken, and obscurely noted, Mr. Pennant's delineations, which are doubtless exact, have made my unskilful description less necessary. (*Journey*, p. 135)

As this quotation indicates, when appropriate Dr Johnson did his own measuring and so was fully aware of the accuracy, and inaccuracy, of his data. Nor was he afraid of approximations—another sign of numeracy.

Our measures were not critically exact, having been made with a walking pole, such as it is convenient to carry in these rocky countries; of which I guessed the length by standing against it. In this there could be no great error, nor do I much doubt but the Highlander, whom we employed, reported the number right. More nicety however is better, and no man should travel unprovided with instruments for taking heights and distances. (Johnson, p. 133)

Johnson was also well aware of the differences between relative and absolute comparisons. Thus in discussing the population of the Western Isles we find: 'The people collectively considered are not few, though their numbers are small in proportion to the space which they occupy.' (Johnson, p. 142) Or again: 'I had opportunities of observing . . . that there are many beggars in Scotland. In Edinburgh the proportion is, I think not less than in London, and in smaller places it is far greater than in English towns of the same extent.' (Johnson, p. 11) This comparison of like with like is quite subtle and a key step in many statistical methods. When necessary Dr Johnson made his own more detailed calculations. Thus estimating Rassay's population provided little problem:

The number of this little community has never been counted by its ruler, nor have I obtained any positive account, consistent with the result of political computation. Not many years ago, the late Laird led out 100 men upon a military expedition. The sixth part of a people is supposed capable of bearing arms: Rassay had therefore 600 inhabitants. But because it is not likely, that every man able to serve in the field would follow the summons, or that the chief would leave his lands totally defenseless, or take away all the hands qualified for labour, let it be supposed, that half as many might be permitted to stay at home. The whole number will then be 900, or nine to a square mile. (Johnson, pp. 56-7)

He used the same method for the island of Coll. Having established its population at about 1000 persons he checked plausibility of his estimate, found it wanting, and did something to improve the estimate:

... if the dimensions of the country have been accurately related, every mile maintains more than 25. This proportion of habitation is greater than the appearance of the country seems to admit, for wherever the eye wanders, it seems much waste and little cultivation. I am more inclined to extend the land, of which no measure has ever been taken, than to diminish the people, who have been really numbered. Let it be supposed, that a computed mile contains a mile and a half, as was commonly found true in the mensuration of the English road, and we shall then allot nearly 12 to a mile, which agrees much better with ocular observation. (Johnson, p. 114)

A completely different approach was adopted when different sources of data were available: 'Mr. Lowe mentioned the great number of new buildings of late in London, yet Dr Johnson had observed, that the number of inhabitants was not increased'. Johnson: 'Why, Sir, the bills of mortality prove that no more people die now than formerly, so it is plain no more live. The register of births proves nothing, for not one-tenth of the people of London are born there' (Boswell, *Life*, II, p. 461) We might argue that there are assumptions here about death rates and age structures but the basic idea is sound. Another good example of his use of numbers is the conversation when Dr Adams found him busy at his dictionary:

ADAMS: But Sir, how can you do this in three years?

JOHNSON: Sir, I have no doubt I can do it in three years.

ADAMS: But the French Academy, which consists of forty members, took forty years to compile their Dictionary.

JOHNSON: Sir, thus it is. This is the proportion. As three is to sixteen hundred so is the proportion of an Englishman to a Frenchman.

What I like about this is the way Johnson nonchalantly works in terms of man-years.

During his Journey Johnson had no need for involved arithmetical calculations, but we know that he was capable of doing these. For example, a friend had made many ingenious advances towards a discovery of longitude; Johnson taught himself the principles and experiments involved and wrote a pamphlet describing the method. And Boswell also tells us that 'he delighted to exercise his mind on the science of numbers' (Boswell, *Life*, II 150) Also, we know he had in his library the geometric and trigonometric books of William Payne. Indeed Johnson wrote the dedications for these.

Recalling the moral of the dog that did not bark in the Sherlock Holmes story Dr Johnson also gets good marks for not being 'over-ambitious' in his calculations. Thus though interested in the depopulation of the Highlands he does not try to quantify it. But he does state, examine, and reject a hypothesis in the best textbook style:

There are some, however, who think this emigration has raised terror disproportionate to its real evil, and that is only a new mode of doing what was always done. The Highlands, they say, never maintained their natural inhabitants; but the people, when they found themselves too numerous, instead of extending cultivation, provided for themselves by a more compendious method, and sought better fortune in other countries. They did not indeed go away in collective bodies, but withdrew invisibly a few at a time; but the whole number of fugitives was not less, and the difference between other times and this, is only the same as between evaporation and effusion. This is plausible, but I am afraid it is not true. Those who went before, if they were not sensibly missed, as the argument supposes, must have gone either in less number, or in a manner less detrimental, than at present, because formerly there was no complaint. (Johnson, p. 119)

Indeed population was a topic in which Dr Johnson took a particular interest. He was not easily taken in by misleading economic analogies:

E. 'We hear prodigious complaints at present of emigration. I am convinced that emigration makes a country more populous'. Johnson: 'That sounds very much like a paradox'. E. 'Exportation of men, like exportation of all other commodities, makes more be produced'. Johnson: 'But there would be more people were there not emigration, provided there were food for more'. E. 'No; leave a few breeders, and you'll have more people than if there were no emigration'. Johnson: 'Nay, Sir, it is plain there will be more people, if there are more breeders. Thirty cows in good pasture will produce more calves than 10 cows, provided they have good bulls'. (Boswell, *Life*, II, p. 168)

And he had no difficulty in distinguishing between the dependent and the independent variable:

C. 'It is remarkable that the most unhealthy countries, where there are the most destructive diseases, such as Egypt and Bengal, are the most populous'. Johnson: 'Countries which are the most populous have the most destructive diseases. That is the true state of the proposition'. C. 'Holland is very unhealthy, yet it is exceedingly populous'. Johnson: 'I know not that Holland is unhealthy. But its populousness is owing to an influx of people from all other countries. Disease cannot be the cause of populousness, for it not only carries off a great proportion of the people; but those who are left are weakened, and unfit for the purposes of increase'. (Boswell, *Life*, II, p. 169)

The effects of disease and poverty would be very familiar to Johnson, but he still followed his principle of quantification:

We talked of the state of the poor in London. Johnson: 'Saunders Welch, the Justice, who was once High Constable of Holborn, and had the best opportunities of knowing the state of the poor, told me that I underrated the number, when I computed that 20 a week, that is, above a thousand a year, died of hunger; not absolutely of immediate hunger, but of the wasting and other diseases which are the consequences of hunger. This happens only in so large a place as London, where people are not known'. (Boswell, *Life*, II, p. 284)

On this theme of poverty, and the long-term effect of lack of food, Adam Smith was known to Dr Johnson, so perhaps Smith's statement that 'every species of animal naturally multiplies in proportion to the means of their subsistence, and no species can ever multiply beyond it' was familiar to Johnson when he wrote: 'I heard of very little cows in Barra, and very little horses in Rum, where perhaps no care is taken to prevent that diminution of size, which must always happen, where the greater and the less copulate promiscuously, and the young animal is restrained from growth by penury of sustenance'. (Johnson, p. 74) Even if this was not a wholly original thought, it does show Johnson was alert enough to recognize the principle in operation.

So much for the use of statistics. Dr Johnson also shows an aptitude for abstract concepts. For example the notion of what, in today's jargon would be 'a critical minimum population density in a predator-prey study' is evident in a comment on travelling in Scotland: 'The night and the day are equally solitary and equally safe, for where there are so few travellers, why should there be robbers.' (Johnson, p. 12) And he was aware that the range of values within a distribution depends on the sample size or, as he put it: 'The inhabitants of Skye, and of the other islands, which I have seen, are commonly of the middle stature, with fewer among them very tall or very short, than are seen in England, or perhaps, as their numbers are small, the chances of any deviation from the common measure are necessarily few.' (Johnson, p. 75) So perhaps his remark about the gentlemen who had been very unhappy in marriage and remarried immediately after his wife died 'the triumph of hope over experience' should be taken, not only as a discerning and witty comment on human nature, but also as showing an awareness of the unreliability of a sample of one.

The idea of chance and the calculation of odds seems to have been very familiar to Johnson, and he took some pleasure in surprising his less numerate friends with the results:

Talking of shaving the other night, Dr Johnson said 'Sir, of a thousand shavers, two do not shave so much alike as not to be distinguished'. I thought this not possible, till he specified so many of the varieties in shaving; holding the razor more or less perpendicular;—drawing long or short strokes;—beginning at the upper part of the face, or the under, at the right or the left side' (Boswell, *Life*, II, p. 120)

And again;

Dr Beattie observed, as something remarkable which had happened to him, that he had chanced to see both No 1 and No 1000, of the hackney-coaches, the first and the last; 'Why, Sir (said Johnson), there is an equal chance for one's seeing those two numbers as any other two'. He was clearly right; yet the seeing of the two extremes, each of which is in some degree more conspicuous than the rest, could not but strike one in a stronger manner than the sight of any other two numbers. (Boswell, II, p. 546)

Wouldn't he have had fun with lottery numbers.

As well as such arithmetical playfulness Johnson knew probabilities were the basis for proper decision taking :

Talking of a court-martial that was sitting upon a very momentous public occasion, he expressed much doubt of an enlightened decision; and said, that perhaps there was not a member of it, who in the whole course of his life, had ever spent an hour by himself in balancing probabilities. (Boswell, *Life*, II, p. 325)

We sometimes find Dr Johnson applying probability techniques:

Yet there is, probably, a great deal of learning in France, because they have such a number of religious establishments; so many men who have nothing else to do but study. I do not know this; but I take it upon the common principles of chance. Where there are many shooters, some will hit. (Boswell, *Life*, II, p. 183)

And the idea of a significance test is implicit in:

I introduced the subject of second sight, and other mysterious manifestations; the fulfillment of which, I suggested, might happen by chance. Johnson: 'Yes, Sir, but they have happened so often, that mankind have agreed to think them not fortuitous.' (Boswell, *Life*, I, p. 316)

It is tempting to think that he had an intuitive feel for probability calculations for in discussing people with second sight, which we might regard as an even more unusual occurrence than he did, Johnson wrote; 'The proportion in these countries of the poor to the rich is such, that if we suppose the quality to be accidental, it can very rarely happen to a man of education.' (Johnson, p. 100)

As well as making explicit a presumption of randomness Dr Johnson, I think, shows good judgment in not giving an estimate of its likely occurrence among the educated. It is as if he senses that the probability is so small that it is not a simple calculation. Not of course that Dr Johnson knew statistical theory; rather that this, and the other examples, are instances of 'fortune favouring the prepared mind'. His mind was prepared, not through knowledge or experience, but through a natural aptitude for figures.

I can't resist a slight digression here. The other way of putting this is: 'He who would bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry the wealth of the Indies with him.' These, and many of my other examples, are practical illustrations of what Dr Johnson once wrote to Miss Thrale:

Nothing amuses more harmlessly than computation, and nothing is oftener applicable to real business or speculative enquiries. A thousand stories which the ignorant often tell, and believe, die away at once, when the computist takes them in his gripe. (*Letters*, III, no. 870)

Moreover this approach affected his literary views. I have only one example but hope some of you may have others. My example is the objection to the witchery in Macbeth: 'A poet who should now



make the whole action of his tragedy depend upon enchantment, and produce the chief events by the assistance of supernatural agents, would be censured as transgressing the bounds of probability.'

The last of my specific examples comes from the schoolroom. While being shown round a school for the deaf, Dr Johnson was pressed to ask the pupils a question. As a literary man he might have asked for a quotation; as a lover of the classics for a translation, as a lexicographer for the definition of an awkward word. He did none of these things but instead: 'wrote a question consisting of three figures, to be multiplied by two figures' (Johnson, p. 48).

Dr Johnson's feeling for statistics is illustrated by his well-known saying about writing: 'In all pointed sentences, some degree of accuracy must be sacrificed to conciseness'. There is a close parallel here to the art of summarizing data so as to bring out its main features without losing too much information. As will I hope be evident from these quotations, Johnson showed numerical skill and judgment. It may be objected that this overstates the case and that all he did was to show some common sense. To this there are two rejoinders. One is that high up in any list of the qualities of a good statistician you will find common sense and shrewdness. The other is that a master craftsman always makes his art look simple.

It is intriguing to consider how individuals with a talent for numeracy could use it 200 years ago. There would be some scope within an estate or household but hardly any for larger scale activities such as market research or national accounts. However, Dr Johnson, appropriately for an extraordinary individual, found an extraordinary outlet. It is not too fanciful, in view of what we have heard, to regard his dictionary as a census or survey—but of words rather than people. So it is a happy coincidence that many of the parts of London associated with Dr Johnson are in the vicinity of the government department chiefly concerned with the collection of social statistics—the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. And Dr Johnson's definition of a lexicographer as 'a writer of dictionaries, a harmless drudge' will ring a bell for many statisticians and scientists who feel their status is inferior to the policy-maker or executive.

The empirical side of Johnson's character is evident in many of the quotations given and is summed up in the famous story of Johnson refuting Bishop Berkeley's theory of the non-existence of matter by striking his foot against a large stone saying 'I refute it thus'. Such a person cannot be far from the practical statisticians' heaven. As John Wain (1960) has put it 'Johnson did not believe in genius in the sense of an inborn gift for some special activity. To him, a gifted man was gifted generally, his mind strong and active over the whole range of its activities, and the accidental circumstances of his life gave him a nudge towards this or that profession'.

Of course I am not claiming Dr Johnson was a statistician. It is a matter of potential rather than achievement, and anyway the label hardly matters. But he does seem to me to convincingly show a marked aptitude for quantitative thought. He provides an excellent example of what numeracy means and of someone striking the right balance between ignoring statistics and becoming their slave. As he himself wrote 'Example is always more efficacious than precept'; I think we can all learn something from the quotations cited.

By way of a postscript, there is a larger scenario. In the eighteenth century there was a revolution in scientific thought. The experimental approach won, and Johnson was a fully paid-up member of that school. Schwartz's book is very good on this. I am not going to try and summarise it in two sentences but here are a couple of quotes to tempt you:

However, the most interesting example of Johnson's application of the methods of the new philosophy appears in the *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. Here he is working in an extremely practical context, testing accounts and relating the evidence of the sense.  
(p. 73)

and again—Johnson must speculate, test, debunk, and imaginatively reconstruct. He takes pains to point out the manner in which his views are formed: the difficulties encountered, the sifting of evidence and clarification of experience, the concrete examples upon which his generalised reflections are based. To an extent, the book represents a mental diary, a history of the complexities of the learning process.

I think the quotations I have used show the quantitative side of this process.

I shall be happy to try and answer questions but I am hoping that there may be other examples you can point out. Personally I am guilty of reading more about Johnson than of him so there may well be examples from the *Idler*, *Rambler*, *Letters* and so on which would be equally striking.

#### Notes

James Boswell *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Samuel Johnson Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* ed. by R. W. Chapman (Oxford University Press, 1974). *Journal* originally published 1786; *Journey* originally published 1775.

James Boswell *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (Dent Everyman, 1973). Originally published 1791.

*The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. by R. W. Chapman (Oxford, 1952)

R. B. Schwartz *Samuel Johnson and The New Science* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1971)

John Wain ed. *Johnson on Johnson* (London: Dent, 1960) p. vi.

### THE WREATH-LAYING

The annual wreath-laying ceremony, commemorating the death of Dr Johnson, took place in Westminster Abbey on 9th December 1996. The allocution was delivered by Judge Sir Stephen Tumim, until recently H.M.'s Chief Inspector of Prisons. He read to us his favourite passage in Johnson, his tribute to Gilbert Walmsley: and this led naturally to recollection of Johnson's near neighbour in the Abbey, David Garrick, who had also been present in the early years at Walmsley's home in the Close at Lichfield.

The passage is as follows:

Of Gilbert Walmsley, thus presented to my mind, let me indulge myself in the remembrance. I knew him very early; he was one of the first friends that literature procured me, and I hope that at least my gratitude made me worthy of his notice.

He was of an advanced age, and I was only not a boy; yet he never received my notions with contempt. He was a Whig, with all the virulence and malevolence of his party; yet difference of opinion did not keep us apart. I honoured him, and he endured me.

He had mingled with the gay world, without exemption from its vices or its follies, but had never neglected the cultivation of his mind; his belief of Revelation was unshaken; his learning preserved his principles; he grew first regular, and then pious.

His studies had been so various, that I am not able to name a man of equal knowledge. His acquaintance with books was great; and what he did not immediately know, he could at least tell where to find. Such was his amplitude of learning, and such his copiousness of communication, that it may be doubted whether a day now passes in which I have not some advantage from his friendship.

At this man's table I enjoyed many cheerful and instructive hours, with companions such as are not often found; with one who has lengthened, and one who has gladdened life; with

Dr. James, whose skill in physick will be long remembered; and with David Garrick, whom I hoped to have gratified with this character of our common friend: but what are the hopes of man! I am disappointed by that stroke of death, which has eclipsed the gaiety of nations, and impoverished the publick stock of harmless pleasure.

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.

### IN MEMORIAM Trevor Russell-Cobb 1918-1996

**The Hon. Mrs Fionn Morgan**

Not having been myself much of a joiner, I was a little overwhelmed when I first met Trevor, by the number of organisations and learned societies to which he belonged. Our most frequent attendance was at the Royal Society of Arts. Trevor had been elected to the council there in 1972 and was still one of the two Treasurers there when I met him in 1981. But most dear to his heart was the Johnson Society.

As with all our members he was, of course, an admirer of the great Doctor. Though he never presumed to think so himself, he did have some of the characteristics of his hero. After his death I was reading from the *Life* and came upon this passage where Boswell accounts for the Doctor's ready wit: 'It can be accounted for only in this way that by reading and meditation and a very close inspection of life, he had accumulated a great fund of miscellaneous knowledge, which, by a peculiar promptitude of mind, was ever ready at his call.' These words brought Trevor to my mind.

He was born in Buckinghamshire at Chalfont-St.-Peter. His father was a professional soldier and for this reason he was educated at Wellington College. His mother was a musician, and it was through her that he acquired his early interest in music. He later trained as a pianist at the Royal College of Music. (He was wont to say that he was Moiseiwitch's worst pupil.) Music remained throughout his life a passionate interest and source of joy. He was director of the English Chamber Orchestra from 1953 to 1978; and he sat on the jury which awarded music scholarships at the Royal Society of Arts.

His first paid job—he told me he was paid £1 a week—was on the London Stock Exchange. But, as Leslie Sayers, his friend since schooldays, wrote in the *Independent* obituary, 'this was not at all his métier'. With the outbreak of the Second World War he enlisted in the Welsh Guards rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. After the War he joined the British Council and while working there he enrolled at London University as an external student and took two degrees: the first a BA in English in 1952 and the second, a BSc(Econ.) in 1956. 'Tempted by the remuneration', as Leslie Sayers expressed it, he took a job in Geneva for the United Nations on the staff of its technical assistance programme, 'but did not find international diplomacy a sufficient challenge and returned to his favourite city, London'. A section of Trevor's library—a library of 30,000 volumes—was devoted to books about London. And he did, of course, share the sentiment expressed in that most famous of all Johnson quotations: 'When a man is tired of London, he is tired of Life; for there is in London all that life can afford'.

It was thought by some of his friends that the 30,000 books, up and down the house and piled upon the stairs, kept it from falling down. From this house in Pimlico Trevor continued, in retirement, to run his own public relations company. After an apprenticeship with Campbell Johnson consultants

he had set up his own business in 1962. It was his experience representing clients such as Watney Mann and Selection Trust which had prompted him to write his 1968 monograph *Paying the Piper—the theory or practice of industrial patronage*. Its prime objective was 'to persuade industry to play a fuller part in the communities from which it draws its sustenance by spending money in support of art and artists'. We are all now accustomed to business sponsorship for the arts but thirty years ago *Paying the Piper* was a pioneering work.

To a man of so many and varied interests—'The great source of pleasure is variety' (*Lives of the English Poets*)—retirement held no fears for him. Of those many pursuits, one that gave him particular pleasure was the Omar Khayam Club, set up to honour Edward Fitzgerald, consisting mainly of much 'filling of the cup' at entertaining dinners. More seriously, he enjoyed his long Chairmanship of the Foundation for Ephemera Studies; and he remained until his death a trustee of the Sir John Soane's Museum. His membership of the Johnson Society of London extended over many years; he served on the Committee and participated in its affairs right up to his final illness.

He is survived by a son and daughter of his first marriage and two sons of his second.

## OCCASIONAL PAPERS

### JOHNSON'S CONTEMPORARY REPUTATION

By Brian Hanley, Capt., U.S. Airforce, New College, Oxford

Scholars have traditionally—and rightly—discussed Johnson's *Rambler*, *Adventurer*, and *Idler* essays in relation to timeless or abstract issues. When Walter Jackson Bate, Robert DeMaria, and others encourage us to study these works as descendants of the humanistic tradition of classical antiquity and the Renaissance, they in fact perpetuate the very image Johnson himself sought to project: *Rambler* 78, 106, 208, and *Idler* 59 are just a few of the many instances where Johnson ponders or mentions the vanity of overtly topical writing. The essay mottoes, taken from classical authors, and the frequent references to Grotius, Pontanus, Scaliger, and other Renaissance authors convey a yearning to transcend the concerns of the present moment as well.<sup>1</sup> But it also must be said that the essay serials have an immediate relevance that is often overlooked by Johnson's twentieth century readers, particularly with regard to what Johnson says about the scarcity of literary fame.

In *Rambler* 2 (1750), for instance, Johnson strives to 'fortify' himself and his contemporaries against 'the writer's malady', that is, an over-sanguine expectation of fame and fortune. To drive home his point, Johnson sets forth an unvarnished and rather pessimistic view of contemporary authorship's numerous trials. 'He that endeavours after fame by writing, solicits the regard of a multitude fluctuating in pleasures, or immersed in business, without time for intellectual amusements', Johnson observes, 'he appeals to judges prepossessed by passions, or corrupted by prejudices, which preclude their approbation of any new performance'. More often than not, in other words, the public and the press look upon the aspiring author with contempt or suspicion rather than with sympathy or goodwill. Hence the author who 'finds his way to reputation, through all these obstructions, must acknowledge that he is indebted to other causes besides his industry, his learning, or his wit'. *Rambler* 2's preoccupation with the hazards of authorship echoes through *Rambler* 3, 21, 144, 146, 176, *Adventurer* 138, *Idler* 55, and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the progress of literary reputation is one of the major themes of Johnson's essay serials, as it figures prominently in his commentary on criticism, authorial self-deception, and patronage.

Johnson's views on professional letters have been amply discussed by E. A. Bloom, Paul Fussell, and of course, James Boswell.<sup>3</sup> But rather than duplicate what has already been done, my aim here is to



illuminate the correlation of what Johnson says about literary reputation in the *Rambler* (1750-52), *Adventurer* (1753-54), and *Idler* (1758-60) essays—particularly with regard to the malevolence, self-importance, and fallibility of critics—and his own later experiences as a famous author. In broader terms, the *Rambler*, *Adventurer*, and *Idler* essays on authorship can be fruitfully studied as historical documents that tell us a great deal about what it was like to write professionally circa 1750-80. Thanks to H. L. McGuffie's bibliography of Johnson's contemporary reception in the British press, one can compare the evolution of Johnson's reputation with his own commentary on literary fame.<sup>4</sup> In exploring this issue, the reception of eight of Johnson's works will be considered: the *Vanity of Human Wishes* and *Irene* (1749); the *Rambler* (1750-52); the *Dictionary* (1755); *Rasselas* (1759); the edition of Shakespeare (1765); *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775); and the *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81).

What was the image of Samuel Johnson projected by the British press between 1749, when the *Vanity of Human Wishes* appeared, and the publication of the *Dictionary* more than six years later? Apart from advertisements in newspapers and the *Gentleman's Magazine* (identified hereafter as the GM), the *Vanity* was given no serious public attention. *Irene* received fuller but largely unfavourable press coverage—in spite of its popularity with playgoers. Though the tragedy was puffed in the GM by Hawkesworth ('To instance every moral . . . would be to transcribe the whole'), two pamphlets harshly criticised the work. John Hippelsley's *An Essay on Tragedy with a Critical Examen of Mahomet and Irene* characterised Johnson's play as 'languid and unaffecting'. An anonymous pamphlet, *A Criticism on Mahomet and Irene*, dismissed Johnson's play as unrealistic and amateurish. In contrast, the *Rambler's* reception was almost singularly favourable. Various papers—the *Daily Advertiser*, the *Rembrancer*, the *Bath Journal*, and a few others—offered praise in prose and verse. The only existing review journal, the *Monthly Review* (identified hereafter as the MR), gave an appreciative but very brief notice of the first collected edition in 1752 (numbers 1-136). It is worth noting, however, that the review is placed not in the 'Main Article' section but in the 'Catalogue of Books', a catchall for less significant titles. The only negative review came in the form of a parody in the *Drury Lane Journal* ('A Rambler, Number 99999').<sup>5</sup>

Significantly, 'Mr. Rambler' and not 'Samuel Johnson' is the subject of these reviews. Even though Johnson's authorship of the *Rambler* was known by a close circle of friends and book trade associates, he managed to keep his anonymity largely intact in the early stages. As late as August, 1750 Johnson's friend Samuel Richardson did not know who 'Mr. Rambler' was. Indeed, Johnson acknowledges the scantiness of his reputation in the final *Rambler*: 'I am far from supposing, that the cessation of my performances will raise any inquiry', Johnson writes in number 208, 'for I have never been much a favourite of the publick, nor can boast that, in the progress of my undertaking, I have been animated by the rewards of the liberal, the caresses of the great, or the praises of the eminent'.<sup>6</sup>

An even more telling barometer of the limits of Johnson's reputation is a tally of the press accounts of his work before the publication of the *Dictionary*. Of the 3,500 items in McGuffie's bibliography, the reviews of the *Vanity of Human Wishes*, *Irene*, the *Rambler*, and the *Adventurer* total roughly sixty items. Put another way, less than two percent of the initial reviews of Johnson's writings are devoted to what would eventually become some of his best known titles. Unlike the commentary on the later works, moreover, most of these early pieces were barely reviews at all, the lion's share being mere advertisements or the contributions of admiring readers. In book trade and London intellectual circles, where his journalistic and scholarly skills were well-known, Johnson was held in high regard. But he had yet to earn much of a popular reputation. That Johnson received scant attention in the press is at least partly a reflection of the times; book reviewing was still in its infancy during the early 1750s. But the fact remains that his name was not widely known before the spring of 1755. With its potentially wide scholarly and nationalistic appeal, the *Dictionary* would define his professional prospects.

In a letter to Thomas Warton, 1 February 1755, Johnson reveals a deep anxiety about the *Dictionary's* reception: 'I now begin to see land, after having wandered', Johnson writes just weeks before the *Dictionary's* publication, 'in this vast Sea of words':

What reception I shall meet upon the Shore I know not, whether the sound of bells and acclamations of the People which Ariosto talks of in his last canto or a general murmur of dislike, I know not whether I shall find upon the coast, a Calypso that will court or a Polypheme that will eat me. But if Polypheme comes to me have at his eyes.

I hope however that critics will let me be at peace for though I do not much fear their skill or strength, I am a little afraid of myself, and would not willingly feel so much illwill in my bosom as literary quarrels are apt to excite.<sup>7</sup>

Here the apprehensions of the anonymous *Ramblers* are given a more pointed expression: the *Dictionary* would carry Johnson's name on the title page, thus laying him to the full force of contemporary critics. The letter also illuminates the tension in Johnson's mind over a problem anonymous authors normally didn't face: how does one respond to critics? In a manner that recalls his remark to Goldsmith about setting "Reviewers at defiance", Johnson's initial impulse is to strike back at hostile reviews; but he abruptly changes his mind in the next sentence, perhaps in recollection of the utter futility of Pope's quarrel with Cibber which Johnson would cite years later in his 'Life of Pope'.<sup>8</sup>

In what was perhaps a surprise for Johnson, the *Dictionary* was well-received. In fact, reviewers in the major journals were uniform in their lavish applause. The *Dictionary* 'is written with the utmost purity and elegance', writes the *GM* reviewer, 'tho' it is only an avenue to the dusty deserts of barren philology, it abounds with flowers that can shoot only on poetic ground'. Similarly, the *London Magazine* reviewer characterised Johnson as an 'eminent' philologist whose work has done 'honour to his country'. The *MR* review was a bit more tempered. Sir Tanfield Leman applauded the scale of Johnson's achievement and recommended that readers keep the *Dictionary's* few minor flaws in a proper perspective. Only Adam Smith offered something like a rigorous and balanced account. Writing in the *Edinburgh Review*, Smith criticised Johnson's arrangement of words but praised him for advancing the state of lexicography. The only unfavourable review came from a competing lexicographer, John Maxwell. In the first five pages of his transparently petty and self-serving pamphlet, Maxwell ignores Johnson's intentions as stated in the preface and rails against the absence of Middle English, Scottish terms, and regional words. Not surprisingly, the remaining twenty pages call attention to Maxwell's own forthcoming *Dictionary*. Apart from the fulminations of a thwarted and evidently less capable rival, then, the British press heartily ratified Johnson's achievement.<sup>9</sup>

We should not overlook the importance of the *Dictionary's* reception in establishing Johnson's reputation. The *Dictionary* earned for Johnson international esteem at the historical moment when the *Rambler* was being printed in subsequent editions, thus giving further lustre to Johnson's new-found fame. And unlike the anonymous *Rambler* series, which cumulatively contributed to Johnson's name through the many reprints and editions in his lifetime, the *Dictionary* attracted immediate and intense attention. By the end of the 1750s, Johnson was known as an accomplished lexicographer and moralist. Writing in the *Annual Register* in his 1759 review of *Rasselas*, Edmund Burke notes that Johnson had "done so much for the improvement of our taste and our morals, and employed a great part of his life in an astonishing work for the fixing of the nation's language". One crucial bellwether of his growing reputation was that he could no longer write anonymously. Even though his name would not appear on the title page of *Rasselas*, Johnson correctly expected his authorship to be widely recognized. But as he had predicted in the *Rambler* series and would experience for himself, literary reputation is inevitably a mixed blessing.<sup>10</sup>

As J. L. Clifford has demonstrated, Johnson's admirers and enemies used reviews of *Rasselas* (1759) as a forum for their own prejudices. The *GM* reviewer (almost certainly John Hawkesworth) places Johnson

on par with the best fiction writers of all time: his novel abounds 'with the most elegant and striking pictures of life and nature, the most acute disquisitions, and the happiest illustration of the most important truths'. The *Lloyd's Evening Post* published a poem that Johnson probably found more embarrassing than gratifying, as the following excerpt suggests:

We bend the knee, as Romans to their Saints;  
So pure his diction, and his thoughts so bright,  
His language shines an insula of light;  
A tide of vivid lustre pours along,  
That ev'n his prose is melody and song.

In sharp contrast, Owen Ruffhead evidently used his review of *Rasselas* as a means of settling a long standing political grudge. Writing in the *MR*, Ruffhead berates Johnson for his 'tumid and pompous' style, his stilted dialogue, and his pedestrian imagination.<sup>11</sup>

The popularity of *Rasselas* solidified Johnson's reputation.<sup>12</sup> From the 1760s onward, rarely would Johnson's name be absent from newspapers, pamphlets, or journals. Ironically, Johnson received a great deal of attention during a period when he published nothing substantial. In the summer of 1762, the *St. James Chronicle* announced the details of Johnson's recently awarded pension.<sup>13</sup> This spawned a host of predictable assaults on Johnson's integrity, many of them exploiting the irony of Johnson's *Dictionary* definition of 'pension'; others, such as Charles Churchill's *The Ghost* (1762) and Archibald Campbell's *Lexiphanes* (1767), took advantage of Johnson's blossoming fame and parodied his writing style, appearance, and mannerisms. But Johnson was not without defenders. McGuffie's bibliography lists a host of responses to the numerous attacks on Johnson. The sparring over Johnson's pension went on for years: as late as the fall of 1765 the *St. James Chronicle* and the *Public Ledger* were printing and reprinting commentaries on the issue. Significantly, these commentaries were themselves subject to review, so defending or attacking Johnson's reputation took on a literary life of its own. Johnson's emerging celebrity had other consequences as well, as it apparently revived interest in his early anonymous works. In a review of *The Tenth Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated*, the *Critical Review* (identified hereafter as the *CR*) cited the 'ingenious author of the *Rambler's*' imitations of Juvenal as exemplifying the excellence of contemporary versions of classical works; Johnson's the 'Life of Blake' (1740), 'Dissertation on Epitaphs written by Pope' (1756), and portions of the *Life of Savage* (1744) were all reprinted in newspapers and magazines during the 1760s. Thus, despite the often venomous attacks and the fact that Johnson published nothing significant between 1760 and October, 1765, his reputation continued to mature.<sup>14</sup>

Johnson's notoriety evidently conditioned the reception of the Shakespeare edition (1765) and later works. A mediocre and pompous hack writer, William Kenrick sought to build up his reputation by dismantling Johnson's. Indeed, Kenrick is an incarnation of Johnson's warnings in the various *Ramblers* about malicious and benighted 'distributors of literary honours' who strive to destroy reputations that eclipse their own. Writing in the *MR*, Kenrick attempted to exalt himself by exaggerating and misrepresenting Johnson's scholarly judgments. Kenrick begins by rebuking Johnson for the tardiness of his edition and his overall scholarly incompetence; the allegedly numerous 'trite and common-place expressions' in the 'Preface' are singled out for extended criticism. In Kenrick's view, Johnson is incapable of doing anything well. Even in his defense of Shakespeare's violation of the dramatic unities, Johnson proves himself unequal to the task: 'Dr. Johnson [is] too little acquainted with the nature and use of the drama, to engage successfully in a dispute of so much difficulty', Kenrick declares. In *A Review of Doctor Johnson's New Edition of Shakespeare*, Kenrick was more outspoken in his resentment of Johnson's fame, declaring that a chief aim of his pamphlet is to cut down to size Johnson's inflated reputation. In a second pamphlet, *A Defence of Mr. Kenrick's Review of Dr. Johnson's Shakespeare*, Kenrick grew even more shameless, dredging up the twenty-year-old Lauder controversy and arguing that Johnson further lowered Shakespeare's esteem by helping Charlotte Lennox with *Shakespeare Illustrated*.<sup>15</sup>

In a manner similar to Kenrick, the *Critical* reviewer aggressively attacked Johnson's edition. Over four installments, the reviewer stakes out critical positions directly opposite those of Johnson's in a rather obvious effort to build himself up at Johnson's expense. Johnson's observation that Shakespeare's characters epitomise human nature, for instance, is rejected in favour of the reviewer's contrary opinion: 'the objects which Shakespeare presents us', the reviewer asserts, 'are compounds of peculiarities that never existed till he created them'. The reviewer also claims that Shakespeare's excellence resides in his memorable turns-of-phrase, and not, as Johnson believes, in the progress of his fables. Clearly, the CR reviewer uses the occasion of Johnson's edition to gain a hearing for his own critical views.<sup>16</sup>

The reviewers of *A Journey to the Western Islands* (1775) split along national lines. As Ian Walker has demonstrated, the *Scottish Weekly Magazine* unmercifully, and quite unfairly, railed against Johnson for what they saw as his breathtaking incompetence and virulent bigotry. Johnson's *Weekly Magazine* attackers, Walker observes,

viewed Johnson with as much prejudice as ever he was accused of possessing himself. They did not understand his character: taking him much too seriously, they did not perceive the crusty humour behind many of his anti-Scottish remarks, which were sometimes provoked by expressions of narrow-minded national superiority encountered during his tour. The interest and charm of the *Journey* was lost on them.

Andrew Henderson's *A Letter to Dr. Samuel Johnson*, on his *Journey to the Western Isles* attempts to discredit Johnson's supposed bigotry. Henderson's volume adds nothing substantive to the critical voices Walker describes above, as he largely sticks to vilifying Johnson and exalting his native Scotland.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, the English press celebrated the work. The CR reviewer, for instance, clearly draws on Johnson's reputation as 'Mr. Rambler' when he asserts that the *Journey's* author 'is conversant in moral speculations, and is endowed with intellectual penetration capable of tracing the peculiarities of manners and action, through their various modifications, to the universal principles of human nature'. Similarly, the MR reviewer cites Johnson's renown as a moralist: 'sagacity of remark, and profundity of reflection' characterise Johnson's effort, the reviewer declares. The GM echoed these judgments, asserting that the *Journey* offers readers a 'faithful representation' 'of men and manners'.<sup>18</sup>

Of all of Johnson's works, none received more intense contemporary scrutiny than the *Lives of the Poets*, thus culminating a trend that saw Johnson attract increasing amounts of attention with each new work. Not surprisingly, the reviews focused not on the edition itself but on the author of its prefatory matter. As a dominant political and literary figure writing on canonical authors—even though the comments were mere prefaces—Johnson was bound to attract aggressive criticisms and lofty praises. Indeed, reviewers often used Johnson's remarks as an opportunity to ride favourite literary and political hobby horses. In the MR, for instance, Edmund Cartwright defended Dyer, Lyttleton, Shenstone, and others from what he believed to be Johnson's 'dogmatical spirit of contradiction to received opinion' and 'disposition to censure'. Interestingly, Cartwright gives a great deal of attention to Johnson's very slight and off-handed reproaches of Theophilus Cibber in the lives of Hammond and Savage. Similarly, William Fitzthomas used Johnson's 'Life of Gray' as a foil for his own treatise on lyric poetry, a *Cursory Examination of Dr. Johnson's Strictures on the Lyric Performances of Gray*. In a less dramatic example, the *London Review* published a letter in which the correspondent berates Johnson's 'usual dictatorial positiveness' in asserting that Dryden's *Ode to Mrs. Killegrew* is the best example of the genre. After contending that poems by Milton and Gray are vastly superior to Dryden's, the correspondent, in a shameless attempt to trade on Johnson's renown, pleads for a response. Johnson's criticisms of Milton's republicanism especially struck a nerve with some reviewers. A free-thinker and devoted student of John Locke, Francis Blackburne argued in a 131-page pamphlet that Johnson's remarks proved him to be an enemy to human freedom; Edmund Cartwright also rebuked Johnson's political bigotry in his MR review.<sup>19</sup> In exploiting Johnson's fame to make personal or petty cavils into dominant issues, these criticisms distort the actual contents of Johnson's literary biographies.



It also must be said that Johnson's renown as a moralist informed the reviews as well. Apart from his criticisms, Cartwright lauded Johnson for dignifying literary biography: 'Ever attentive to the more important interest of mankind, and sensible that biography ought to be a lesson of virtue', Johnson never fails to impart 'either maxims of prudence or reflexions on the conduct of human life'. Both the GM and the CR applauded Johnson on similar grounds.<sup>20</sup>

In summary, Johnson's reception in the British press came to validate his commentary on the hazards of authorship. For anyone seeking an accurate depiction of what it was like to write for a living in the second half of the eighteenth century, the *Rambler*, *Adventurer*, and *Idler* essays are a worthwhile place to begin.

#### Notes

1. See Walter Jackson Bate's introduction to *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Rambler* (New Haven, 1969), iii. xxvi-xxx. Also see Bate, *Samuel Johnson* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978), especially pp. 277-96, 335; Philip Davis, *In Mind of Johnson: a Study of Johnson the Rambler* (London: Althone Press, 1989); Robert DeMaria, *The Life of Samuel Johnson: a Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); A. T. Elder, 'Thematic Patterning and Development in Johnson's Essays', *Studies in Philology* lxii (1965), 610-34.
2. *Yale* iii. 14; also see Johnson's early poem 'The Young Author', and *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. by G. B. Hill, rev. L. F. Powell, (Oxford, 1934-64), ii. 358.
3. Bloom, *Samuel Johnson in Grub Street* (Providence, RI: Brown UP, 1957); Fussell, *Samuel Johnson and the Life of Writing* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972). An interesting study of Johnson and authorship in its commercial context is Alvin Kernan's *Printing Technology, Letters & Samuel Johnson* (Princeton, 1987).
4. Helen Louise McGuffie, *Samuel Johnson in the British Press, 1749-1784: A Chronological Checklist* (New York: Garland, 1976). Also see Ian Merrylees, 'Biographical, Anecdotic, and Poetical Accounts of Samuel Johnson, printed during his lifetime' (unpublished B. Litt. essay, Oxford University, 1957). Merrylees' essay is a pioneering, though dated, treatment of Johnson's contemporary reception.
5. McGuffie, pp. 9-13; GM xviii. 598; xix. 79; John Hippelsley, *An Essay on Tragedy* (London, 1749), p. 17; *A Criticism on Mahomet and Irene. In a Letter to the Author; Monthly Review* vi. 145.
6. J. L. Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson* (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp. 75-121. *Yale* v. 316.
7. *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. by Bruce Redford (Princeton, 1995) i. 92.
8. *Boswell's Life* v. 274; *Lives of the Poets*, ed. by G. B. Hill (Oxford, 1905) iii. 186.
9. GM xxv. 150; *London Magazine* xxiv. 193; MR xii. 322-24; *Edinburgh Review* i. 61-73; John Maxwell, *A Letter from a Friend in England to Mr. Maxwell in Johnsoniana I: Early Criticism, 1749-1768* (New York: Garland, 1975). Also see Gertrude E. Noyes, 'The Critical Reception of Johnson's Dictionary in the Latter Eighteenth Century', *Modern Philology*, 1955 (52), pp. 177-78.
10. Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, pp. 148-49; 262; *Letters* i. 179. The third and fourth editions of the *Rambler* appeared in 1756.
11. Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, pp. 213-216; GM xxix. 186; MR xx. 428-437.
12. *Rasselas* quickly went through three editions, its sales reaching a very respectable 3,500 within one year of publication. Subsequent editions—1,000 copies each—followed in 1766 and 1775 (*Yale* xvi. xlix).
13. Worth 300 pounds per annum, the pension 'was granted to Johnson solely as the reward of his literary merit, without any stipulation whatever, or even tacit understanding that he should write for the administration' (*Boswell's Life* i. 373).
14. McGuffie, pp. 25-36; CR iii. 87; *London Chronicle* ii. 154.
15. MR. xxxiii. 285-87; 295. *A Review of Doctor Johnson's New Edition of Shakespeare* (London, 1765), p. xiii; *A Defence of Mr. Kenrick's Review of Dr. Johnson's Shakespeare* (London, 1766), pp. 3-14. For an overview of the Lauder controversy, see W. P. Courtney and D. N. Smith, *A Bibliography of Samuel Johnson* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll, 1984), pp. 36-38.
16. CR vols. xx-xxi. passim.

17. *Review of English Studies* xix (1968), p. 24; Andrew Henderson, *A Letter to Dr. Samuel Johnson, on his journey to the Western Isles* (London, 1775).
18. CR xxxix. 44; MR lii. 57; GM lxv. 86.
19. MR lxvi. 116-27; lxv. 408-11; Fitzthomas, in *Johnson: the Critical Heritage*, ed. by James T. Boulton (London: Routledge, 1971), pp. 286-91; the *London Review* x. 350-52. For Johnson's remarks on Milton and Cibber, see *Lives* i. 156-57; ii. 312; 340-41. Francis Blackburne, *Remarks on Johnson's Life of Milton* (London, 1780), 85-86, 127; MR lxi. 7.
20. MR lxi. 81; GM xlix. 312-13; CR xlvii. 451.

## BOOK REVIEWS

John Cannon, *Samuel Johnson and the Politics of Hanoverian England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). Pp. viii + 326. Price £35.00.

By no stretch of the imagination could Samuel Johnson be described as a major player on the eighteenth-century political stage. His involvement in political activity was energetic but sporadic and short-lived; he was an able, but hardly prolific political writer; and in comparison with a figure such as his friend Burke, his political thinking lacked depth, originality, intensity, and vision. It is striking, then, that in 1994 two distinguished historians of eighteenth-century politics and political culture should have chosen to publish studies of Johnson. Professor Cannon's volume (under review here) and J. C. D. Clark's *Samuel Johnson: Literature, religion and English cultural politics from the Restoration to Romanticism* create very different contexts for Johnson and, unsurprisingly, reach very different conclusions about the ideological contours and historical meanings of his political thought. While both historians show profound respect for Johnson's achievements they have another (and not very hidden) agenda which goes beyond an appreciation of the man. In these books Johnson is placed at the centre of a vigorous historiographical debate; different versions of Hanoverian politics and society are articulated and constructed through his writings and recorded opinions. This should neither alarm nor surprise us. As both Cannon and Clark show, interpretative and cultural battles have long been fought out in Johnson's name, and both these historical studies testify in their own way to the continued potency of his afterlife as an author.

One of the most impressive features of Cannon's book is its deft interweaving of close comment on Johnson with wider historical analysis. Hanoverian politics is observed through the lens of Johnson and Johnson is observed through the lens of Hanoverian politics. This double perspective structures Cannon's account of Johnson's involvement in the major issues and historical themes of the eighteenth century. Following a series of shrewd and informative chapters on religion, Jacobitism, the constitution, the aristocracy, enlightenment, and nationalism the book concludes with an authoritative, wide-ranging summary of the nature of Hanoverian politics. In all this Johnson is valued above all for his representativeness. It is Cannon's contention that in most aspects of his thought Johnson belongs to the mainstream, not to the margins, of eighteenth-century opinion. He is therefore presented as a reliable guide to the intellectual and ideological currents of the period. Thus we are told that his religious views 'were rather conventional and middle-of-the-road' (p. 23); that 'London', far from being an example of incendiary, Jacobite-inclined satire, is 'a fairly standard opposition critique of Walpole and his regime' (p. 47); and that there was 'nothing at all unusual or immoderate' (p. 96) about Johnson's conception of sovereignty, however much his antagonists denouficed it as arbitrary and absolute. Cannon's Johnson is thus neither genuinely reactionary nor profoundly nostalgic. While his attachment to the Stuart line and to a traditional, 'organic', version of Toryism is acknowledged here, in the end Cannon places the emphasis on Johnson's pragmatism and somewhat Whiggish valuing of the progress of commerce and democratising of culture.

Cannon portrays Johnson primarily as a man of reason rather than as a dogmatist or ideologue, ascribing to him a 'balanced' mentality and measured outlook which he evidently admires. But because he chooses to emphasise balance rather than, say, tension or contradiction, he risks underplaying some of the darker, more troubled and fraught manifestations of Johnson's mind. In his chapter on religion, for instance, Cannon largely disregards Johnson's 'private devotions and spiritual life' (p. 8) on the grounds that they have already been adequately considered by scholars and focuses instead on his opinions about the more public relationship between Church and State. Arguably, though, this tendency to neglect the non-rational and ideological elements in Johnson limits what can be said about his political and cultural attachments, or at any rate marks out in advance the nature of the questions that can be asked about them. Cannon's approach to perhaps the most controversial aspect of Johnson's political life, his alleged Jacobitism, is a case in point. The scepticism which leads him to comment dryly on, for example, Boswell's sentimental Jacobitism—his susceptibility to 'the combination of mountains and mournfulness' (p. 59)—lends his analysis a certain argumentative strength. Yet this account perhaps loses sight of the role of feeling in politics, and in the shaping of political identities. If, as Cannon reminds us, Boswell found Jacobitism difficult to define (p. 59), then the same could be said of most definers, and of most ideologies, precisely because as amalgams of thought, sentiment, and tone they are not simply reducible to opinions and ideas.

The almost simultaneous publication of studies by Clark and Cannon is a welcome sign that recent historical debates about eighteenth-century England are being constructively brought to bear on literary studies. Cannon's book is the product of a mind steeped in the history and literature of the period. Anyone reading it will benefit from its command both of Johnson's writings and of the wider historical scene, and will be provoked into thought by its underlying theme that eighteenth-century England can plausibly be described as 'Johnson's England'.

Christopher Reid  
Queen Mary and Westfield College

Lady Mary Wortley Montague, *Romance Writings*, edited by Isobel Grundy, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. Pp. 276.

This collection of mainly unpublished writings of Lady Mary Wortley Montague contains not only five 'romances', or stories, but also the 'Italian memoir', her 'most extended surviving autobiographical narrative', written in idiosyncratic Italian (included, with the French of 'Princess Docile' as appendices, both translated by Isobel Grundy). The 'Memoir' details the gulling, swindling and intimidating of the writer by the Italian Count Palazzi, and was intended as evidence in a law-suit against him, but even this reads at times like a gothic novel. Montagu's fiction was not written to be published: in 'Mademoiselle de Condé', probably written in Italy, 1746-56, she writes 'You will be surprised my dear Mademoiselle after so long having taken Leave of Follies of this nature, that I return to the little Amusements of my Childhood,' (28) but the weather is bad, and she writes, she says, to stave off melancholy. Her first story is the only one to have been published: 'Indamora to Lindamira', in the form of five letters to a girl-friend (and indeed circulated among the writer's sisters and friends), was written at fourteen. It has the usual coercive father, wicked stepmother, frustrated love, a sister's elopement, a duel in which the hated intended is killed, a second-best marriage, a final reunion and the book's only happy ending. It is told at break-neck speed, with some disregard for spelling, and gives an entertaining sense of the conversational style of romance-reading teenage girls.

'Indamora' owes something to the 'vast French romances' of La Calprenède and Scudéry. Throughout the stories, the French influence predominates over the English, and Grundy demonstrates a dense intertextuality (supported by Montagu's own library catalogue and her surviving books). Grundy describes the last story, 'Princess Docile', as 'mock-romance, mock-picaresque, mock-fairy-tale' (xii), and in her adult stories, Montagu is able to play with all these genres, subverting the morality of the

'The Sultan's Tale', which may have been intended as one of an *Arabian Nights* series, has little oriental about it. It is a fable about testing female chastity through flowers, involving Diana, Venus, and Flora 'whom some call a terrest[r]ial Goddess, others say she was a mortal and no better than she should be. But no matter for that (only I like to communicate what I know),' as the Sultan disarmingly says (17). The unchaste go unpunished, as the neat device of a 'garde fleurs', hooked onto a stomacher, saves the reputation of a somewhat licentious court.

Like 'The Sultan's Tale', the two following stories seem designed as part of a series. They suggest Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, but in fact owe more to Mlle de Montpensier and Mme. de Lafayette. Set at Louis XIV's court, and using actual names for invented characters, 'Mademoiselle de Condé' and 'Louisa' are linked by a fictional Duke of Enguien. He is brother to the eponymous heroine of the first story, a princess who falls in love with the commoner, Fontenelle, and is cruelly betrayed by the Duke, who seduces her maid into handing over her letters (women in these stories are far from sisterly). Fontenelle escapes, she retires brokenhearted to a convent, but is forced out to marry suitably. In the sequel story, the Duke plots with Madame de Maintenon to seduce the beautiful Louisa, inmate of the convent of St Cyr, who loves learning, and though 'susceptible of the most tender and violent Passion,' has 'a sense of Honour and innate Virtue more rigid than that of the Catos and Scipios of Rome,' which are, unfortunately, 'the necessary qualifications to make her the most miserable of her sex' (43). The married Duke makes her love him passionately, and to save her chastity, she marries an elderly misogynist, and dies of a broken heart in a distant land.

All Montagu's heroines feel sexual desire, Princess Docile, indeed, for two different men. At the request of her cruel mother (who ends up turned into a Brie cheese!), a fairy makes her 'docile', and she naïvely absorbs every system she is taught. She reads *La Princesse de Clèves* and *Pamela*, and is soon 'quite stuffed with Sentiment' (111). The action moves from court to cottage to inn, from country to sea, in each of which some system of male authority — religion, philosophy, medicine, law, heroic conquest, is mocked. Docile falls in love with a feminised charmer from Venus, but marries a man very like Edward Wortley Montagu. Later, she is duped into love for a gallant who 'regarded Woman as a kind of Game Animal made for man's amusement.' When she is captured and threatened with becoming a slave, she reflects that 'in truth she had always been one, she only lacked the name' (176). The story ends perfunctorily, consigning her to a convent.

Isobel Grundy's scholarship is always impressive and illuminating (see also her edition of Montagu's *Selected Letters*, Penguin) [Ed.: reviewed on p. 66 of this journal.] The 'Memoir' throws fresh light on Montagu's Italian sojourn, and the romances are undoubtedly entertaining, giving a new feminist twist to familiar genres: Grundy goes further, concluding that had they been published in Montagu's lifetime, the history of the novel might have changed. This is a large claim, and worth discussion by the 'enthusiastic and discriminating critics' she rightly hopes they will attract.

Dr. Eithne Henson



James Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to Corsica* (In Print Publishing Ltd., 1996), 'Literary Travellers' Series. First published 1768. Price £9.95.

The cover of this book is not very inviting—the excellent engraving of James Boswell dressed as a Corsican Chief on page 4 would have been a little more interesting, though as the volume is part of a series, this may have been a less than practicable variation of the design. John Edmondson's informative introduction is succinct and factual, placing the visit in context, and showing the finer points of the editorship of the work. The text itself is very much 'as Boswell himself approved it', and retains some of the idiosyncratic spelling which lends authenticity to the edition.

Boswell's account of his visit is, as the enthusiasts would expect, intimate, lively, and pictorial. Not for him lengthy descriptions of either the scenery or the ideology which he undoubtedly encountered and which certainly inspired him. Indeed the purpose of the visit was ideological—'Boswell went to Corsica because he was enthused by Rousseau himself about the Corsicans' struggle for freedom, and his love for Corsica was of an ideological, and idealistic, nature. However, the journal account contains little polemic or jingoistic statements or reflections upon his beliefs about freedom or the politics which threaten it. It is a strung-together collection of anecdotes and pithy recollections about the people he meets, about their oddities and eccentricity, and about how his own insatiable curiosity about his fellow men drives him to observe and record the things that they say and do in meticulous and remorseless detail.

Virtually every page of this relatively short account—119 pages—contains a vignette of somebody he has met, generally in an informal way, and always with the down-to-earth, genuine dry humour which is Boswell's trademark—or, at its most elevated, his hallmark! Of a meeting with the Corsican Pasquale Paoli, whom he admired greatly, he says, 'One morning . . . I came in upon him without ceremony, while he was dressing. I was glad to have an opportunity of seeing him in those teasing moments, when according to the Duke de Rochefoucault, no man is a hero to his valet de chambre.' (p. 73).

Boswell's intention, in recounting such events, is clearly not disrespectful, and the tone of his writing always suggests genuine liking for the people he observes. However, this, and the times in which he characteristically satirises and chides himself for his non behaviour, makes the work readable, and his everyday experiences credible.

He describes people from all levels of society—the hangman, guards and guides, the fathers at the convent—with the same detail and vigour. Ambrosio, a guard, 'a strange, iron-coloured, fearless creature', (p. 96), and we learn that 'even the man who carried my baggage was armed, and had I been timorous might have alarmed me' . . .

To summarise, this is an excellent book for enthusiasts of Boswell. Indeed, as he himself seems to have been very receptive to the enthusiasms of people he meets, he has the infectious capacity to take the reader with him, and to see things as he sees them. He does this by writing a homely and approachable account of his adventures, not afraid to defer to his own shortcomings or his wonder at everything and everybody he sees. Wherever he goes, there may be much to make him cynical, especially in the futility and mixed motives which abounded in the most revolutionary of circles, but this never touches him. Only the heroism and real humanity of those he admires are recounted in his writing. One so well-travelled may well have become jaded in his view of people—especially heroic ones—but Boswell remains ever the receptive child, ever the optimist, wide eyed with wonder, and with a lawyer's eye for detail.

Brian W. Todd

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Selected Letters* edited by Isobel Grundy (London: Penguin Classics, 1997), Pp. 536.

The last pleasure that fell in my way was Madam Sevigny's Letters; very pretty they are, but I assert without the least vanity that mine will be full as entertaining 40 years hence. I advise you therefore to put none of 'em to the use of Wast [sic] paper.

(Lady Mary to Lady Mar, June 1726)

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's 'Turkish Embassy' letters were first published 36 years after she made this assertion, and the frequent appearance of new volumes and editions of her correspondence confirm that readers have found them as entertaining as she predicted. The most recent edition has been edited by Montagu scholar Isobel Grundy and published in the 'Penguin Classics' series. As Grundy points out in her introduction, too many of Lady Mary's letters—if not used as waste paper—were lost or consigned to the flames. Out of over 900 remaining letters Grundy has selected 326 letters that she believes 'do justice to Montagu the writer, thinker, and feminist, and to Lady Mary the friend and family member, the idealistic girl and sardonic old woman,' (p. xxii).

The letters are divided into eleven sections, each reflecting a stage in Lady Mary's life and travels. Concise footnotes explain the context of each letter and cite relevant passages from her poetry and correspondence. Grundy's footnotes and her comprehensive chronology of Lady Mary's life give the letters a narrative momentum which makes this edition entertaining and accessible to the general reader. Scholars will find this the most useful edition published since Robert Halsband's three-volume edition of Lady Mary's letters in 1965-7; it includes a detailed index plus several newly-discovered letters and reprints of letters for which accurate originals have been located.

Lady Mary uses different tones and styles for each correspondent, and the selection reflects what Grundy calls her 'variousness'. The letters Lady Mary sent to her teenage girlfriends (one begins, 'O, what vile inconstant toads these men are') reveal a light-heartedness missing in her earnest, defensive letters to Edward Wortley. Her repeated attempts to counter Wortley's accusations of coquetry, vanity and social ambition suggest the frustration she would find in her marriage. There are moments of unintentional humour, such as the conclusion to Lady Mary's first letter to Wortley: 'Tis the first I ever writ to one of your sex and shall be the last. You must never expect another. I resolve against all correspondence [sic] of this kind. My resolutions are seldom made and never broken' (Letter 12, 28 March, 1710). Many equally 'final' dismissals follow before the couple's elopement.

In letters suggesting a course of education for her granddaughter, Lady Mary repeatedly asserts that a love of learning and a knowledge of languages is a woman's best defence against unhappiness. Her own voracious reading and interest in foreign and English customs sustained Lady Mary's spirits through a difficult marriage, an unreturned passion for the younger, bisexual Francesco Algarotti, and a self-imposed exile in Italy. In turn, her witty, perceptive commentaries on Turkey, London and Italy were designed to cheer her melancholic sister Lady Mar and to maintain ties with her beloved daughter Lady Bute. During her years in Italy, Lady Mary insisted that Lady Bute send her copies of the latest British fiction. Her critiques, interesting in themselves, also show how Lady Mary used correspondence to create an aura of intimacy and commonality with a distant child.

In the *Selected Letters* Lady Mary appears by turns as the impassioned lover, the concerned parent, the travel writer and the acerbic social critic. It is to be regretted that few letters about Lady Mary's involvement with literary, political and feminist figures and her crusade to popularise the small-pox vaccine have survived. Yet if Isobel Grundy's knowledgeable editing of Lady Mary's letters is any indication, her forthcoming biography of Lady Mary should fulfill the interest created by this admirable volume.

Susan Catto  
Balliol College, Oxford

THE NEW RAMBLER  
Journal of the Johnson Society of London

Editor: David Palfrey MA, MPhil

Serials Editor:

ISSN 0028-280X

1997

Contents

Page

FROM THE EDITOR

PAPERS READ TO THE SOCIETY October 1995 – April 1996  
The Hertschman Totals and the Senathem Family

Finding the Right Language and Identity in Sheridan's Speeches

Christopher Jones

An Aspect of Johnson's

Judgeship and the Law

A Note

It is with great regret that we have to inform members of the very recent death, on the 13th of May, of Professor Donald Greene. He had only last year accepted a Vice Presidency of the Society. An appreciation of his life and work will appear in the next *New Rambler*. In the meantime, we offer our sincere condolences to his family.

The Johnson Society's 100th Anniversary

Philip Gould

Democracy and the Johnson

May 1997

THE WREATH LAYING

IN MEMORIAM Thomas Bowdler Club 1996-1997

OCASIONAL PAPERS

Johnson's contemporary reputation

Philip Gould

BOOK REVIEWS

Christopher Jones on John A. Johnson, *Johnson and the Nation*, and David Palfrey on

Edward H. Carr on Mary Anne Johnson, *Johnson's World*, and David Palfrey on

John Todd on David Palfrey, *The Johnsons*

Johnson's 100th Anniversary: A Review of the Johnson Society's 100th Anniversary

**1995 – 6**

**President**

The Very Rev Dr E. F. CARPENTER, KCVO

**Vice Presidents**

W. J. BATE, PhD, Litt D, D Hum, LHD, Lowell  
Professor of Humanities, Harvard

J. R. G. COMYN

The Rt Hon VISCOUNTESS ECCLES, PhD, D Litt

Professor DONALD GREENE, PhD, D Litt, Litt D, FRSC  
University of Southern California

Professor ISOBEL GRUNDY, MA DPhil  
Henry Marshall Tory Professor, University of Alberta

Professor IAN JACK, MA, D Phil, Litt D, Cambridge

J. H. LEICESTER, MA FRSA

JAMES MISENHEIMER, Jr, PhD, FSA Scot  
Professor of English, Indiana State University