

# THE NEW RAMBLER



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**Contents**

<b>FROM THE EDITOR</b>	2
<b>PAPERS READ TO THE SOCIETY OCTOBER 1998-APRIL 1999</b>	
<i>Johnson and Economics</i>	3
John Craig	
<i>Wicked Women – or Were They?</i>	15
Thelma L'Estrange	
<i>The Devout Dr Johnson</i>	16
Frank Delaney	
<i>Books and the Imagination: Arabella, David Hume and the Eighteenth-Century Readers of History and Fiction</i>	23
Marina Frasca-Spada	
<i>17 Gough Square</i>	32
Natasha McEnroe	
<i>Fanny Burney and the Willings</i>	38
Karin Fernald	
<i>Charlotte Smith and the Lichfield Two</i>	51
Lorraine Fletcher	
<b>THE WREATH-LAYING</b>	62
<b>IN MEMORIAM</b>	
John Comyn	62
<b>OCCASIONAL PAPER</b>	
<i>An Association Copy of Mrs Piozzi's Anecdotes</i>	63
<b>REVIEWS</b>	
Thomas Curley, <i>Sir Robert Chambers: Law, Literature and Empire in the Age of Johnson</i> (J. T. Scanlan)	68
Isobel Grundy, <i>Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Comet of the Enlightenment</i> (Eithne Henson)	70
Peter Martin, <i>A Life of James Boswell</i> (Allan Ingram)	71
Leo Damrosch, (ed.), <i>Major Authors on CD-ROM: Samuel Johnson and James Boswell</i>	73

# FROM THE EDITOR

THIS issue of the *New Rambler* comes hard on the heels of its predecessor. It is the first of two issues which members will receive this year, in order to reduce the gap between the end of a session and the publication of the papers. The 1999-2000 issue will be published later this year, and thereafter the *New Rambler* will appear each Autumn.

There has been one change in the Committee; Brian Rees has handed over his duties as Treasurer and Membership Secretary to John Service. It is an important role, and a time-consuming one; we are grateful to Brian for his endeavours over the last few years, and wish John well as he takes over these responsibilities.

It is with sadness that we record the deaths of a number of members. John Comyn, a Vice-President of the Society, gave it great service as Chairman from 1975 until 1991; an appreciation appears in this issue. Herman W. Liebert, a life member of the Society, was emeritus librarian of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale. He was a member of the editorial committee of the Yale Editions of both the *Works of Samuel Johnson*, and the *Private Papers of James Boswell*, and author of numerous articles concerning Johnson and his circle. Major-General M. H. P. Sayers had been a member since 1978 and had served on the Committee. Dr R. G. Watson, an avid reader and collector of books relating to Johnson, had only recently joined the Society.

Members may be interested to know that a short account of the 1997 Christmas meeting of the Society, when the speaker was P. D. James, appears in her 'fragment of autobiography', *Time to Be in Earnest*.

Back issues of the *New Rambler* are available from the editor at £3.00 per issue, or £50.00 for all available issues, plus postage. All issues from 1968 until 1997-98 are available, except that for 1993-94, which has sold out. A full contents list is available on the Society's web site, which is at <http://www.nbbl.demon.co.uk>. Members with queries can contact the editor at the address given at the front of this issue, or by e-mail on [JSL@nbbl.demon.co.uk](mailto:JSL@nbbl.demon.co.uk).

MICHAEL BUNDOCK



10th October 1998

# JOHNSON AND ECONOMICS

John Craig

Chairman: Robert Bartlett

*John Craig is a member of the Royal Statistical Society and the British Society for Population Studies. His paper on 'Numeracy and Dr Johnson' was broadcast by the BBC, and published in the New Rambler for 1995-1996.*

MY appearance here for a second time reminds me of an old story which was popular in those innocent magazines of long ago. Someone had made a fine model, correct in every detail, out of wood. An admirer says 'How did you get all the details right? Did you have plans?' The reply is something like 'No, I made it out my head; and I have enough wood left to make another!' The similarity is that after my previous talk I happened to remark, quite innocently and merely to emphasise that Johnson was more than a literary figure, that as well as evidence of numeracy there were also lots of remarks of interest to economists in Boswell's *Journal*. That was my undoing!

A more positive reason for a look at this topic is that today we live in C. P. Snow's two culture world. But Samuel Johnson lived in a one culture world – and it is good to remind ourselves of this.

Every economics student soon learns that Adam Smith is one of the giants of the subject. Indeed he is almost the founder of modern economics with his book *The Wealth of Nations*. He started writing this in 1766 and it was published in 1776. Smith was 14 years younger than Johnson and the two were known to each other. So I want to start by recapping on what is known about the contacts between the two men; three if we include Boswell, which we can hardly avoid – especially as Boswell had studied under Adam Smith at Glasgow.

Smith did not spend a lot of time in London but in April 1773 he came to London to oversee the printing and publication of *The Wealth of Nations* and stayed almost three years. During this time he was elected a member of 'the Club'. Bate suggests that it was about this time that Johnson began to attend less frequently; also the meetings had become fortnightly. Whatever the frequency with which the two met it is clear that they were well known to each other, but were acquaintances rather than friends. Hibbert says that Smith did not like Johnson because of the latter's odd behaviour. Certainly they did not exactly 'hit it off'. Boswell records a Dr Robertson as saying:

The first time I met him was one evening at Strahan's, where he had just had an unlucky altercation with Adam Smith, to whom he had been so rough, that Strahan, after Smith was gone, had remonstrated with him.<sup>1</sup>

Then there is the famous 'Brentford' put-down:

I once reminded him that when Dr Adam Smith was expatiating on the beauty of Glasgow, he had cut him short by saying, 'Pray, Sir, have you ever seen Brentford?' and I took the liberty to

<sup>1</sup> Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (edited G. B. Hill, revised L. F. Powell) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-64), (hereafter *Life*), Vol. III, pp. 331-332.

add, 'My dear Sir, surely that was *shocking*.' – 'Why, then, Sir, (he replied,) YOU have never seen Brentford.'<sup>2</sup>

Boswell also records another severe put-down:

Johnson one day gave high praise to Dr Bentley's verses in Dodsley's Collection, which he recited with his usual energy. Dr Adam Smith, who was present, observed in his decisive professorial manner, 'Very well, – Very well.' Johnson however added, 'Yes, they *are* very well, Sir; but you may observe in what manner they are well. They are the forcible verses of a man of a strong mind, but not accustomed to write verse; for there is some uncouthness in the expression.'<sup>3</sup>

Boswell has a footnote to this in which he gives a possible explanation of the antipathy between these two geniuses:

The difference between Johnson and Smith is apparent even in this slight instance. Smith was a man of extraordinary application, and had his mind crowded with all manner of subjects; but the force, acuteness and vivacity of Johnson were not to be found there. He had book-making so much in his thoughts, and was so chary of what might be turned to account in that way, that he once said to Sir Joshua Reynolds, that he made it a rule when in company, never to talk of what he understood. Beauclerk had for a short time a pretty high idea of Smith's conversation. Garrick, after listening to him for a while, as to one of whom his expectations had been raised, turned slyly to a friend, and whispered him, 'What do you say to this? – eh? *flabby*, I think.'<sup>4</sup>

I am not wholly convinced by this. Johnson too had a detailed knowledge of an amazing variety of subjects; and Smith had got on very well with the French intelligentsia. Added complications were that Smith was a great friend and admirer of David Hume; but Hume was a non-believer, and so a most objectionable character to Johnson.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Smith had written critically of his time at Oxford and this too may have counted against him.

But both men were big enough to recognize the worth of the other. Two anecdotes from Boswell:

He enlarged very convincingly upon the excellence of rhyme over blank verse in English poetry. I mentioned to him that Dr Adam Smith, in his lectures upon composition, when I studied under him in the College of Glasgow, had maintained the same opinion strenuously, and I repeated some of his arguments. JOHNSON. 'Sir, I was once in company with Smith, and we did not take to each other; but had I known that he loved rhyme as much as you tell me he does, I should have HUGGED him.'

I mentioned Dr Adam Smith's book on 'The Wealth of Nations,' which was just published, and that Sir John Pringle had observed to me, that Dr Smith, who had never been in trade, could not be expected to write well on that subject any more than a lawyer upon physick. JOHNSON. 'He is mistaken, Sir; a man who has never been engaged in trade himself may undoubtedly write well

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, Vol. IV, p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> *Life*, Vol. IV, pp. 23-24.

<sup>4</sup> *Life*, Vol. IV, p. 24, note 2.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick A. Pottle and Charles H. Bennett (eds), *Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, 1773* (London: William Heinemann, 1963), p. 17.

upon trade, and there is nothing which requires more to be illustrated by philosophy than trade does.<sup>6</sup>

And Smith for his part described Johnson's Shakespeare Preface as 'the most manly piece of criticism that was ever published in any country'.<sup>7</sup>

Still I would like to think that at times they got on well. There is a story of Johnson gossiping with Smith about Richard Savage spending far more than he could afford on a fashionable scarlet coat with gold lace while his naked toes were peeping through his shoes.<sup>8</sup>

Now I turn to a second angle on my topic. It is the evidence of Johnson thinking as a person with an aptitude for economics. I start with some straightforward examples of the awareness of costs and values. At Derby Boswell and Johnson were shown how china was made. Boswell records:

The china was beautiful, but Dr Johnson justly observed it was too dear; for that he could have vessels of silver, of the same size, as cheap as what were here made of porcelain.<sup>9</sup>

Turning to a different product, Johnson was sent a free copy of a book. This led to the observation which we found to be true when I worked in a Government Office:

People seldom read a book which is given to them; and few are given. The way to spread a work is to sell it at a price. No man will send to buy a thing that costs even sixpence, without an intention to read it.<sup>10</sup>

Even then one is not out of the wood because another remark was:

My judgment, I have found, is no certain rule as to the sale of a book.<sup>11</sup>

Now you may feel that books were one product for which Johnson would have picked up some marketing expertise. But he had much wider interests. Goldsmith had been arguing that the nation was becoming degenerate due to luxuries. This prompted quite an outburst; the following is relevant to my theme:

JOHNSON... 'Let us take a walk from Charing-cross to Whitechapel, through, I suppose, the greatest series of shops in the world; what is there in any of these shops, (if you except gin-shops,) that can do any human being any harm?' GOLDSMITH. 'Well, Sir, I'll accept your challenge. The very next shop to Northumberland-house is a pickle-shop.' JOHNSON. 'Well, Sir: do we not know that a maid can in one afternoon make pickles sufficient to serve a whole family for a year? nay, that five pickle-shops can serve all the kingdom? Besides, Sir, there is no harm done to any body by the making of pickles, or the eating of pickles.'<sup>12</sup>

Or take the occasion that Boswell remarked that he would like to have a good walled garden. Johnson immediately turned to the business case:

<sup>6</sup> *Life*, Vol. I, p. 427. Vol II, pp. 429-430.

<sup>7</sup> *Life*, Vol. I, p. 496, note 4.

<sup>8</sup> George Birbeck Hill (ed.), *Lives of the Poets*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), Vol. II, p. 401, note 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Life*, Vol. III, p. 163.

<sup>10</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, pp. 229-30.

<sup>11</sup> *Life*, Vol. IV, p. 121.

<sup>12</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, pp. 218-219.

JOHNSON. 'I don't think it would be worth the expence to you. We compute, in England, a park-wall at a thousand pounds a mile; now a garden-wall must cost at least as much. You intend your trees should grow higher than a deer will leap. Now let us see;— for a hundred pounds you could only have forty-four square yards, which is very little; for two hundred pounds, you may have eighty-four square yards, which is very well. But when will *You* get the value of two hundred pounds of walls, in fruit, in your climate? *No*, Sir, such contention with Nature is not worth while. I would plant an orchard, and have plenty of such fruit as ripen well in your country.'<sup>13</sup>

The conversation went on to what kind of fruits could best be grown and the economics of hothouses. Boswell was moved to a comment, which I feel supports my general thesis:

I record this minute detail, which some may think trifling, in order to shew clearly how this great man, whose mind could grasp such large and extensive subjects, as he has shewn in his literary labours, was yet well-informed in the common affairs of life, and loved to illustrate them.<sup>14</sup>

Johnson did not know everything and Boswell once stumped him:

I put a question to him upon a fact in common life, which he could not answer, nor have I found any one else who could. What is the reason that women servants, though obliged to be at the expence of purchasing their own clothes, have much lower wages than men servants, to whom a great proportion of that article is furnished, and when in fact our female house servants work much harder than the male?<sup>15</sup>

This was no disgrace because up to the present day economists have had problems in accounting for wage differences. A footnote by Michael Kearney (added to the fourth edition by Malone) may be a partial explanation:

There is a greater variety of employments for men, than for women: therefore the demand raises the price.<sup>16</sup>

Another difficult problem was the price of money; that is the rate of interest. Johnson said:

'Kames is puzzled with a question that puzzled me when I was a very young man. Why is it that the interest of money is lower, when money is plentiful; for five pounds has the same proportion of value to a hundred pounds when money is plentiful, as when it is scarce? A lady explained it to me. "It is (said she) because when money is plentiful there are so many more who have money to lend, that they bid down one another. Many have then a hundred pounds; and one says. — Take mine rather than another's. and you shall have it at four *per cent*." ' BOSWELL. 'Does Lord Kames decide the question?' JOHNSON. 'I think he leaves it as he found it.'<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Life*, Vol. IV, p. 205.

<sup>14</sup> *Life*, Vol. IV, p. 206.

<sup>15</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, pp. 216-217.

<sup>16</sup> Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (edited R. Ingpen) (Bath: Pitman, 1907), Vol. I, p. 432, note.

<sup>17</sup> *Life*, Vol. III, p. 340.

On the matter of wages, Boswell also records that Johnson said:

Raising the wages of day-labourers is wrong; for it does not make them live better, but only makes them idler, and idleness is a very bad thing for human nature.<sup>18</sup>

Evidently something of a hard-liner here! But on money itself Johnson had the right approach in recognizing it as a 'medium of exchange':

Money, to be sure, of itself is of no use; for its only use is to part with it.<sup>19</sup>

My next batch of quotations are related to what is called Welfare Economics. This is concerned with the trade-offs that arise when a particular action makes some people better off and other worse off. For example Boswell argued warmly for the old feudal system, and Johnson commented:

I agree with Mr Boswell that there must be a high satisfaction in being a feudal Lord; but we are to consider, that we ought not to wish to have a number of men unhappy for the satisfaction of one.<sup>20</sup>

Almost the same line of thinking occurred in another everyday context:

One of the company not being come at the appointed hour, I proposed, as usual upon such occasions, to order dinner to be served; adding, 'Ought six people to be kept waiting for one?' 'Why, yes, (answered Johnson, with a delicate humanity,) if the one will suffer more by your sitting down, than the six will do by waiting.'<sup>21</sup>

This approach leads on to marginal utilities which are just what Johnson was thinking of when he said:

Now Goldsmith's putting himself against another, is like a man laying a hundred to one who cannot spare the hundred. It is not worth a man's while. A man should not lay a hundred to one, unless he can easily spare it, though he has a hundred chances for him: he can get but a guinea, and he may lose a hundred.<sup>22</sup>

This balancing of utilities is also evident in:

Mandeville puts the case of a man who gets drunk in an alehouse; and says it is a publick benefit, because so much money is got by it to the publick. But it must be considered, that all the good gained by this, through the gradation of alehouse-keeper, brewer, maltster, and farmer, is overbalanced by the evil caused to the man and his family by his getting drunk.<sup>23</sup>

A very subtle point is brought up in my next quote from Boswell:

<sup>18</sup> *Life*, Vol. IV, pp. 176-177.

<sup>19</sup> *Life*, Vol. I, p. 441.

<sup>20</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 178.

<sup>21</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 83.

<sup>22</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 231.

<sup>23</sup> *Life*, Vol. III, p. 292.

This brought on a question whether one man is lessened by another's acquiring an equal degree of knowledge with him. Johnson asserted the affirmative. I maintained that the position might be true in those kinds of knowledge which produce wisdom, power, and force, so as to enable one man to have the government of others; but that a man is not in any degree lessened by others knowing as well as he what ends in mere pleasure: – eating fine fruits, drinking delicious wines, reading exquisite poetry.<sup>24</sup>

This almost introduces the concept of what are now known as positional goods. That is goods whose value to an individual depends very much on their scarcity. Then the additional concept of 'opportunity cost' is introduced as follows:

On Sunday, October 10, we dined together at Mr Strahan's. The conversation having turned on the prevailing practice of going to the East-Indies in quest of wealth; – JOHNSON, 'A man had better have ten thousand pounds at the end of ten years passed in England, than twenty thousand pounds at the end of ten years passed in India, because you must compute what you *give* for money; and a man who has lived ten years in India, has given up ten years of social comfort and all those advantages which arise from living in England.'<sup>25</sup>

An instance where modern economists might differ from Johnson is:

If you wish only to support nature, Sir William Petty fixes your allowance at three pounds a year; but as times are much altered, let us call it six pounds. This sum will fill your belly, shelter you from the weather, and even get you a strong lasting coat, supposing it to be made of good bull's hide. Now, Sir, all beyond this is artificial, and is desired in order to obtain a greater degree of respect from our fellow-creatures. And, Sir, if six hundred pounds a year procure a man more consequence, and, of course, more happiness than six pounds a year, the same proportion will hold as to six thousand, and so on as far as opulence can be carried.<sup>26</sup>

Note that *en passant* this involves the idea of a subsistence income which is roughly uprated for inflation. My quarrel is with the assumption of constantly increasing marginal utility; today we would think the increase might well be non-linear.

The doubling of the basic income needed to allow for inflation was apparently not entirely speculation. We have this recollection:

He amused himself, I remember, by computing how much more expence was absolutely necessary to live upon the same scale with that which his friend described, when the value of money was diminished by the progress of commerce. It may be estimated that double the money might now with difficulty be sufficient.<sup>27</sup>

I would love to have the details of the calculation of this price index. Perhaps it was something along the following lines:

<sup>24</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 220.

<sup>25</sup> *Life*, Vol. III, p. 400.

<sup>26</sup> *Life*, Vol. I, p. 440.

<sup>27</sup> *Life*, Vol. I, p. 106.

His OFELLUS in the *Art of living in London*, I have heard him relate, was an Irish painter, whom he knew at Birmingham, and who had practised his own precepts of economy for several years in the British capital. He assured Johnson, who, I suppose, was then meditating to try his fortune in London, but was apprehensive of the expence, 'that thirty pounds a year was enough to enable a man to live there without being contemptible. He allowed ten pounds for clothes and linen. He said a man might live in a garret at eighteen-pence a week; few people would inquire where he lodged; and if they did, it was easy to say, "Sir, I am to be found at such a place." By spending three-pence in a coffee-house, he might be for some hours every day in very good company; he might dine for six-pence, breakfast on bread and milk for a penny, and do without supper. On *clean-shirt-day* he went abroad, and paid visits.'<sup>28</sup>

In case anyone asks, I cannot explain the how the minimum of £3 in one example has risen to £30 in another! Johnson also used the ideas of welfare economics when faced with the problem of poverty and the thought that some levelling out was desirable. Boswell wrote:

Observing some beggars in the street as we walked along, I said to him, I supposed there was no civilised country in the world, where the misery of want in the lowest classes of the people was prevented. JOHNSON. 'I believe, Sir, there is not; but it is better that none should be unhappy, than that none should be happy, which would be the case in a general state of equality.'<sup>29</sup>

And Boswell once told Johnson that Mrs Macaulay said that:

She wondered how he could reconcile his political principles with his moral; his notions of inequality and subordination with wishing well to the happiness of all mankind, who might live so agreeably, had they all their portions of land, and none to domineer over another. JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, I reconcile my principles very well, because mankind are happier in a state of inequality and subordination. Were they to be in this pretty state of equality, they would soon degenerate into brutes; – they would become Monboddo's nation; – their tails would grow. Sir, all would be losers, were all to work for all: – they would have no intellectual improvement. All intellectual improvement arises from leisure: all leisure arises from one working for another.'<sup>30</sup>

While on the subject of happiness, the concept of the noble savage evidently had an attraction for some – but not for the practical Johnson. Remember our more recent debates about whether our missionary endeavours were good or bad; and whether any newly discovered societies deep in the Amazon or Borneo should be left alone or not. Here are three quotations:

A larned gentleman who holds a considerable office in the law, expatiated on the happiness of a savage life; and mentioned an instance of an officer who had actually lived for some time in the wilds of America, of whom, when in that state, he quoted this reflection with an air of admiration, as if it had been deeply philosophical: 'Here am I, free and unrestrained, amidst the rude magnificence of Nature, with this Indian woman by my side, and this gun, with which I can procure food when I want it: what more can be desired for human happiness?' It did not require much sagacity to foresee that such a sentiment would not be permitted to pass without due animadversion. JOHNSON. 'Do not allow yourself, Sir, to be imposed upon by such gross

<sup>28</sup> *Life*, Vol. I, p. 105.

<sup>29</sup> *Life*, Vol. III, p. 26.

<sup>30</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 219.



absurdity. It is sad stuff; it is brutish. If a bull could speak, he might as well exclaim,—Here am I with this cow and this grass; what being can enjoy greater felicity?'<sup>31</sup>

BOSWELL. 'I am well assured that the people of Otaheite who have the bread tree, the fruit of which serves them for bread, laughed heartily when they were informed of the tedious process necessary with us to have bread;—plowing, sowing, harrowing, reaping, threshing, grinding, baking.' JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, all ignorant savages will laugh when they are told of the advantages of civilized life. Were you to tell men who live without houses, how we pile brick upon brick, and rafter upon rafter, and that after a house is raised to a certain height, a man tumbles off a scaffold, and breaks his neck, he would laugh heartily at our folly in building; but it does not follow that men are better without houses. No, Sir, (holding up a slice of a good loaf,) this is better than the bread tree.'<sup>32</sup>

I attempted to argue for the superior happiness of the savage life, upon the usual fanciful topicks. JOHNSON. 'Sir, there can be nothing more false. The savages have no bodily advantages beyond those of civilised men. They have not better health; and as to care or mental uneasiness, they are not above it, but below it, like bears. No, Sir, you are not to talk such paradox: let me have no more on't.'<sup>33</sup>

I turn now to another branch of economics known nowadays as Demand Theory. This is not concerned with individual businesses or individuals but with the economy in aggregate. It is highly desirable that the aggregate demand of individuals, businesses and firms is large enough to bring about full employment. Here are two observations that show Johnson was on the right wavelength:

On the subject of the right employment of wealth, Johnson observed, 'A man cannot make a bad use of his money, so far as regards Society, if he does not hoard it; for if he either spends it or lends it out, Society has the benefit. It is in general better to spend money than to give it away; for industry is more promoted by spending money than by giving it away. A man who spends his money is sure he is doing good with it; he is not so sure when he gives it away. A man who spends ten thousand a year will do more good than a man who spends two thousand and gives away eight.'<sup>34</sup>

Also:

He as usual defended luxury: 'You cannot spend money in luxury without doing good to the poor. Nay, you do more good to them by spending it in luxury, than by giving it: for by spending it in luxury, you make them exert industry, whereas by giving it, you keep them idle. I own, indeed, there may be more virtue in giving it immediately in charity, than in spending it in luxury; though there may be a pride in that too.'

Boswell introduced a complication which Johnson recognized:

<sup>31</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 228.

<sup>32</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 248.

<sup>33</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 73.

<sup>34</sup> *Life*, Vol. IV, p. 173.

He and I returned to town in the evening. Upon the road, I endeavoured to maintain, in argument, that a landed gentleman is not under any obligation to reside upon his estate; and that by living in London he does no injury to his country. JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, he does no injury to his country in general, because the money which he draws from it gets back again in circulation; but to his particular district, his particular parish, he does an injury. All that he has to give away is not given to those who have the first claim to it. And though I have said that the money circulates back, it is a long time before that happens.'<sup>35</sup>

Then another complication was noted:

On the subject of wealth, the proper use of it, and the effects of that art which is called economy, he observed, 'It is wonderful to think how men of very large estates not only spend their yearly income, but are often actually in want of money. It is clear, they have not value for what they spend. Lord Shelburne told me, that a man of high rank, who looks into his own affairs, may have all that he ought to have, all that can be of any use, or appear with any advantage, for five thousand pounds a year. Therefore, a great proportion must go in waste; and, indeed, this is the case with most people, whatever their fortune is.' BOSWELL. 'I have no doubt, Sir, of this. But how is it? What is waste?' JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, breaking bottles, and a thousand other things. Waste cannot be accurately told, though we are sensible how destructive it is. Economy on the one hand, by which a certain income is made to maintain a man genteelly, and waste on the other, by which, on the same income, another man lives shabbily, cannot be defined. It is a very nice thing: as one man wears his coat out much sooner than another, we cannot tell how.'<sup>36</sup>

Again this refusal to even try to define waste would be approved of today. But it seems to me that here Johnson is implicitly recognizing declining marginal utility which was overlooked in the earlier example I quoted you. But Johnson did recognize that some forms of economic activity were less meritorious than others. I have already read the quote comparing the bad effect of drunkenness with the benefits of producing and marketing the alcohol. Here is an example in the field of Demand Theory:

BOSWELL. 'So then, Sir, you do not think ill of a man who wins perhaps forty thousand pounds in a winter?' JOHNSON. 'Sir, I do not call a gamester a dishonest man; but I call him an unsocial man, an unprofitable man. Gaming is a mode of transferring property without producing any intermediate good. Trade gives employment to numbers, and so produces intermediate good.'<sup>37</sup>

When aggregate demand is low some unemployment is inevitable; and it is unfair to blame the unemployed for being out of work. This is a fact which not all modern politicians are willing to face up to. But Johnson recognized it:

What we are told about the great sums got by begging is not true: the trade is overstocked. And, you may depend upon it, there are many who cannot get work. A particular kind of manufacture fails: those who have been used to work at it, can, for some time, work at nothing else. You meet a man begging; you charge him with idleness: he says, 'I am willing to labour. Will you give me work?' - 'I cannot.' - 'Why, then you have no right to charge me with idleness.'<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Life*, Vol. III, p. 249.

<sup>36</sup> *Life*, Vol. III, p. 265.

<sup>37</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 176.

<sup>38</sup> *Life*, Vol. III, p. 401.

Moving onto what we would now call the theory of the firm, the topic of small businesses being swallowed up into large ones had arisen:

BOSWELL. 'But, to consider the state of our own country; – does not throwing a number of farms into one hand hurt population?' JOHNSON. 'Why no, Sir; the same quantity of food being produced, will be consumed by the same number of mouths, though the people may be disposed of in different ways. We see, if corn be dear, and butchers' meat cheap, the farmers all apply themselves to the raising of corn, till it becomes plentiful and cheap, and then butchers' meat becomes dear; so that an equality is always preserved.'<sup>39</sup>

In that quotation we had the idea of supply and demand together with that of long run equilibrium. Here is another agricultural example making much the same points:

BOSWELL. 'But, Sir, is it not a very bad thing for landlords to oppress their tenants, by raising their rents?' JOHNSON. 'Very bad. But, Sir, it never can have any general influence; it may distress some individuals. For, consider this: landlords cannot do without tenants. Now tenants will not give more for land, than land is worth. If they can make more of their money by keeping a shop, or any other way, they'll do it, and so oblige landlords to let land come back to a reasonable rent, in order that they may get tenants.'<sup>40</sup>

Yet another example with many modern parallels is this story:

Dr Wetherell, Master of University College, Oxford, accompanied us home from church; and after he was gone, there came two other gentlemen, one of whom uttered the commonplace complaints, that by the increase of taxes, labour would be dear, other nations would undersell us, and our commerce would be ruined. JOHNSON, (smiling). 'Never fear, Sir. Our commerce is in a very good state; and suppose we had no commerce at all, we could live very well on the produce of our own country.'<sup>41</sup>

To be fair we could not brush off international trade as an optional extra, nor could we be so sure of self-sufficiency. However Johnson had grasped why international trade is beneficial. Today we talk about the theory of comparative advantage. Johnson's phrasing was:

As to mere wealth, that is to say, money, it is clear that one nation or one individual cannot increase its store but by making another poorer: but trade procures what is more valuable, the advantages of different countries.'<sup>42</sup>

There are a couple of examples of what is almost population geography. The first concerns London:

Talking of a London life, he said, 'The happiness of London is not to be conceived but by those who have been in it. I will venture to say, there is more learning and science within the circumference of ten miles from where we now sit, than in all the rest of the kingdom.'

<sup>39</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 102.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, pp. 356-357.

<sup>42</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 430.

BOSWELL. 'The only disadvantage is the great distance at which people live from one another.'  
 JOHNSON. 'Yes, Sir; but that is occasioned by the largeness of it, which is the cause of all the other advantages.'<sup>43</sup>

The other concerns the distribution of population on a global scale:

He said, 'Mankind have a strong attachment to the habitations to which they have been accustomed. You see the inhabitants of Norway do not with one consent quit it, and go to some part of America, where there is a mild climate, and where they may have the same produce from land, with the tenth part of the labour. No, Sir; their affection for their old dwellings, and the terror of a general change, keep them at home. Thus, we see many of the finest spots in the world thinly inhabited, and many rugged spots well inhabited.'<sup>44</sup>

Notice that one-tenth – the quantification of a factor of production. The final aspect that impresses me is Johnson's insights about the relationship between economics and social issues. Thus my next example is a perceptive analysis of something that comes up time and again with respect to the problems of developing countries:

I talked of the little attachment which subsisted between near relations in London. 'Sir, (said Johnson,) in a country so commercial as ours, where every man can do for himself, there is not so much occasion for that attachment. No man is thought the worse of here, whose brother was hanged. In uncommercial countries, many of the branches of a family must depend on the stock; so, in order to make the head of the family take care of them, they are represented as connected with his reputation, that, self-love being interested, he may exert himself to promote their interest. You have first large circles, or clans; as commerce increases, the connection is confined to families. By degrees, that too goes off, as having become unnecessary, and there being few opportunities of intercourse. One brother is a merchant in the city, and another is an officer in the guards. How little intercourse can these two have!'<sup>45</sup>

Then Johnson almost anticipated Karl Marx when he said:

Providence has wisely ordered that the more numerous men are, the more difficult it is for them to agree in any thing, and so they are governed. There is no doubt, that if the poor should reason, 'We'll be the poor no longer, we'll make the rich take their turn,' hey could easily do it, were it not that they can't agree. So the common soldiers, though so much more numerous than their officers, are governed by them for the same reason.'<sup>46</sup>

I spoke earlier about welfare economics and happiness. Johnson was a realist and knew that no man is an island. We have this comment:

Rousseau's treatise on the inequality of mankind was at this time a fashionable topick. It gave rise to an observation by Mr Dempster, that the advantages of fortune and rank were nothing to a wise man, who ought to value only merit. JOHNSON. 'If man were a savage, living in the woods

<sup>43</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 75.

<sup>44</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 103.

<sup>45</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, p. 177.

<sup>46</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, pp. 102-103.

by himself, this might be true; but in civilized society we all depend upon each other, and our happiness is very much owing to the good opinion of mankind. Now, Sir, in civilized society, external advantages make us more respected. A man with a good coat upon his back meets with a better reception than he who has a bad one. Sir, you may analyse this, and say what is there in it? But that will avail you nothing, for it is a part of a general system.<sup>47</sup>

A trickier issue was the question of land ownership and my next quote is an astute analysis that uses several of the ideas which I have previously mentioned:

He said, 'Entails are good, because it is good to preserve in a country, serieses of men, to whom the people are accustomed to look up as to their leaders. But I am for leaving a quantity of land in commerce, to excite industry, and keep money in the country; for if no land were to be bought in a country, there would be no encouragement to acquire wealth, because a family could not be founded there; or if it were acquired, it must be carried away to another country where land may be bought. And although the land in every country will remain the same, and be as fertile where there is no money, as where there is, yet all that portion of the happiness of civil life, which is produced by money circulating in a country, would be lost.' BOSWELL. 'Then, Sir, would it be for the advantage of a country that all its lands were sold at once?' JOHNSON. 'So far, Sir, as money produces good, it would be an advantage; for, then that country would have as much money circulating in it as it is worth. But to be sure this would be counterbalanced by disadvantages attending a total change of proprietors.'<sup>48</sup>

So far I have not used any quotes from Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands*. This is because their economy was at a more primitive stage so the economic comments are at a different level. But there certainly are such comments. For example increasing rents seem to have been a burning issue and there are many comments on this. One example must suffice:

It seems to be the general opinion, that the rents have been raised with too much eagerness. Some regard must be paid to prejudice. Those who have hitherto paid but little, will not suddenly be persuaded to pay much, though they can afford it. As ground is gradually improved, and the value of money decreases, the rent may be raised without any diminution of the farmer's profits: yet it is necessary in these countries, where the ejection of a tenant is a greater evil, than in more populous places, to consider not merely what the land will produce, but with what ability the inhabitant can cultivate it. A certain stock can allow but a certain payment; for if the land be doubled, and the stock remains the same, the tenant becomes no richer. The proprietors of the Highlands might perhaps often increase their income, by subdividing the farms, and allotting to every occupier only so many acres as he can profitably employ, but that they want people.

From him [Lauchlan Macqueen] we first heard of the general dissatisfaction, which is now driving the Highlanders into the other hemisphere; and when I asked him whether they would stay at home, if they were well treated, he answered with indignation, that no man willingly left his native country. Of the farm, which he himself occupied, the rent had, in twenty-five years,

<sup>47</sup> *Life*, Vol. I, pp. 439-440.

<sup>48</sup> *Life*, Vol. II, pp. 428-429.

been advanced from five to twenty pounds, which he found himself so little able to pay, that he would be glad to try his fortune in some other place.<sup>49</sup>

Johnson's interest in prices and standards of living however was somewhat frustrated by quasi-exchange rate complications:

Of the proportion, which the product of any region bears to the people, an estimate is commonly made according to the pecuniary price of the necessities of life; a principle of judgment which is never certain, because it supposes what is far from truth, that the value of money is always the same, and so measures an unknown quantity by an uncertain standard. It is competent enough when the markets of the same country, at different times, and those times not too distant, are to be compared; but of very little use for the purpose of making one nation acquainted with the state of another. Provisions, though plentiful, are sold in places of great pecuniary opulence for nominal prices, to which, however scarce, where gold and silver are yet scarcer, they can never be raised.

In the Western Islands there is so little internal commerce, that hardly any thing has a known or settled rate. The price of things brought in, or carried out, is to be considered as that of a foreign market; and even this there is some difficulty in discovering, because their denominations of quantity are different from ours; and when there is ignorance on both sides, no appeal can be made to a common measure.<sup>50</sup>

My conclusion is much the same as for numeracy. I am not claiming Johnson as an economist but as one whose mind was such that he could think in the ways that an economist would think. I find this impressive. I am afraid I have not had the time or energy to try and see how much of his approach could be attributed to conversations with Adam Smith; or how much was in common currency from other sources. Whether or not it was original is not the main point; plenty of us hear economic issues talked about without getting Johnson's kind of understanding.

21st November 1998

### WICKED WOMEN – OR WERE THEY?

Thelma L'Estrange

Chairman: C. Tom Davis

*Thelma L'Estrange studied music and languages in Switzerland, and was a student of Rosette Anday in Vienna. She became principal soloist for Opera Italia, and has had wide experience in films, on stage and in cabaret.*

*Mrs L'Estrange's paper centred around the lives of the Marquise de Pompadour and Madame du Barry, and made comparison with a number of other courtesans throughout history. The meeting was well attended, and the paper was followed by lively discussion.*

<sup>49</sup> Mary Lascelles (ed.), *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 94, 38.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

12th December 1998

**THE DEVOUT DR JOHNSON**  
**Frank Delaney**

Chairman: Richard Thrale

*Frank Delaney is a writer and broadcaster. He inaugurated 'Bookshelf' on Radio 4, presents the English language programme 'Word of Mouth', and has made many other programmes for radio and television. His books include 'A Walk to the Western Isles after Boswell and Johnson'.*

**M**R Chairman, Reverend and other distinguished ladies and gentlemen; I am honoured by your invitation to commemorate the late Dr Samuel Johnson. We are gathered here some twenty-seven hours before the precise anniversary. Two hundred and fourteen years ago, at seven o'clock on the evening of Monday, December the 13th 1784 'the noise he made in breathing had ceased.' A few days earlier he had observed, 'An odd thought strikes me. We shall receive no letters in the grave.' (That was long before the setting-up of the Post Office made this fact come true for many of us who have not yet reached the grave.) I hope today that my humble address might reach him. We are near enough to his grave perhaps for our voices to be heard. But above all he inhabits those regions, I feel certain, where warm thoughts and feelings of great affection shall reach him – and I send those to him with all the spiritual energy I can command. For this is a man I truly love, who retained after death – as Stevenson said of him – the art of making friends.

There are, as we all know, loves of which we may not speak. To traverse the earth muttering passionately of how one loves one's wife is thought to show a lack of style. If it's one's mistress of whom one trumpets, too many people end up too interested – solicitors, barristers, journalists. One's horse, perhaps? One's cat? One's stockbroker? One's MP? Yes, perhaps one's MP as we witness the last days of the love that dare not speak its name. All I have to do is offer you the vision of the Cabinet we have today.

No – I mean a very pure and simple love, of the kind Johnson himself showed to people of all dimensions. I remind you of that most gracious of affections he conveyed to Boswell when Boswell passed his law finals. Johnson wrote to him – and it is a remark which I did not even have to memorise: from the moment I heard it I remembered it – 'You have done exactly what I always wished when I wished you best.'

There is a depth of kindness there – Johnson as usual hitting several targets with one phrase in his customarily economic use of the English language. And it is the final three words that hold the key, I think, to the aspect of Johnson I want to discuss today. 'Wished you best' – that is certainly the phrase that led me to consider at greater length than I have had the opportunity to do hitherto the good Samuel Johnson.

From the word 'good' I reached quickly the term 'devout', hence the devout Dr Johnson. For 'good' as a term to denote how we ought to behave is no longer with us in the abundance I believe it should be and certainly as he believed it should be. I do not have to explain the word 'good' – it means everything positive from intended excellence to charitable humaneness. When we use the term 'the good Dr Johnson' – and does it strike you now how often he is invoked as 'the good Dr Johnson'? – I think we do so because his genuine strivings towards his God and towards his neighbour made him good. An essential part of that goodness – perhaps its very engine – was his devoutness. Indeed it may be the other way round.

Let me begin this enterprise therefore as Johnson himself might have ordered me to – with a prayer, one he wrote in 1765.



Almighty God, the giver of wisdom, without Whose help resolutions are vain, without Whose blessing study is ineffectual; enable me, if it be Thy will, to attain such knowledge as may qualify me to direct the doubtful, and instruct the ignorant; to prevent wrongs and terminate contentions.

In fairness to our attendance, Mr Chairman, I should add that Johnson wrote this prayer at a time when, as Boswell put it, 'he had thoughts both of studying law and of engaging in politics.' So perhaps an address to the Johnson Society is not the moment to pray for help in directing the doubtful and instructing the ignorant, or preventing wrongs and terminating contentions.

The principle remains though – of soliciting divine aid. In this Johnson was truly conscientious. Time and again we encounter him not only seeking the intervention of the Almighty but behaving almost like a divine in the composition of prayers and sermons, and in the observation of religious contemplation. To examine however briefly this aspect of his character is to uncover him still further, because in the nature and form of address he used in his worship we find a clue to the structure of his mind and spirit as full as and fuller than any guidance Boswell has given us and certainly as direct. In this I believe the single most absorbing aspect of Dr Johnson, his very core, emerges.

What we already know about him is legion and myriad. A harmless drudge who described the English language; a man of exceptional physical, emotional and intellectual presence; a forthright opinionator; a cautious depressive; a reckless carrier of the fight to an opponent, perhaps even professionally when he first came to London; a good and sentimental friend; a clear-eyed viewer of fraud – he was not swayed by the MacPherson forgeries; a relentless writer both in energy and search; a profound commentator on literature: 'While an author is yet living,' he remarked in his preface to Shakespeare, 'we estimate his powers by his worst performance, and when he is dead we rate them by his best'; a shining beacon on writing – 'That which is written without effort is in general read without pleasure'; as a husband a hopeless lover – as a lover a hopeless husband; an innocent man who liked to watch dancing, and to have a good roll down a hill; a man of great warmth and courtesy and friendship who wrote the English language as though an angel steered his pen and who spoke it with all its robust beauty to the fore.

He was also an unhygienic and noisy man, a flatulent, scrofulous, goutish hypochondriac who may have suffered from de Tourette's syndrome; 'You must not mind me Madam; I may say strange things but I mean you no harm'; a rarely relenting enemy; a man given to anger on such a scale that those who witnessed it, even though not the target of it, winced – but a forgiving man of those he loved; a man afraid of life and death and everything in between.

Yes, we do know so much about him from the man who was by his side for many of the years of Johnson's halcyon – and yet, as with all such cases, we sometimes know so much we know too little.

Certainly there has for me always been one mystery, and if not mystery, question. It is the central question of all humankind, and it is one I ask about all people, living or dead, who have or have had or continue to have significance in my life either directly or by the effect of their art upon me. I ask, 'What do they think of themselves?' And today I ask – 'What did Johnson think of himself?'

If we put ourselves that question regarding our own selves we find it difficult, I believe, to have a ready answer, even in the intimacy of our own minds. Or perhaps even more difficult to have a consistent answer: today I am so-and-so; yesterday I was – other than that.

One of the uses of religion may be to tell us what we are. It is as if the measuring of ourselves against a greater power throws us into relief. Not so much by our deeds as by our prayers shall you know us. To whom do we pray? What language do we use? Do we come in on the side of Despair or Presumption, the Scylla and Charybdis of many a Papist's (as Johnson would have it) of many a Papist's doctrinal experience? Here, in his theatre of prayer, we can analyse Johnson's language and discover him.

We already know from Boswell that Johnson 'habitually endeavoured to refer every transaction of his life to the Supreme Being' and we know too that Johnson actually authorised the publication of a volume of his own *Prayers and Meditations*. I like to think of that – a leading writer of the day publishing a collection of devout observations and supplications and I await with interest the similar contributions from today's best-sellers. But where I find Johnson most revealing, and where we begin to guess at what he thought of himself, is not in *that* but *how*; not in those facts of his life but in the language he used – or rather the aim of his language.

Some examples before I make the substantive point.

We all know, I think, the prayer with which he began the enterprise of *The Rambler* (do you need reminding that the Italians translated this as 'Il Vagabondo' and thought it, I expect, an early version of *Playboy*?) Johnson prayed, 'Almighty God, the giver of all good things, without whose help all labour is ineffectual, and without whose grace all wisdom is folly; grant, I beseech Thee, that in this undertaking Thy Holy Spirit may not be withheld from me, that I may promote Thy glory and the salvation of myself and others; grant this, O Lord, for the sake of Thy son Jesus Christ, Amen.' Intoned, as you are fully aware, at the morning editorial conference of the *Sun* newspaper. Six days a week. Your super soaraway *Sun*.

Interesting competition: compose a prayer in the style of Dr Johnson to be said every morning by a tabloid editor. 'O God, please allow another member of the Cabinet to walk upon Clapham Common. Or allow a member of the Royal Family or the Dean or a member of the Chapter of any of our great cathedrals be a part-time lap dancer.'

To deal with his personal life Johnson composed prayers with the speed and regularity of a writer of self-help books. Within the year after the death of his wife we find him recalling the marriage by means of prayer. 'O Lord, who givest the grace of repentance, and hearest the prayers of the penitent, grant that by true contrition I may obtain forgiveness of all the sins committed, and of all duties neglected in my union with the wife whom Thou has taken from me; for the neglect of joint devotion, patient exhortation and mild instruction.' He was, as we know, a stranger to political correctness.

By the same token, recalling Johnson's fame, I do not see the same type of prayer much in evidence in today's public marriages. But I may be misjudging people. Who am I to say what Mick Jagger, or Woody Allen say before they kneel down by their bedsides or futons at night. One old roué in Ireland with whom I once had a conversation regarding bedtime prayers reminded me of his favourite prayer among women; 'O Holy Mary I believe that without sin thou didst conceive; And now I pray while still believing that I may sin without conceiving.'

To be more serious. Johnson used prayer as we use psychotherapy – as a means of managing his emotions, as a means of allaying his fears or at least holding them out where he could see them: as a means of directing his life towards higher purpose.

There is the memorable New Year's resolution prayer: 'I have now spent fifty-five years in resolving; having, from the earliest time almost that I can remember, been forming schemes for a better life. I have done nothing. The need of doing, therefore, is pressing, since the time of doing is short. O, God, grant me to resolve aright and to keep my resolutions, for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen.'

This was a recurrent theme in his devotional expression. He prayed for 'the change of outward things which I am now to make' and he prayed, 'Grant me the grace of Thy Holy Spirit, that the course which I am now beginning may proceed according to Thy laws, and end in the enjoyment of Thy favour.'

He prayed most famously of all perhaps when beginning Volume Two of his *Dictionary*: 'O God who hast hitherto supported me, enable me to proceed in this labour, and in the whole task of my present state; that when I render up on the last day, an account of the talent committed to me, I may receive pardon, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Amen.'

There are many others. He prayed for his friends; he prayed that he might study well; he prayed for inspiration; he had a wonderful prayer against what he called 'inquisitive and perplexing thoughts' –

'Teach me by Thy Holy Spirit to withdraw my mind from unprofitable and dangerous inquiries, from difficulties vainly curious and doubts impossible to be solved.'

Now none of this is surprising in a man who said he deserved to be whipped for the religious disrespect he had once exhibited when a boy, and who in his teens wrote a long and pious poem about Saint Simon and Saint Jude. At Oxford, after all, he thought about religion 'in earnest', it became 'the predominant object of his thoughts' and he repeatedly lamented his own lack of diligence in its practice. This indeed is the devout Dr Johnson in the making.

But – the substantive point; it has not needed my words so far and I need not speak after I make it, although I shall. Above all please look at how his religion was expressed. In all his language Johnson aimed for the top. His devout relationship was with God the Primary Deity. From time to time he mentions 'the Saviour', but his form of address is clearly to the figure of the Trinity known as God the Father. He will not deal with intermediaries. No saints are invoked with any kind of prominence; he will use no intercessionaries; not even Cherubim, Seraphim, Thrones, Dominations, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Archangels or Angels. This is a man who goes straight to the Chairman of the Board. 'O God who hast hitherto supported me'; 'Almighty God, the giver of all good things'; 'O Lord, who givest the grace of repentance'; 'O, God, grant me to resolve aright and to keep my resolutions'.

Yet for all this direct approach to his Maker, we know that Johnson shared worship. He went to church; he took communion; he didn't overdo it – he believed that Sunday should not be kept 'with rigid severity and gloom, but with a gravity and simplicity of behaviour' and was sufficiently accustomed at churchgoing to arrive late and change his pew several times and stand when others were sitting.

There's a good description of him by Boswell on Good Friday 1773: 'On the ninth of April, being Good Friday, I breakfasted with him on tea and cross-buns...He carried me with him to the church of St Clement Danes where he had his seat; and his behaviour was, as I had imaged to myself, solemnly devout. I never shall forget the tremulous earnestness with which he pronounced the awful petition in the Litany; "In the hour of death, and at the day of judgement, good Lord deliver us." We went to church both in the morning and evening. In the interval between the two services we did not dine; but he read in the Greek new testament...'

This is Samuel Johnson, a man who, remember, said, 'I have generally a meat pie on a Sunday. It is baked at a public oven, one man can attend it and the advantage is obtained of not keeping servants from church...'

I must add here that Johnson found it difficult to take pleasure in public worship. He felt he ought to go to church more often but he was too frequently perturbed by the 'provocations,' he said, 'given by ignorant and affected preachers' and found himself 'apt to whisper to myself on such occasions.'

So here we have a man who went to church, believed in others going to church but yet cut a straight line to God when praying. What I think this tells us about Johnson is that he had a view of himself – a view that balanced rather well. He knew he was gifted – with a gift large enough, he felt, to have come straight from God. He knew too that such gifts brought an equally great responsibility – and he needed help with it from the source of the gift; because he knew that his enemy was his own human weakness and that in order to overcome that weakness he needed constant direct touch with his maker from Whom, as Johnson reminded himself often, all gifts come.

Seen against the conduct of general religious practice, all this lights Johnson from the side and we see a new figure, a figure who compares with the great painters of the renaissance. We may view him as devotional in print as, say, Cima, or Tintoretto or Vivarini were in paint – a man who, thematically, inside himself, and in his public utterances pronounced openly his own devotional attitude.

Seen against the conduct of less talented mortals one might consider his direct appeals to God as immodest, or lacking in humility. Why does a canon of saints, a galaxy of angels exist? Why do the family of God have such prominence? You could argue that they permit people to be effective in their supplication while retaining due modesty – just as the French who lived near the source of the Seine near

Dijon carved little statues showing their ailments and then sent them floating down the waters to Sequanna, the god of the river; just as in Greek churches we see little tin icons of human organs and limbs.

James Joyce said there was no one in any of his novels worth more than a hundred pounds in their personal fortunes. Organised religions such as the one I was brought up in, Irish Roman Catholicism, stressed the church and the communion of saints as a primary, indeed an essential means, of assisting worship. Canonisation and beatification even laid an emphasis on the humble backgrounds of the candidates. Thus was a broad base achieved offering a general empowerment.

None of that for Johnson. He knew where his humility lay. It lay not in his communion as a general worshipper, even though he did partake of the church as a devout member. But, to gauge him from the language of his prayers, he saw himself as worthy of a greater relationship. He was much amused on his tour to Scotland when he found himself the greatest man in England after Lord Mansfield, as a Scottish innkeeper told him (Lord Mansfield, a law luminary, being a local boy made good). And being Johnson, and being ever sensible of human frailty, he respected with all possible zeal the God who had made him even the second most famous man in the land. This was a man who, while supporting all his friends, and tending them and bailing them out and showing them love and affection in the most practical ways, turned not to Man but to God when he himself needed help.

That, of course, is what tells us how he saw himself, and it gives us valuable information about the nature of greatness. Those who have made a significant contribution to their society – by which I mean a contribution as remarkable as Johnson's – have always raised a central question in me: did they know they were great? For one reason and another I have spent a great deal of time in the past among sportsmen and I have always been interested to hear their view of the feats for which they have been lionised. Usually we never hear the view because language is not how they express themselves. Once or twice I have been lucky enough to meet someone who can put the deed into words.

Some years ago I found myself on a television programme with George Best. He had long retired from football. After the broadcast we were chatting and I asked him about a goal he had scored against Chelsea. He was facing goal and the Chelsea left-back, Ron 'Chopper' Harris, was facing him, some thirty yards out. The ball came in over Best's right shoulder, he brought it down on his right instep and with his left foot buried it in the net, a magnificent goal. I asked him if he knew he could do that and he said, 'Not until I saw it later on television.' But – and here is the point – he wondered as the ball came in whether he could do it and was not at all surprised that he could. There was a natural knowingness about him as he said this to me, not just a self-confidence, not a cockiness – just a natural knowledge that this was something he was able to do.

I believe that is what defines greatness – the knowledge deep in your soul that you are set apart, and I believe it is always accompanied by at the very least some sense of a devotional morality which the possessor of the greatness may or may not ever express but certainly privately or secretly owns. I believe they know they have been given a gift by some higher power and they feel in a sense custodians, responsible to and for that gift. And that spiritual dimension may finally be the last movement, that last swirl that – when added to brilliance, intuition, intellectual organisation towards their particular gift – that pitches a person forward into that realm whose defining word is too over-used, the word, 'genius.'

Tintoretto had it. Look at his crucifixion in the Scuola San Rocco in Venice and ask yourself if you can ever again think of either painting or the events of Good Friday 33 A.D. in the same way. When we look at Piero della Francesca's resurrection in San Sepolcro we know from the eyes of the man who has risen that this is the son of God and he now, one leg atop the tombstone, comes to take his place beside His Father. Mozart had it – it was general in him. As it was in Bach. In some it was particular unto certain works: Monteverdi in his Vespers; Errol Garner's left hand playing jazz; Jesse Owen's versatility and co-ordination over the hurdles; Muhammad Ali's speed; Bonnard's wife portraits; Matisse's colours

of the Mediterranean; Joyce's labyrinthineness; one piece of fabric by Sonia Delaunay; Jane Austen's pace. And, of course, of course and *always*, Shakespeare.

These are examples of genius informed, I think, by that quiet power of knowing whether they ever let on they knew it. But had they all been devout as Johnson was, and had they all left an intimate record of devotion as Johnson did, I think we would find in them that central thrust of relationship which said that they felt – in all humility – spoken directly to by God, and therefore could speak back to Him. That is my interpretation of the direct address in Johnson's prayers.

And almost as an aside, isn't it interesting that the greatest prose writer of his day, the first true solo lexicographer of the English language, should also have an output that contained devotional expression? Others such as Donne and George Herbert are rightly known and hailed for the spiritual content and inspiration in their work – but one is not surprised by them in this. Not least, I suppose, because they were clergymen. How many laymen – and Johnson in all his awareness and paradoxical wordliness was certainly that – how many laymen regarded it as natural to include religious expression in their output?

Not many spring to mind and when they do they are memorable – as was, say, C.S. Lewis, T.S. Eliot and in stained-glass glimpses, John Betjeman. What made Johnson memorable too (and I must temper my enthusiasm for this aspect of him with this fact) was that he was among the first of the major writers in English, working in a relatively new language a few mere centuries after French had been the language of the court.

Which leads me directly to Johnson's genius. I have established that he was devout and meant to be. I have established that his devoutness was conducted between himself and God – he accepted no substitutes. I have argued that in this we find the demonstration of his central belief in his own greatness. Only the great giver of such a great gift was appropriate in giving aid to the beneficiary of that gift. And I have established that his love of God was as much a part of his life as his love of Man.

His genius was born of that love. He prepared for us one of the greatest means of ordering our lives in that he laid out for us the language we use. The language that Johnson used contained no ambiguity and he showed by such example that there need be no ambiguity in expression. That simple, pure but muscular English that he used gave and still gives the lie to the old anthropological notion that Man used to communicate telepathically but then invented language in order to be able to lie.

When we read the elderly Dr Johnson in a letter to James Boswell, 'Let us pray for each other and hope to see one another yet from time to time with mutual delight'; or years earlier, 'You will, perhaps, wish to ask, what study I would recommend. I shall not speak of theology, because it ought not to be considered as a question whether you shall endeavour to know the will of God.' He goes on, 'This dissipation of thought, of which you complain, is nothing more than the vacillation of a mind suspended between different motives, and changing its direction as any motive gains or loses strength.' A short lesson in how to write both wisely and lovingly.

When Goldsmith died, Johnson wrote to Boswell; 'He died of a fever, made, I am afraid, more violent by uneasiness of mind. His debts began to be heavy, and all his resources were exhausted. Sir Joshua [Reynolds] is of opinion that he owed not less than two thousand pounds. Was ever poet so trusted before?' Look at the range of comment in that last sentence.

To his step-daughter Lucy Porter he wrote many letters; they are full of love and affection, paternal, avuncular, familial, anxious on her behalf, anxious for her health and well-being and good spirits; and they are full of that honesty which Johnson used English so well to display.

'November 16, 1775; Dear Madam, This week I came home from Paris. I have brought you a little box, which I thought pretty; but I know not whether it is properly a snuff-box, or a box for some other use. I will send it, when I can find an opportunity.'

To your ancestor, Mr Chairman, Mrs Thrale, when she talked of meeting someone she disliked; 'Nothing is more common than mutual dislike, where mutual approbation is particularly expected. There is often on both sides a vigilance not over-benevolent; and as attention is strongly excited, so that nothing

drops unheeded, any difference in taste or opinion, and some difference where there is no restraint will commonly appear, immediately generates dislike.'

Who can speak of Johnson and not mention the letter to Lord Chesterfield, of which we each have our favourite sentences? 'The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary and cannot impart it; till I am known and do not want it.' A lesson in how to push a man off a bandwagon.

And – although I could go on and on – one last example, appropriately a prayer and so moving. This was found in his papers when he died but he had written it thirty-two years and eight months earlier, in April 1752 after midnight about five weeks after his wife died. He had obviously been sleepless again and feeling down and haunted. 'O Lord! Governour of heaven and earth, in Whose hands are embodied and departed spirits, if Thou has ordained the Souls of the dead to minister to the Living, and appointed my departed Wife to have care of me, grant that I may enjoy the good effects of her attention and ministration, whether exercised by appearance, impulses, dreams or in any other manner agreeable to thy Government. Forgive my presumption, enlighten my ignorance, and however meaner agents are employed, grant me the blessed influences of Thy holy Spirit.'

How to mourn and how to cope with the ghosts of those we have loved.

Some years ago I wrote about Johnson and in the course of it moved from a prejudiced view of him to the open affection you now observe that I hold. I should think he was exasperating too, and rude and many things that made him a difficult human being. In the course of the writing I performed a most interesting exercise. I took the work of his that I was tracing – his *Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* – and I copy-typed several pages, to get closer to his prose style, to move in on him, so to speak. Then, impertinently but permissibly, I attempted to edit him – and found I could not get a razor blade between the words. His economy was and remains extraordinary. No meaning of his was ever obscured by a word; his language was like an engine which, as we famously know, is allowed no superfluous parts.

That clarity of communication, which puts one man in touch so comprehensively and unobfuscatingly with the rest of us, is another kind of genius too – a genius of spirit. Note the word – spirit. From which it is a logical step to 'devout'. Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen – for the 214th anniversary of his death I give you the *devout* Dr Johnson and I thank you for having given me the opportunity to do so.



12th January 1999

**BOOKS AND THE IMAGINATION: ARABELLA, DAVID HUME, AND THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY READERS OF HISTORY AND FICTION**

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It is a poor idea of fantasy which takes it to be a world apart from reality, a world clearly showing its unreality. Fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with. (Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 1971, p. 85).

**Introduction**

**I**N his *Dictionary*, under the entry 'Author', Samuel Johnson lists four definitions: 1) 'The first beginner or mover of any thing; he to whom any thing owes its original'; 2) 'The efficient; he that effects or produces any thing'; 3) 'The first writer of any thing; distinguished from the *translator* or *compiler*'; 4) 'a writer in general'. This wonderful progression from Heaven to Grub Street, backed with a variety of examples from Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Newton, the Bible, etc. reminds us once more how self-conscious eighteenth century 'authors' were.<sup>1</sup> Their narcissism found its most typical expressions in the relation they establish with their readers, and in their attitude towards the demarcation between reality and fantasy. In his *Social History of Art* of 1951 Arnold Hauser described this combination in terms that are now classic: 'The author treats the reader as an intimate friend and addresses himself to him in a direct, so to say, vocative style. His tone is constrained, nervous, embarrassed, as if he were always speaking about himself. He identifies himself with his hero and blurs the dividing line between fiction and reality'.<sup>2</sup>

The novels of both Samuel Richardson and Laurence Sterne, to whom Hauser is alluding, have been widely studied in this connection; in fact, this approach has become almost standard for the study of eighteenth-century novels. In this paper I focus on the relation between reality and fantasy at another level, by considering the ways the reader's perceptions and sympathetic responses to historical and fictional writings were reflected on – described, explained, mocked, satirised – in an eighteenth-century novel, Charlotte Lennox' *The Female Quixote* of 1752, and in contemporary works on human perceptions and passions in the tradition of the 'science of human nature', in particular David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, of 1739-40.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: 1755).

<sup>2</sup> A. Hauser, *The Social History of Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, 1st edn 1951), in 4 vols., vol. 3, pp. 65-6. On the boundary between reality and fantasy in Sterne see also J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger with the assistance of F. Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989, 2nd edn), p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> I shall cite *The Female Quixote*, ed. by M. Dalziel, with an Introduction by M. A. Doody (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn revised by P. H. Niddich (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).



Writers like Hume had much to say on facts and illusions, history and fiction, and the criteria by which we assess our perceptions and beliefs. Today we consider this sort of discussion as belonging to 'philosophy' – to epistemology and philosophy of mind, in fact; and they are treated accordingly in the secondary literature. At the time, however, study of such matters as our perceptions and beliefs was thought of as constituting a 'science of human nature' (as Hume himself, among others, called it): a study associated with natural history, with medicine, with history, and with the 'polite' and 'conversable' sympathetic interest in other people, as well as with metaphysics and moral philosophy. Writings in this tradition constitute, I think, another, and more analytically organised reflexive moment of the eighteenth-century culture of feeling. As such, in this paper I suggest that we regard them as both a fact deserving historical attention and explanation, and a most appropriate instrument of interpretation.

### Historical reading

I would like to begin by illustrating how the 'science of human nature' accounted for a reader's perceptions and beliefs. To do so, let me consider a page of Hume's *Treatise* on the nature of a reader's belief in a historical event narrated in a book. The context is a crucial part of Hume's philosophy, and one that is still of interest to philosophers, namely the analysis of the ideas of cause and effect. Hume is discussing the nature and operation of belief, in particular our belief in the link between cause and effect and the transference of belief which occurs from the present sense impression of the cause to the idea of the as yet absent effect.

The discussion starts off by showing that, as in all 'hypothetical arguments, or reasonings upon supposition', when our inferences from cause to effect carry us beyond what is actually present to either our senses or memory, our mind still refers to a direct perception, that is, to an actual or remembered impression:

Tho' the mind in its reasonings from causes or effects carries its view beyond those objects, which it sees or remembers, it must never lose sight of them entirely, nor reason merely upon its own ideas, without some mixture of impressions, or at least of ideas of the memory, which are equivalent to impressions. (T/82)

Of course, this reference to an impression of the memory or senses may be mediated – in fact, it may be at the end of quite a long chain:

When we infer effects from causes, we must establish the existence of these causes [...] either by an immediate perception of our memory or sense, or by an inference from other causes; which causes again we must ascertain in the same manner, either by a present impression, or by an inference from *their* causes, and so on, till we arrive at some object, which we see or remember [...] (T/82-3)

Hume is interested in belief as the special emotional colour, the particularly lively and firm 'manner of conception', as he calls it (T/628-9, T/97, etc.), of a certain idea. The example he presents is belief in historical matters, in particular in the assassination of Julius Caesar – here a longer quotation is helpful:

To give an instance of this, we may chuse any point of history, and consider for what reason we either believe or reject it. Thus we believe that CÆSAR was kill'd in the senate-house on the *ides of March*; and that because this fact is establish'd on the unanimous testimony of historians, who agree to assign this precise time and place to that event. Here are certain characters and letters present either to our memory or senses; which characters we likewise remember to have

been us'd as the signs of certain ideas; and these ideas were either in the minds of such as were immediately present at that action, and receiv'd the ideas directly from its existence; or they were deriv'd from the testimony of others, and that again from another testimony, by a visible gradation, 'till we arrive at those who were eye-witnesses and spectators of the event. 'Tis obvious all this chain of argument or connexion of causes and effects, is at first founded on those characters and letters, which are seen or remember'd, and that without the authority either of the memory or senses our whole reasoning wou'd be chimerical and without foundation. Every link of the chain wou'd in that case hang upon another; but there wou'd not be any thing fix'd to one end of it, capable of sustaining the whole; and consequently there would be no belief nor evidence. (T/83)

Our belief in the event of Caesar's assassination, that is, the specially lively manner in which we conceive it, depends on the vivacity of the sense impressions that we, as readers, have of the characters on the page of our history book. It is based on the transference of emotional vivacity from the present impression of black signs on white paper, to the idea of knives in the hero's flesh – the connection between them being the long tradition of reports and records, which we conceive as a part of the historical fact – indeed, I suggest, as its very historicity.<sup>4</sup>

Let me now move away from the *Treatise* and the 'science of human nature', to consider the readers' reactions to different kinds of books – historical, or fictional.

#### Matters of fact and falsehood – or, two spirited young ladies

... he that writes without Intention to be credited, must write to little Purpose; for what Pleasure or Advantage can arise from Facts that never happened? What Examples can be afforded by the Patience of those who never suffered, or the Chastity of those who were never solicited? The great End of History, is to shew how much human Nature can endure or perform. [...] Prove, therefore, that the Books which I have hitherto read as Copies of Life, and Models of Conduct, are empty Fictions, and from this Hour I deliver them to Moths and Mould (pp. 376-7).

These are the words with which Arabella, the young female Quixote in Lennox' novel, expresses her abhorrence for the books which have guided her life to that point, if it turns out that they are romance rather than history. Her inflamed rhetoric is telling both of her familiarity with the lofty style of romance, and of her aptness to 'quick' and 'wild' – that is, romantic – imaginations. Less romantic young ladies were likely to react more moderately to such things and in fact, on occasion, even to take the opposite line. Consider the following vignette:

I remember I was once desired by a young beauty, for whom I had some passion, to send her some novels and romances for her amusement in the country; but was not so ungenerous as to take the advantage, which such a course of reading might have given me, being resolved not to make use of poisoned arms against her. I therefore sent her PLUTARCH's lives, assuring her, at the same time, that there was not a word of truth in them from beginning to end. She perused them very attentively, 'till she came to the lives of ALEXANDER and CAESAR, whose names she had heard by accident; and then returned me the book, with many reproaches for deceiving her.

<sup>4</sup> On this passage of the *Treatise* see G. E. M. Anscombe, 'Hume and Julius Caesar' (*From Parmenides to Wittgenstein: Collected Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), pp. 86-92); and D. W. Livingston, 'Anscombe, Hume and Julius Caesar', *Analysis* 35, 1974, pp. 13-19.

This is from Hume's essay 'Of the study of history'.<sup>5</sup> Novels and romances are, the author laments, favourites of 'the fair sex': it is a pity that they should 'have such an aversion to matter of fact, and such an appetite for falsehood'. Perhaps it depends, he suggests, on the predominance fiction attributes to love among men's passions, and to the flattering image they offer of men's characters and behaviour.<sup>6</sup>

These two passages are revealing in various respects. First, they offer an interesting representation of a certain category of readers, polite young women, and of their reading and intellectual life. Consider how much power is attributed to the influence of fictional writings – romances and novels alike – on women's behaviour, by turning their brains or softening their hearts. This is a residue, I think, of the approach of the seventeenth-century physiological treatments of reading in terms of the vivacity of the animal spirits.<sup>7</sup> Also note the emphasis on the instructive value of history: in Hume's words, its study is 'the best suited' to women, being at once 'more instructive than their ordinary books of amusement, and more entertaining than those serious compositions which are usually found in their closets' (p. 563).<sup>8</sup> Finally it is interesting that to start with both young ladies were mistaken about what their books were, and that the discovery of this mistake causes them to give up the reading. So, on the one hand history and fiction are totally different: for historical writing is about 'matters of fact', while romance and novels are about 'falsehood'.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, they may be similar enough to be easily mistaken for each other by naïve readers.

Let me now resort to some more 'science of human nature' to see if this pattern of differences and similarities can be clarified. This time I shall look at the diverse ways the operations of the imagination were said to combine with the operations of perception and of memory.

### Three towns and the imagination

Ideas are, according to Hume, exact, if paler copies of former impressions of the senses or of passions: thinking comes after, and reproduces feeling. This is, as he puts it, a general maxim of his science of

<sup>5</sup> First published in 1741. The citation is from *Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1985), p. 564.

<sup>6</sup> For the role of love in romance and novels, with the consequent power attributed to women, see for example J. Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist From Aphra Benn to Jane Austen*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), esp. ch. 6, pp. 181 ff.

<sup>7</sup> See A. Johns, 'The physiology of reading in Restoration England', in J. Raven, H. Small and N. Tadmor (eds.), *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 138-161, for the seventeenth century; and, for the later period, G. S. Rousseau, 'Nerves, spirits and fibres: towards defining the origins of sensibility', *Blue Guitar* 2 (1976): 125-53, and G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1992), pp. 15-23 for the later period. For the traces of this approach in Hume's *Treatise* see below.

<sup>8</sup> This is a relatively common opinion: see for example Mrs Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (London 1773), letter 10, 'On the Manner and Course of Reading History'. This also means that to some extent history, as a kind of reading, belongs together with 'books of amusement', representing the intellectual top of the reading range of a certain category of readers. For example from Boswell's diary, 22 January 1763, we know that Hume's *History of England*, all six volumes of it, together with 'novels and books of a slighter nature', are suitable reading for a period of forced rest due to ill health (Frederick A. Pottle (ed.), *Boswell's London Journal 1762-1773* (London: William Heinemann, 1950), p. 165); in Isaac Watts, *Improvement of the Mind; or a Supplement to the Art of Logic* (London 1800, 1st edn, 1741), pp. 44 ff., history is lumped together with 'poesy, travels, books of diversion or amusement', including newspapers and periodical essays, and contrasted to treatises, 'whereby we design to improve the intellectual powers of the mind with natural, moral, or divine knowledge' (p. 51).

<sup>9</sup> They consist of a combination of fantasy and history, in the case of romances, and of fiction and verisimilitude, in the case of novels: for a rich collection of sources see I. Williams (ed.), *Novel and Romance 1700-1800: A Documentary Record* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), part nos. 2, 24, and 80.

human nature. But strictly speaking this applies in a direct, straightforward way only to simple perceptions: 'many of our complex ideas never had impressions, that corresponded to them, and [...] many of our complex impressions never are exactly copied in ideas'. This is clarified by an illustration:

I can imagine to myself such a city as the *New Jerusalem*, whose pavement is gold and walls are rubies, tho' I never saw any such. I have seen *Paris*; but shall I affirm that I can form such an idea of that city, as will perfectly represent all its streets and houses in their real and just proportions? (T/3)

The readers Hume was addressing were likely to have had perceptions of Paris at some stage or other, and to have memories. On the other hand, they may have been able to imagine the New Jerusalem from, say, pictures of ideal towns. In this sense the complex ideas of both the perceived and remembered Paris and the fantasised New Jerusalem may be taken to copy impressions; but they are also both imagined, insofar as they are both constructed by the imagination as a sort of patchwork of former impressions taken to some extent out of context.

Perhaps we may regard both the New Jerusalem and this Paris reconstructed by the imagination as emblems of fictional writing: the New Jerusalem as an emblem of romance and its fantasy, and Paris as an emblem of the novel and its verisimilitude – as an emblem of history and its adherence to matters of fact we may take Rome.<sup>10</sup> Does the use of the imagination I just sketched apply to account for the readers' reactions to historical and fictional writings? In the writings of eighteenth-century critics, for example Lord Kames, the negotiability of the border between reality and fiction and the mechanism and operations of belief take the particular form, as Patricia Meyer Spacks has aptly put it, of an interest in the 'emotional intensity' of writings.<sup>11</sup> In his *Elements of Criticism* of 1762 Kames writes that

even genuine history has no command over our passions but by ideal presence only; and consequently [...] in this respect it stands upon the same footing with fable [...] what effect either may have to raise our sympathy, depends on the vivacity of the ideas they raise; and with respect to that circumstance, fable is generally more successful than history.<sup>12</sup>

So whether the writings are historical or fictional we are moved by the imagination only, which turns us from readers into spectators of the event being narrated; and frequently it is in fictional writings that we find the more inspiring pages.<sup>13</sup> Kames' account of the 'ideal presence' sounds very close to Hume's description of the role of the imagination in the page on the two towns: we conceive Paris and the New Jerusalem without reference to any actual town as such, and the imagined 'existence' they possess in our thought is some quality of liveliness that we perceive during the evocation of ideas – so much so that in

<sup>10</sup> Of course this suggests some crucial role of the imagination in historical truthfulness as well.

<sup>11</sup> See P. Meyer Spacks, *Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-Century English Novels* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 26 and 46-7.

<sup>12</sup> *Elements of Criticism*, 1762, pp. 95-6 (the whole of Part 1, Chapter 2, section vii, 'Emotions caused by fiction', is relevant in this connection). Cf. Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), pp. 181-2.

<sup>13</sup> Clara Reeve puts it even more specifically: 'The effects of Romance, and true History are not very different. When the imagination is raised, men do not stand to enquire whether the motive be true or false'. Romance is just as good as history in inspiring men to perform great actions, and in this sense the character of Don Quixote, 'with all its virtues and absurdities', is, she suggests, 'more respectable, and more amiable' than many a respectable bourgeois 'wholly immersed in low, grovelling, effeminate, or mercenary pursuits'. Similarly in her opinion one's reactions to Pamela's cases, however fictional, are a good test of the quality of one's heart and feelings. (See C. Reeve, *The Progress of Romance* (London: 1785), vol. 1, pp. 101-3, 106, 135.)

Hume's passage the New Jerusalem has a more convincing tinge and feels more, as it were, 'existent' than Paris, on account of those pavements of gold and walls of rubies, which inevitably capture our imagination more (and afford us more 'ideal presence') than the flat reference to the 'streets and houses' in Paris.<sup>14</sup>

And yet, we still think of Paris, of the New Jerusalem, and of Rome in different ways; and both to Hume's young beauty and to Arabella knowing whether their books tell them true stories does make a difference – indeed they both stop reading when it turns out that things were not as they thought in this respect. Hume explains that the operation of the imagination is affected by the knowledge that what one is reading is a true story:

If one person sits down to read a book as a romance, and another as a true history, they plainly receive the same ideas, and in the same order; nor does the incredulity of the one, and the belief of the other hinder them from putting the very same sense upon their author. His words produce the same ideas in both; tho' his testimony has not the same influence on them. The latter has a more lively conception of all the incidents... (T/97-8).

Hume is suggesting that the flavour of reality sharpens the reader's imagination and adds colour to the story – one believes it, as it were, in a different manner.<sup>15</sup> He is implying here a distinction between the liveliness of the 'incidents' being conceived, and the 'more lively conception' of those incidents – the liveliness of the idea of an amazing, but non-existent New Jerusalem, as distinct from the liveliness of our conceiving a perhaps relatively dull Paris, but as existing out there – that is, between the liveliness of the mental content and the liveliness of the operation of the mind conceiving it. It is the second which, Hume is intimating, makes the difference between reading history and reading fiction: it is the second which explains the refusal, for opposite reasons, of the young beauty to go on reading his Plutarch, and of Arabella to go on reading her romances. Arabella's case, however, also shows that these two kinds of liveliness are not always distinguished as neatly as one might wish.

#### Arabella and the Quixotic mistake

Lennox's *The Female Quixote* derives its very structure from the definitions of history, romances, and novels, on the basis of their contrasting attitudes to reality.<sup>16</sup> The protagonist Arabella is a fine young lady deriving all her knowledge of life from intensive reading of bad English translations of famous seventeenth-century French romances (La Calprenède's 12-or-so volumes blockbusters *Cleopatra*, *Cassandra* and *Pharamond*, Madeleine de Scudéry's *Clelia* and *Artamenes*, etc.), which she takes for 'real Pictures of Life'.<sup>17</sup> Obvious difficulties arise when she leaves the isolated environment in which she has been brought up. Believing love to be 'the ruling Principle of the World', she interprets everything in romantic terms, in a dream of female power: every trifling incident is the beginning of an adventure, every stranger a ravisher trying to abduct her, every servant a prince in disguise ready to die for her, and

<sup>14</sup> See Spacks, *Desire and Truth*, pp. 26 and 46-7, on Kames; on Hume, the discussions in J. Bennett, *Locke Berkeley Hume. Central Themes*, pp. 294 ff., and C. V. Salmon, 'The Central Problem of David Hume's Philosophy: An Essay toward a Phenomenological Interpretation of the First Book of the Treatise of Human Nature', *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* X, 1929, 299-449.

<sup>15</sup> See also Hume, *Treatise*, pp. 630-2.

<sup>16</sup> See L. Langbauer, 'Romance revised: Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*', *Novel* 18, 1984, pp. 29-49; and Spacks, *Desire and Truth*, ch. 1, pp. 12-33.

<sup>17</sup> Arabella is, it has been acutely observed, 'a novelist's fantasy of wish-fulfilment. She is the ideal reader, completely given over the sway of the text, attesting to the power of romance, a power the novelist desires for her form too' (Langbauer, 'Romance revisited', p. 30).

so on. She behaves accordingly, driving her aspiring fiancé near to distraction with her blunders and with her uncompromising insistence on a silent and heroic devotion.<sup>18</sup> A kind Countess, taken with Arabella's beauty and intelligence in all but one matter, tries to sort her out. She explains to Arabella that 'adventures' are nothing a virtuous and sensible woman wishes for herself nowadays, and that romance is no good guide to behaviour because 'Custom [...] changes the very Nature of Things, and what was honourable a thousand Years ago, may probably be look'd upon as infamous now' (pp. 327-8). This line of argument does not yet win Arabella's assent: for this she needs no less than a real adventure. In imitation of de Scudéry's divine Clelia, she escapes a supposed abduction by throwing herself in the Thames, and is nearly drowned. Following this a wise and learned Divine manages to sober her views by means of a full discussion of romance and history.<sup>19</sup> They dispute about historical truth in a very learned vein:

Your Ladyship knows, I suppose to what Authors these Writings are ascrib'd? To the *French Wits* of the last Century, said *Arabella*. And at what Distance, Madam, are the Facts related in them from the Age of the Writer? I was never exact in my Computation, replied *Arabella*; but I think most of the Events happen'd about two thousand Years ago. How then, Madam, resum'd the Doctor, could these Events be so minutely known to Writers so remote from the Time in which they happen'd? (p. 375)

The Doctor is suggesting that precisely the richness of detail which makes the events of romances so lively to the imagination, and therefore so easily taken for real facts, is what makes their truthfulness so unlikely.

Let me resort again to the science of human nature. According to Hume,

among the vulgar, quacks and projectors meet with a more easy faith upon account of their magnificent pretensions, than if they kept themselves within the bounds of moderation (T/129).

The reason is, he says, that the very amazement caused by their unbelievable reports 'so vivifies and enlivens the idea, that it resembles the inferences we draw from experience', thus producing what we may call a functional equivalent of belief. When they pivot their fictions around historical characters or situations, poets rely on another variety of transference of belief:

The several incidents of a piece acquire a kind of relation by being united into one poem or representation; and if any of these incidents be an object of belief, it bestows a force and vivacity on the others, which are related to it (T/122).

<sup>18</sup> On romance as fantasy of female power, and on Arabella's predicament, trapped between being a female Quixote and renounce both power, and the possibility of having a story, see in particular L. E. Warren, 'Of the conversation of women: *The Female Quixote* and the dream of perfection', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 11, 1982, pp. 367-80 (esp. pp. 371 ff.); J. Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Benn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), (esp. ch. 6, pp. 181 ff.); and D. Ross, 'Mirror, mirror: the didactic dilemma of *The Female Quixote*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 27, 1987, pp. 455-73.

<sup>19</sup> For Johnson's authorship of the chapter, first suggested by J. Mitford in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (N.S. XX, Aug 1843, p. 132, and XXI, Jan 1844, p. 41), see M. Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), pp. 2 ff., 79-92; D. Isles, 'Johnson and Charlotte Lennox', *The New Rambler* series C, no. 34, 1967, pp. 34-48 (esp. p. 43). See also M. Dalziel's note in her edition of FQ, pp. 414 f., and Isles' appendix to it 'Johnson, Richardson, and *The Female Quixote*', p. 422, expressing opposite views.



This is the basis of a whole series of possible errors and misunderstandings which, for the sake of brevity, we may identify as 'Quixotic'; and Arabella is a female Quixote because of her inability to tell the mixture of history and fantasy in her books.<sup>20</sup> Such a lively imagination as Arabella's may indeed come close to a form of madness – and here is a description of this borderline between a lively imagination and folly which seems tailor-made for her case:

When the imagination, from any extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits, acquires such a vivacity as disorders all its powers and faculties, there is no means to distinguish betwixt truth and falsehood [...] Every chimera of the brain is as vivid and intense as any of those inferences, which we formerly dignify'd with the name of conclusions concerning matters of fact, and sometimes as the present impressions of the senses (T/123).

So Arabella's problem is that she lets the liveliness of the content of her romances bring about that other kind of liveliness, the liveliness of conception that Hume identifies with belief.

### Conclusion

To the Doctor's last question – how do authors writing so long after the events have such detailed knowledge of them? – Arabella can provide a very good answer, which in turn triggers a series of unanswerable questions:

By Records, Monuments, Memoirs, and Histories, answered the Lady. – But by what Accident, then, said the Doctor smiling, did it happen these Records and Monuments were kept universally secret to Mankind till the last Century? What brought all the Memoirs of the remotest Nations and earliest Ages only to *France*? Where were they hidden that none could consult them but a few and obscure Authors? And wither are they now vanished again that they can be found no more? (p. 375)

So Arabella's brain was 'turned' because she had failed to practice the sensible rules of source criticism:

How is any oral, or written Testimony, confuted or confirmed? – By comparing it, says the Lady, with the Testimony of others, or with the natural Effects and standing Evidence of the Facts related, and sometimes by comparing it with itself (pp. 377-8).

This criterion, pronounced by Arabella herself, is violated in all sorts of ways in La Calprenède and de Scudéry's stories, where characters unmentioned in any history book appear, and geography and landscape are altered, nations and kingdoms created according to narrative convenience. This is enough to discredit her romances – she is finally convinced.

But romances are not only untruthful, insists the Doctor, they are also absurd and criminal. They are criminal, because they 'inflamm[e] our Passions' to the 'contemplation of Crimes' (p. 380): in their pursuit of personal glory romance heroes and heroines behave like selfish monsters, unmoved even by needless bloodshed (pp. 380-2). And they are absurd, because they lack verisimilitude: 'the only Excellence of Falsehood [...] is its Resemblance to Truth', a criterion that romances fail by definition (p. 378). So

<sup>20</sup> See Spacks, *Desire and Truth*, pp. 22-3, 26, etc. In fact, this is a typical definition of Quixotism: see for example S. Staves, 'Don Quixote in Eighteenth-Century England', *Comparative Literature* 24, 1972, pp. 193-215 (also for further bibliography on the topic). Ross, 'Mirror, mirror', p. 464 contains a good summary of Arabella's situation: 'she believes romance is history – told from a perspective that makes women central figures'.



fantastic narrative is not to be preferred to a narrative constrained by respect of verisimilitude, and heroic virtue is not to be preferred to a less flamboyant, but more humane bourgeois morality. 'Truth – says the Doctor – is not always injured by Fiction': in fact, Richardson in his novels

has found the Way to convey the most solid Instructions, the noblest Sentiments, and the most exalted Piety, in the pleasing Dress of a Novel, and, to use the Words of the greatest Genius of the present Age, 'Has taught the Passions to move at the Command of Virtue' (p. 377).

The genius cited here is Dr Johnson, with whose benediction, if she has now lost *Cleopatra* and *Cassandra*, Arabella may still read the still fictional, but bourgeois and edifying *Clarissa*.

We may add that *Clarissa* is, believe it or not, a far slimmer work than any of Arabella's favoured readings; but what it lacks in pages is more than balanced by Arabella's admission to the polite circle of its readers – so keen on *Clarissa*'s cases, that they talk about her as if she really existed, while their very conversation protects them against the danger of overheating of the imagination, of brain-turning, and in short of Quixotic mistakes.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> On conversation as a remedy against 'turning' of the brain see L. E. Warren, 'Of the conversation of women: *The Female Quixote* and the dream of perfection', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 11, 1982; and on conversation, philosophy, and forms of entertainment see also S. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: the Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 12-13 and 38-39.

13th February 1999

# **17 GOUGH SQUARE**

**Natasha McEnroe**

Chairman: David Parker

*Natasha McEnroe was educated at the University of Greenwich, and has worked for the Victoria and Albert Museum and the National Trust. She has been Curator of Dr Johnson's House, 17 Gough Square, since 1997.*

**W**HEN thinking about Johnson, we tend to associate him with Fleet Street. Fleet Street had long been associated with printers and booksellers. Its connections with literary London made it an obvious place for Johnson to live, and he had ten different residences on or near Fleet Street. He took great pleasure in its 'animated appearance', and Boswell tells us that it had a 'cheerfulness ... owing to the quick succession of people which we perceive passing through it.'

Johnson moved house frequently; often a move would reflect a change in his finances. Boswell describes his own difficulty in finding a lodging that was both pleasant and affordable:

A genteel lodging in a good part of town is absolutely necessary: seeking a lodging is like seeking a wife. Sometimes I aimed at one or two guineas a week, like a rich lady of quality, sometimes one guinea, like a knight's daughter; and at last fixed on £22 a year, like the daughter of a good gentlemen of moderate fortune.

Johnson's first lodgings on arriving in London were with a stay maker in Exeter Street. He moved out of London to Greenwich for a time, in order to finish his play *Irene*, but returned to live in a number of places around Holborn and Fleet Street. After leaving No. 17 Gough Square, he moved to Staple Inn, Gray's Inn, and he had rooms in Inner Temple Lane, the site of Dr Johnson's Buildings which were erected in 1857. In the last years of his life, from 1765 until 1776, he resided at Johnson's Court, named for an Elizabethan tailor of that name, not for Samuel Johnson. Lastly, he moved to Bolt Court, probably named after a vanished tavern called the Bolt-in-Tun. This house had a small garden, with a vine, that Johnson 'took delight in watering'.

According to Boswell, Johnson had seventeen different London addresses, of which No. 17 Gough Square is the only one left standing today. It is situated to the north of Fleet Street (named from the underground river that still flows beneath it today), in an area in which a number of little lanes and courts can be found. Many of these have picturesque names that give us a clue to the occupations of the original inhabitants – Wine Office Court, Hen and Chickens Court, Shoe Lane, Printer Street. Gough Square is a cobbled, pedestrian square, with a visible incline from south to north. At the far side of the square is an acacia tree, underneath the tree is the statue of Hodge, sitting on an edition of the *Dictionary*. The square is lined by reproduction bollards – originally, bollards were made of cannon sunk into the ground, with the shot or cannon ball on the top. Bollards were very important in the eighteenth century, as there was not the distinction of levels between walkway and the main thoroughfare that we have now.

A family of wool merchants named Gough built the square at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Richard Gough was knighted in consequence of his trading with India and China. His son Harry Gough used to boast that he had to reprimand Johnson, who would keep his neighbours awake by walking around the house all night, talking loudly to himself.

Johnson lived at 17 Gough Square from 1748 to 1759, which were essentially the *Dictionary* years. (There is some discussion about when he actually moved in, certainly no earlier than 1746, and no later than 1749.) It is an elegant house, well proportioned and airy, with a surprising amount of light that is explained by the eighteenth-century enthusiasm for having windows in at least two walls. The fact that the House is still standing at all is surprising, but what makes it unique is the almost untouched interiors. The House has much of its original panelling, with many fascinating details such as door furniture and the fanlight still intact.

One detail of which we are very fond is our eighteenth-century anti-burglar devices. The fanlight has a bar with spikes placed horizontally behind it, and this was to prevent child house breakers from being lowered into the house. Another technique, when thwarted by the bar, would be to lower a rod to attempt to hook up the chain behind the door. So there is a metal corkscrew that takes two hands to untwist the chain from. The heavy chain on the front door would doubtless have been used to prevent the bailiffs from entering on more than one occasion, as during the end of his stay at Gough Square Johnson suffered from extreme poverty.

As you enter the House through the main front door, the first thing that you notice is the impressive balustraded staircase. The staircase runs from the basement up to the famous garret where the *Dictionary* was written. The panelling that runs throughout the house is made of pine, which comes from Virginia. It was brought back in the trading ships from the colonies as ballast. The frame of the House, however, is also pine, possibly from the Balkans. On the two lower floors, the framework is concealed, but it is left uncovered as you go up through the House.

Another feature of architectural interest is the panelling on the first floor. On the first three floors, the layout consists of a landing with two large rooms opening off each side of it. However, on the first floor the doors that divide the floor incorporate two large panels which accommodate two doors each. These panels could be folded back either against the window or toward the stairs so that when open the entire first floor could be used as one open space. Sadly, these moving panels are no longer in use, but there are plans afoot to have them conserved so that we would be able to use them in the way that the architect intended.

Johnson rented the house very much as a place of work as well as being a home. He had been commissioned to write the *Dictionary* by a syndicate of booksellers in 1746, and had been paid a lump sum of 1500 guineas. Much of this sum was spent on expenses and the wages of his assistants. Gough Square was situated near his printer William Strahan, and boasted a large room at the top of the house which was ideal for a workroom. Sadly, Johnson didn't meet Boswell until four years after he left Gough Square, so we do not have the benefit of Boswell's obsessive diary keeping about the details of the house. We do know that the garret was laid out with long trestle tables, where Johnson and his six amanuenses organised the definitions on their slips of paper.

One of the more humorous episodes that has been recorded during the time that the *Dictionary* was being compiled was a discussion between Johnson and one of the amanuenses, Robert Shiels about the poet Thomson. Johnson had his reservations about Thomson, and to prove a point, pulled down a volume and read out a long passage. 'Is this not very fine?' he demanded, and Shiels agreed enthusiastically. 'Well,' said Johnson in triumph, 'I have missed out every other line.'

The work was finally finished in 1755, and Johnson sent off the last set of proofs to his long suffering bookseller, Andrew Miller. Johnson asked the messenger what Miller had said, and was told he had exclaimed 'Thank God I have done with him.' 'I am glad,' said Johnson heavily, 'That he thanks God for anything.'

Johnson's residences were never particularly luxurious. He was hard on his furniture, and very little of it survived his lifetime. Charles Burney once visited Johnson, and described how he, as the guest, was given the one whole chair in the room – Johnson himself was unconcernedly propped up on a chair with only three legs and one arm.

There are large fireplaces in each room, wood was purchased in bundles and stored, and coal was bought from the street. In Johnson's day, water would also have been bought from the street, although they wouldn't have needed very much. No water was used for drinking, and washing would be limited to hands and face in a basin. Pots would be kept under beds, and in discreet corners, and there may well have been a privy over a cesspit under the basement stairs, or out in the area, which would have been cleared out by the night soil men at intervals.

Despite being a moderately successful writer, Johnson still found it hard to make enough money for himself and Tetty to live comfortably. He tried to follow the advice of a Birmingham friend on how to live well on £30 a year. The largest item was £10 for 'clothes and linen', otherwise:

a man might live in a garret at eighteen-pence a week, few people would inquire where he lodged; and if they did, it was easy to say, 'Sir, I am to be found at such a place.' By spending three-pence in a coffee-house he might be for some hours every day in very good company; he might dine for six-pence, breakfast on bread and milk for a penny, and do without supper. On *clean-shirt day* he went abroad and paid visits.

Johnson was famously nocturnal, and despite living in the City, kept the hours of the more fashionable West End – that is, not rising until noon, and staying up until the small hours. After dark, the streets were not a safe place to be. In certain areas, footpads, pickpockets and prostitutes abounded, and the darkness held little protection. Link boys – boys with lanterns who could be hired to light your way home – were sometimes in league with the footpads, and would lure the unsuspecting into traps. Johnson often walked late at night, and unusually wasn't attacked very often. Partly, perhaps, as he didn't look very rich, in his shabby brown coat and ill-fitting wig. Also, his great size might make people think twice about accosting him – one occasion he was attacked by four men, but he managed to keep them at bay until the watch arrived. In later years, he took to carrying a club.

However, it is probably safe to presume that, during the *Dictionary* years, he would have kept more regular hours, but for most of his life, he found it difficult to rise early. Friends would visit him in late morning, knowing that he was unlikely to have gone out by that time.

In many ways, Johnson was not a 'home-centred' man – for example, during her lifetime, many of Johnson's friends and acquaintances had never met Tetty. Following her death, several people remarked that little effort was made to make his various residences comfortable, and he appears to have been indifferent to his surroundings. We imagine Johnson's home as somewhere to use as a place to work, store his books, and sleep, and when not working or sleeping, he would be found elsewhere.

Fleet Street had numerous eating houses, from the famous Dolly's Beefsteak House to Mrs Lovett's Pie Shop. Chop houses would often be used when Johnson was entertaining, although sometimes food would be sent out for and brought back to his house ready cooked, but this was unusual. One Easter, Boswell arrived for dinner at Johnson's house, and was surprised to find they were eating at home, but describes a good dinner of soup, boiled leg of lamb, spinach, a veal pie and a rice pudding.

The prevalence of coffee shops never took away from the popularity of taverns, and Johnson always felt at home in an inn:

As soon as I enter the door of a tavern, I experience an oblivion of care, and a freedom from solicitude: when I am seated, I find the master courteous, and the servants obsequious to my call; anxious to know and ready to supply my wants: wine there exhilarates my spirits, and prompts those whom I most love: I dogmatise and am contradicted, and in this conflict of opinions and sentiments I find delight.

Johnson certainly saw his home as fairly elastic, and this can be seen in the way that, following the death of Tetty in 1752, Johnson came to surround himself with a number of needy people that he referred to as his 'family.' From a combination of fear of being alone, and genuine charity, Johnson took financial responsibility for these people, and in many cases they lived with him for years. This household was not always harmonious: 'Williams hates every body; Levett hates Desmoulins, and does not love Williams; Desmoulins hates them both; Poll loves none of them.' And so forth. Another time, Johnson had suggested that Fanny Burney might be able to put his household into a book. 'I wish Miss Burney would come among us; if she would only give us a week, we should furnish her with ample material for a new scene in her next work.'

Francis Barber, Johnson's black servant, was brought to England by the family of some friends of Johnson, the Bathursts, who owned sugar plantations in Jamaica. Frank joined Johnson's household in 1752, soon after Tetty's death. Bathurst was concerned at Johnson being alone at this difficult time, and thought that Frank's company might cheer Johnson up. Johnson took a lifelong interest in Frank and paid for his education. Frank lived with Johnson until Johnson's death, apart from two occasions, one of which was when Frank had joined the Navy, an unusual thing to do – voluntarily – in those days. Johnson had to pull strings to get him released, and pointed out that 'No man will be a sailor who has contrivance to get himself into a jail; for, being in a ship *is* being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned. A man in a jail has more room, better food and commonly better company.' Frank was the main beneficiary of Johnson's will, and was left £70 per year.

Another important member of Johnson's household was Anna Williams. The daughter of an unsuccessful inventor, she came to London aged 21, with already weakened eyesight and she ended up going totally blind. Johnson had arranged for her to have her cataracts operated on, but the operation was unsuccessful. She befriended Mrs Johnson, and nursed her through her last illness, and afterwards continued to live with Johnson, or near him, until her death. She moved about the house confidently, despite her blindness, and managed most of Johnson's domestic affairs. Being taken to tea with Mrs Williams was a symbol of intimacy into Johnson's circle, although her table manners could often turn the stomach of the more fastidious. Boswell describes how, the first time he had dinner with Johnson and Goldsmith, he was left alone as the other two left, Goldsmith calling back smugly: 'I go to tea with Mrs Williams.' Luckily, Boswell himself was soon after admitted into the hallowed intimate circle, although this did not stop him criticising Mrs Williams for dipping her fingers in the teacups to ascertain how full they were. In later years, Anna Williams grew very peevish, and Johnson paid her maid one shilling a week more for putting up with her bad temper.

Dr Levett came to live with Johnson during his time in Gough Square, and probably slept in what is now the Will Room, and what was originally Tetty's bedroom. Dr Levett was a 'Practitioner' – that is, he had no formal medical training, but attempted to learn what he could, and helped the poor who could not afford a proper physician. Levett and Johnson always ate breakfast together, and always in total silence. They had originally met at Old Slaughter's coffee shop, and Johnson had decided that he needed looking after. Levett must have had a sharp tongue, as it was he who described Tetty as: 'always drunk and reading romances in her bed, where she killed herself by taking opium.' However, he seems to have been the least troublesome and expensive member of the household, as he would go out after breakfast, and not reappear until late at night. Johnson says that Levett was the only man he knew who would become intoxicated through prudence – often, if treating a publican's wife, he would accept payment in kind. 'He would swallow what he did not like, nay, what he knew would injure him, rather than go home with an idea, that his skill had been exerted without recompense.'

The House was saved from demolition by the Liberal MP Cecil Harmsworth, who set up the Dr Johnson's House Trust at the turn of the century. It is his grandson, the present Lord Harmsworth, who is chairman of the board of Governors today. The House was opened to the public for the first time in 1912. Many changes had occurred since the time that Dr Johnson left to move to Staple Inn. Amongst other

things, the House had been used as a store room, a printing press and a hotel. By the time that it was discovered by Cecil Harmsworth, it was in such a state of dilapidation that it only seemed fit for demolition. Cecil Harmsworth:

At the time of my purchase of the House in April 1911 it presented every appearance of squalor and decay. Some parts of the fabric were structurally unsound. The roof leaked disastrously; the plaster had fallen large patches from the ceilings and walls; the staircase and several of the floors were unsafe. Every part of the interior was thick with dust and grime. It is doubtful whether in the whole of London there existed a more forlorn and dilapidated tenement.

Acting against the advice of his two brothers, Lord Northcliffe and Viscount Rothermere, Cecil Harmsworth bought Dr Johnson's House and set about restoring it to its formal state of elegance. This was by no means an easy job. Much of the panelling had been taken down and put up again elsewhere in the House. For example, the long garret that covers all of the top story of the House was converted into three bedrooms during the time the House was used as a hotel. It had made sense to maximise the number of bedrooms. Also, pieces of panelling had been used to create small telephone boxes on the first and second landings of the House.

It was decided quite early on that to ensure the authenticity of the restoration, a rule must be made that nothing that was old should be taken out of the House, and nothing new should be put into it. In this way, by dint of much hard work and reorganising, it was found that practically all of the original panelling was still in the House and the various pieces fitted together again like a jigsaw puzzle.

At the same time as the restoration of the House, a small cottage was being built next to the main House, purpose built for the Curator to live in. The cottage was designed to blend in as much as possible with the main House, and as a measurement of how successful that was, we are constantly having to tell people that the cottage isn't an eighteenth-century laundry, or something similar. On more than one occasion, we have had visits from people who were convinced that the Cottage is in fact Dr Johnson's House itself.

Several exciting discoveries were made during the restoration progress. Many of the walls were covered with a strata of paint and paper, and underneath this was found the original panelling that was preserved in an almost perfect condition. In both of the ground floor rooms, they discovered a cupboard sunk into the wall that had been papered over. The cupboard in the Dining Room is particularly interesting as it contains six little cupboards within the main cupboard, all with the original eighteenth-century screws and handles. In this way it is fortunate that the cupboard was papered over, as if it had been open during Victorian times, they would almost certainly have ripped the little cupboards out and replaced them with shelves.

The area was extensively bombed during the war, and any buildings earlier than 1950 are very much a rarity. For example, there is only one other building in Gough Square that has brickwork of a similar date to Dr Johnson's, everything else is 20 years old at the most. During the air raids in which enemy bombers were trying to hit St Paul's, the area was flattened to the extent that it was possible to stand at the top of Dr Johnson's House and actually see Holborn Viaduct. The House has suffered a great deal of upheaval during its existence, with the post-war rebuilding of the area unsettling the foundations almost as much as the bombing raids of 1941-42.

When the House first became open to the public, Cecil Harmsworth, the Trust's founder, wrote up a policy statement in which he laid a number of guidelines that outline the way in which he would wish the House to be run, and we try and stick to these as closely as possible. One of the main points is that he wished Dr Johnson's House to be a *house* not a museum.

With this in mind, we encourage people to use the furniture, to sit down in the eighteenth century chairs and the window seats while they are reading the guidebook. The furniture in the House is *not* furniture that was owned by Johnson, he always rented his homes and therefore had little furniture of his own. One aspect that many visitors remark on is the comparative emptiness of the rooms, compared to, say Dickens' House or Carlyle's House. This, again, is quite deliberate. Cecil Harmsworth felt strongly that the House should not become a 'repository for miscellaneous "antiques." ' The house is furnished with a selection of study chairs and tables.

Our library is open to scholars who wish to look at our collection of literature relating to Johnson – although they do have to make an appointment first. We encourage group visits, and it is a common sight to see myself or one of the volunteers holding forth to a (hopefully) enthralled party. Also, the House is available to be rented out – at very competitive rates – for evening parties and festive occasions ranging from a wedding party to a small wine tasting session. Therefore, the House has an atmosphere that is often commented on. Unlike many other historic houses of a literary figure, the House has nothing of the shrine about it, it has a quality of friendliness and cheerfulness all of its own.

I will finish with an example of Cecil Harmsworth's characteristic enthusiasm for his discovery:

In this Johnson house we have ... the staircase, intact in every particular, that has so many times creaked to his footstep as he made his way up to the Dictionary Attic; the panelled walls that have resounded to his laughter and to his prayers – what more, or better, can his most enthusiastic follower desire!



13th March 1999

**FANNY BURNEY AND THE WITLINGS**  
**Karin Fernald**

Chairman: Natasha McEnroe

*Karin Fernald trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Her theatre roles have ranged from Hedda Gabler to the Dormouse in 'Alice in Wonderland'. She has appeared at most major festivals in the country, and has performed her one woman show 'The Famous Miss Burney' at numerous venues, including Dr Johnson's House at 17 Gough Square. She has also appeared at the National Portrait Gallery, most recently in a production on Dr Johnson and the Thrales of Streatham Park.*

THERE are clear similarities between Fanny Burney and her admirer Jane Austen, born 23 years later. Each comes from an affectionate middle-class family of lively brothers and sisters; each has as a confidante a beloved sister; each has a literate, intelligent and well-educated mother and a much admired father. And in the background of each is a love of play in every sense, including that of acting out and writing plays. From the age of about ten, Fanny had been writing songs, elegies, stories, plays and farces. On the strength of her first novel *Evelina*, its colourful characters expressing themselves in vigorous idiom, there is no reason to suppose Fanny's farces would have been any less rumbustious than those of the young Jane Austen. But alas, Fanny's mother died when she was only ten. Hence the bonfire she made of all her 'childish writings' on June 13th 1767, her 15th birthday 'in the yard of our house in Poland Street'.

Years later, in the early years of the 19th century, an old friend would remember Madame D'Arblay as a child in Poland Street, where in 1760 the Burney family had come to live: 'You were so merry, so gay, so droll, & had such imagination in making plays, always something new, something of your own contrivance.'<sup>1</sup>

Fanny was a god-child of the theatre. From the mid 1740s, her father, musician Charles Burney, had made a friend of David Garrick, soon to become joint manager of Drury Lane. Burney would write music for some of Garrick's successful shows there, including *Robin Hood*, *Queen Mab* and *The Masque of Alfred*. The year before Fanny was born, Burney had earned the 'liberty' of Drury Lane, meaning he could go behind the scenes when he wanted in recognition of music he had composed there. Eleven years later Burney would work for Garrick again; this time on a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which, it was said, failed about as completely as any play ever did on the 18th century stage: 'The performers sung the audience to sleep, and then went to sleep themselves.'<sup>2</sup>

Amazingly, their friendship was not affected or if it was, the tragic death soon after of Esther Burney, Fanny's mother, brought the two friends together again. Soon Garrick was allowing his friend's motherless younger children – Fanny, her young brother Charles and her sisters Susan and Charlotte – into Mrs Garrick's box at Drury Lane. There they saw many plays; farces by Samuel Foote, comedies by George Colman the Elder, whose *Clandestine Marriage* was to be a lifelong favourite of Fanny's; plays by Garrick himself; his own performances in great roles – Lear, Macbeth, Richard III – 'he was sublimely horrible!' enthuses Fanny<sup>3</sup> – and in his favourite comic role of Abel Druggier in Ben Jonson's *The*

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Joyce Hemlow, *The History of Fanny Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Roger Lonsdale, *Dr Charles Burney: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Lars E. Troide (ed.), *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney, Vol. II*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 225.



*Alchemist*. After the play they would go home and act out what they could remember of the play. Fanny, recalls her father, 'used, after having seen a play in Mrs Garrick's box, to take the actors off and compose speeches for their characters, for she could not read.' Garrick would also turn up at seven in the morning in Poland St accompanied by his spaniel, named Slobberchops, according to the *Early Diaries*. Together they would entertain the children who, says their father, 'worshipped the shadow of Garrick's shoe-tie. Nobody talked such pretty nonsense as our great Roscius to children and lapdogs.'<sup>4</sup> Once Garrick turned up in disguise, as Burney's *bête noire*, the rival historian of music Sir John Hawkins, and on another occasion, recalls Madame D'Arblay years later, he arrives while Burney is having his hair dressed.

Mr. Garrick fastened his eyes upon the hairdresser; as if wonder-struck at his amazing skill. The man, highly gratified by such notice from the celebrated Garrick, briskly worked on, frizzing, curling, powdering and pasting ... Garrick seemed wholly absorbed in admiring watchfulness ... putting on, by degrees, with a power like transformation, a little mean face of envy and sadness, such as he wore in representing Abel Druggier ... his mouth hanging stupidly open, he fixed his features in so vacant an absence of all expression, that he less resembled himself than some daubed wooden block in a barber's shop window.

... The friseur, who at first had smirkingly felt flattered at seeing his operations thus curiously remarked became utterly discountenanced ... Garrick then, suddenly starting up, gawkily perked his altered physiognomy, with the look of a gaping idiot, full in the man's face.

Scared and confounded, the perruquier now turned away his eyes, and hastily rolled up two curls, with all the speed in his power, to make his retreat. But before he was suffered to escape, Mr. Garrick, lifting his own miserable scratch from his head, and perching it high up in the air upon his finger and thumb, dolorously, in a whining voice, squeaked out, 'Pray now, Sir, do you think, Sir, you could touch up this here old bob a little bit, Sir?'

The man, now with open eyes, and a broad grin, scampered pell-mell out of the room; hardly able to shut the door, ere an uncontrollable horse-laugh proclaimed his relieved perception of Mr Garrick's joke.<sup>5</sup>

In later years Fanny herself would be known as an excellent mimic. Though notoriously shy in company, at the age of 25 she almost admits to enjoying performing in public – that is, to an audience of friends and relations, in Worcester with cousins. The young people stage two plays, first a comedy by Arthur Murphy, *The Way to Keep Him*. To begin with, Fanny suffers from stagefright. She is discovered drinking tea. 'My Hand shook so violently, I was fain to put down the Cup instantly, in order to save my Gown ... Not once could I command my voice to any steadiness,— or look about me otherwise than as a poltroon, either smelling something unsavoury, or expecting to be Bastinadoed.'<sup>6</sup>

The second play gets everyone going. It is a sort of pantomime, *Tom Thumb* by Henry Fielding, a very funny play to read and what's more, the title role is played by Fanny's niece Nancy aged four, so there's no getting a look in and no being nervous. Fanny plays a lady called Huncamunca, in love with Tom Thumb. 'The seeing the first act, & my being so much interested about Nance, made me quite forget my self, &, to my great satisfaction, I found myself forsaken by the Horrors. The extreme absurdity & queerness of my part contributed greatly to reviving me & I was really in high & happy spirits:— though I must own I had been fain to Drink a glass of punch before I began.'<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Hemlow, note 1 above, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Madame D'Arblay, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), Vol. I, pp. 347-9.

<sup>6</sup> Troide, note 3 above, pp. 239, 243.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 248.

The dame role of Glumdalca, Giantess and Queen, is played by Fanny's cousin James 'in a strait Body ... ornamented with small Bows of Green, Blue, Garnet & yellow ... his shoes were ornamented with tinsel, he had a Fan in his Hand; a large Hoop on ... Feathers, of an immense height, cut in paper;—streamers of ribbons of all Colours,—& old Earrings & stone Buckles put in his Hair, for Jewels ... he had the full Covering of a modern Barber's Block, Toupee, Chinon, & Curls, all put on at once ... &, to make him still more violent, he had very high heeled shoes on ... There was nothing but Laughter whenever he was on the stage.'<sup>8</sup>

By the 1770s, Fanny in her twenties, female dramatists are already making their mark on the London stage. A few are doing so in comedy. Among them is Frances Sheridan, mother of the dramatist, who some years earlier has written a successful comedy in which Garrick himself, a supporter of female dramatists, has taken part. But there is no writing a play as a woman without feeling self-conscious and probably being satirized by playwrights like George Colman the Elder. What Fanny needs is not permission to write a comedy but a feeling of security while doing so; and that is precisely what she gets from two friends of her father, Samuel Johnson and Hester Thrale.

From the previous year 1777 Burney has been making weekly visits to Streatham Park to teach the harpsichord to thirteen-year-old Queeney Thrale; then staying to dinner with her mother, the ebullient and erudite Hester with whom he has become great friends. 'The only man I ever knew' says the waspish mistress of Streatham 'who, being not rich, was beloved by his Wife & Children.'<sup>9</sup> Some years earlier, by collecting subscriptions for Johnson's *Dictionary*, Burney had paved the way to a lifelong friendship there too. August 23rd 1778, is the first of Fanny's many visits to Streatham Park after the success of her novel *Evelina*, published anonymously in January of that year. In this novel we meet a variety of characters from all walks of society; an extremely bad-tempered French ex-barmaid, Evelina's grandmother; a sea-captain, Captain Mirvan, anti-woman and anti-French; an upper-class rake, Sir Clement Willoughby; a socially pretentious silversmith, and his quarrelsome daughters; and three unfortunate elderly women who are forced to run a race for the amusement of young aristocrats in a scene treated with stark black humour. Fielding, says Johnson 'never drew so good a character'.<sup>10</sup> 'Fielding could describe a Horse or an Ass but he never reached to a Mule.'<sup>11</sup>

Later Johnson would admit to never actually finishing *Evelina* but that in no way inhibits his friendly support. He speaks to Fanny of an elderly Admiral coming to dinner at Streatham the following week: 'The doctor, turning to me with a laugh, said, "You must mark the old sailor, Miss Burney; he'll be a character." "Ah!" cried Mrs Thrale, who was going out of the room, "how I wish you would hatch up a comedy between you! do, fall to work!" A pretty proposal! (says Fanny) To be sure, Dr. Johnson would be very proud of such a fellow-labourer!' Soon after Mrs Thrale starts up again. 'I have been telling her she must write a comedy; I am sure nobody could do it better. Is it not true, Dr. Johnson?' 'I would fain have stopt her' says Fanny 'but she was not to be stopped, and ran on saying such fine things! though we had almost a struggle together.' And then later 'Mrs. Thrale then returned to her charge, and again urged me about a comedy; and again I tried to silence her, and we had a fine fight together; till she called upon Dr. Johnson to back her. "Why, madam," said he, laughing ... "She is writing one upstairs all the time. Who ever knew when she began *Evelina*? She is working at some drama, depend upon it" "True, true O king!" thought I.'<sup>12</sup> Which may possibly mean that by August 1778 Fanny was already engaged upon *The Witlings*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 247-8.

<sup>9</sup> Katherine Balderston, (ed.), *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs Hester Lynch Thrale (later Mrs Piozzi) 1776-1809* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, 1952), Vol. I, p. 399. (Hereafter cited as *Thraliana*.)

<sup>10</sup> Charlotte Barrett (ed.), *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay (1778-1840)* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1904), Vol. I, p. 72. (Hereafter cited as *Diary and Letters*.)

<sup>11</sup> *Thraliana*, Vol. I, p. 555.

<sup>12</sup> *Diary and Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 76, 89, 90.

*Friday* was a very full day. In the morning we began talking of *Irene*, and Mrs Thrale made Dr. Johnson read some passages which I had been remarking, as uncommonly applicable to the present times. He read several speeches, and told us he had not ever read so much of it before since it was first printed. 'Why, there is no making you read a play,' said Mrs. Thrale, 'either of your own, or any other person. What trouble had I to make you hear Murphy's *Know Your Own Mind*! "Read rapidly, read rapidly," you cried, and then took out your watch to see how long I was about it! Well, we won't serve Miss Burney so, sir; when we have her comedy we will do it all justice.'<sup>13</sup>

Mrs Thrale was to have great influence on Fanny and perhaps, too, on the actual plot of *The Witlings*. We're accustomed to see in our mind's eye Boswell's Mrs Thrale, 'short, plump and brisk': her learning that of 'a schoolboy in one of the lower forms.' Fanny's Mrs Thrale is a goddess. Fanny's young sister Charlotte would go even further. Years later, when Mrs Thrale is Mrs Piozzi, and she and Fanny do not speak, Charlotte would write to her own daughter, first editress of Fanny's *Diaries*. 'I have known many Genius's and famous and charming people, from 15 years of age when I first knew Mrs Thrale. And I have never met with anyone with manners and conversation so captivating, her wit is so sweet temper'd, her humour so spontaneous and comic, her observations so original, her repartee so ready and brilliant, her quotations and allusions so impressive such a luxuriant playfulness of Fancy, and of her shining qualities she seems unconscious, there is no arrogance, she is as artless, easy and unaffected as if all her companions were her equals.'<sup>14</sup> Certainly a woman to influence Fanny, eleven years younger, motherless from the age of nine, with a stepmother of uncertain temper.

'I was so much agitated by the certainty of being known as a scribbler' says Fanny, 'that I was really ill all night and could not sleep.' The secret of her authorship of *Evelina* is only just emerging. 'When Mrs Thrale came to me the next morning, she was quite concerned. 'O Miss Burney' cried she 'what shall we do with you? This must be conquered; indeed this delicacy must be got over! ... You must set about a comedy; and set about it openly; it is the true style of writing for you; but you must give up all these fears and this shyness; you must do it without any disadvantages; and we will have no more of such sly, sneaking, private ways!'<sup>15</sup>

Now Mrs Thrale, who may perhaps have been helping Charles Burney financially,<sup>16</sup> knew the family was hard up; certainly a successful play would have been a good idea for Fanny and Mrs Thrale was right to suggest it. From her own point of view she may have had something else in mind as well; her own rivalry with the wealthy and prominent patroness and bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu, twenty years older than she.

A few years earlier young Hannah More had arrived from Bristol to become a great favourite with Mrs Montagu, with the Garricks and with Johnson. Three years later, Hannah's tragedy *Percy* had been successfully produced by Garrick, establishing Hannah More as a social and literary success, still very close to Mrs Montagu. 'Hannah More' says Hester Thrale to Fanny 'got nearly four hundred pounds for her foolish play, and if you did not write a better than hers, I say you deserve to be whipped!'<sup>17</sup> Possibly Mrs Thrale, energetic and competitive by nature, would have liked a protégée of her own to achieve a comparable éclat.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Hemlow, note 1 above, p. 109.

<sup>15</sup> *Diary and Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 97-98.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: the Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> *Diary and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 148.

Perhaps, too, the unseemly practice of urging on rival thespians may have been considered good sport. Years later in Bath the elderly Mrs Piozzi would entertain herself by whipping up another theatrical rivalry – that of the leading actors, James Warde and William Augustus Conway. Mrs Piozzi would support the handsome Conway, who would become known as her ‘Tall Young Beau’. In his fascinating account of their relationship, *Mrs Piozzi's Tall Young Beau*, Conway's descendant John Tearle quotes from *The Bath Stage* by B. S. Penley (1892):

Each leading actor on the Bath stage had a patronising dowager who sat in opposite stage boxes and led the applause for their respective protégés. The feuds of the Orsinis and Colonnas during the middle age at Rome never raged with greater intensity.<sup>18</sup>

Through the autumn and winter of 1778, according to Fanny's journals and letters to her sister Susan and to her family friend and elderly adviser Mr Samuel Crisp (1706-1783), from time to time Hester Thrale again brings up the subject of her writing a comedy, which Fanny is obviously dying to do anyway but is afraid of being thought presumptuous. Johnson advises her to write a piece called *Streatham – a Farce*. By November she has told Samuel Crisp, himself an ex-dramatist, that she is being advised by influential friends to write for the stage. Crisp's approval of the idea is very important to her. In particular he approves of the idea of her making money. He gives sensible advice: “Keep it (if possible) an impenetrable secret that you are even about such a work. Let it be all your own till it is finished entirely in your own way.”<sup>19</sup>

In another letter he points out difficulties that might exist for a nice girl writing a comedy which needs, he says ‘lively freedoms (and waggeries that cannot be called licentious, neither) that give a strange animation and vigour to the style, and of which if it were to be deprived, it would lose wonderfully of its salt and spirit. I mean such freedoms as ladies of the strictest character would make no scruple, openly, to laugh at, but at the same time ... perhaps would shy at being known to be the authors of.’<sup>20</sup> Crisp was talking about Restoration comedy, the comedy of his youth. By now in his early seventies, Crisp had not been well enough to come to town and see *The Rivals* or *The School for Scandal*, neither of which depend on rude jokes and besides, as Professor Hemlow delightfully points out, ‘bawdy speech was not a rock against which Fanny Burney was likely to dash.’

January 1779: “And now, my dear Susan, to relate the affairs of an evening perhaps the most important of my life.” At the home of bluestocking hostess Mrs Cholmondeley, half sister of the actress Peg Woffington, Fanny meets Sir Joshua Reynolds together with the proprietor of Drury Lane Theatre and author of *The School for Scandal*, Richard Brinsley Sheridan himself. What happens next is enough to turn any young woman's head:

‘Sir Joshua’ said Mr. Sheridan ‘I have been telling Miss Burney that she must not suffer her pen to lie idle— ought she?’

*Sir Joshua*. No indeed, ought she not.

*Mr Sheridan*. Do you, then, Sir Joshua, persuade her.

*Sir Joshua*. Anything in the dialogue way, I think, she must succeed in.

*Mr Sheridan*. I think she should write a comedy.

<sup>18</sup> John Tearle, *Mrs Piozzi's Tall Young Beau: William Augustus Conway* (London: Associated University Presses, 1991), p. 76.

<sup>19</sup> *Diary and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 139.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 150.

*Sir Joshua.* I am sure I think so; and hope she will. Consider, you have already had all the applause and fame you can have given you in the clozet; but the acclamation of a theatre will be new to you.

And then he put down his trumpet, and began a violent clapping of his hands. I felt myself already in Drury Lane, amidst the hubbub of a first night. 'Oh no!' cried I, 'There may be a noise, but it will be just the reverse,' And I returned his salute with a hissing.

'Ay,' cried Sir Joshua 'And you (to Mr. Sheridan) would take any thing of hers, would you not?—unsight, unseen?'

'Yes,' answered Mr. Sheridan, with quickness, 'and make her a bow and my best thanks into the bargain.'

And now my dear Susy, if I should attempt the stage, I think I may be fairly acquitted of presumption.<sup>21</sup>

Next month at Streatham Park Fanny meets the Thrales' friend, the actor and author Arthur Murphy, who wrote over twenty farces, comedies and tragedies for the theatre including adaptations of Molière and Voltaire. (Plays by Murphy have been put on recently at the *Orange Tree*, Richmond, Surrey, with great success.) 'Murphy' says Mrs Thrale 'knows stage business so well; and if you will but take a fancy to one another, he may be more able to serve you than all of us put together. My ambition is that Johnson should write your prologue, and Murphy your epilogue; then I shall be quite happy.'<sup>22</sup>

Never it seemed was play born under more auspicious stars. Murphy even offers to vet the play. 'I can tell what the sovereigns of the upper gallery will bear: for they are the most formidable part of an audience: I have had so much experience in this sort of work, that I believe I can always tell what will be hissed at least.'<sup>23</sup>

Then Johnson butts into the conversation. 'Come come, have done with this now; why should you overpower her? ... I don't mean to dissent from what you say; I think well of it, and approve of it; but you have said enough.' 'Perhaps' thinks Fanny 'I ought to speak to him of my new castle, lest hereafter he should suspect that I preferred the counsel of Mr. Murphy.' Johnson advises her as Crisp has done 'to keep my own counsel ... to raise no expectations ... and finally, to have it performed while the town knew nothing of whose it was ... he somewhat distressed me, when I told him that Mr. Murphy must be in my confidence, as he had offered his services, by desiring he might be the last to see it. What I shall do, I know not, for he has, himself, begged to be the first! Mrs Thrale, however, shall guide me between them.'<sup>24</sup>

On May 4th 1779 Fanny writes to Samuel Crisp from Streatham Park, telling him she has finished the play. 'I must entreat you ... to keep this communication to yourself ... Dr. Johnson himself enjoins it ... another, and a very great reason for secrecy ... avoiding the interference of the various Maecenas,<sup>25</sup> who would expect to be consulted. Of these, I could not confide in one without disobliging all the rest; and I could not confide in all, without having the play read all over the town before it is acted. Mrs. Montagu, Mrs. Greville, Mrs. Crewe, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mrs. Cholmondeley and many inferior etc's, think they have an equal claim, one with the other, to my confidence; and the consequence of it all would be, that ... it would become a mere patchwork of all my acquaintance.'<sup>26</sup>

At home in St. Martin's Street, writing *Evelina* anonymously over a period of eight years, Fanny had her sister Susan as a confidante, responsive and intelligent. Possibly if Susan had been with her at

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 186-196 (with omissions).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 202.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 205.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 205, 207-8.

<sup>25</sup> I.e. supporters of *Evelina*.

<sup>26</sup> *Diary and Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 213-214.

Streatham, discussing the plot of *The Witlings*, she might have warned her sister of temptations to which perhaps, in her attempt to follow *Evelina* with a comic hit on the London stage without loss of female delicacy, Fanny has become blind.

On August 3rd, at Chessington Hall, Surrey, home of Samuel Crisp, *The Witlings* is read aloud by Dr Burney to an audience of Crisp, his sister Mrs Gast, members of his household, who were also friends of the Burneys, Susan and bright young Charlotte Burney, then aged seventeen, who laughs at the play 'till she was almost black in the face'<sup>27</sup> and the others laugh too. After that one reading this play of Fanny's, christened with so many good wishes, will never again be read aloud in her lifetime and not for many years after that. In a private conversation Dr Burney and Mr Crisp decide upon the wisdom of suppressing it altogether and they write her a joint letter on the subject. A letter which has not survived, only her heartbroken response describing it as a 'hissing, groaning, catcalling epistle'.<sup>28</sup> 'Mrs Thrale says little about it in her journal, *Thraliana*. Already on May 1st Fanny has read her *The Witlings* 'I like it very well for my own part' says Mrs Thrale, 'though none of the scribbling ladies have a right to admire its general tendency'. On the 18th of August, after the play-reading at Chessington, she writes 'Fanny Burney has pleased me today—She resolves to give up a Play likely to succeed; for fear it may bear hard upon some Respectable Characters.'<sup>29</sup> And Mrs Thrale says nothing further about *The Witlings*.

In Fanny's comedy *The Witlings*, Cecilia Stanley, a young heiress, is in love with nice young Beaufort. They expect to marry. Terrible news comes that Cecilia has lost her fortune, which Kate Chisholm points out in *Fanny Burney: Her Life*, is a topical allusion by Fanny to the terror of bankruptcy that was obsessing everyone in London in 1778-9.<sup>30</sup> Upon this news, Beaufort's aunt and guardian Lady Smatter, forbids their marriage and is unkind to Cecilia, who disappears to lodgings where Beaufort can't find her.

The lovers are saved by Censor, a virtuous character, who finds Cecilia and defeats Lady Smatter by threatening to publish a cruel lampoon upon her, which is not difficult. For Lady Smatter, while priding herself on being a literary critic, hates reading, can seldom remember anything she has read and confuses her authors with each other.

LADY SMATTER. How, as a certain author Says, can Time better be employed than in cultivating intellectual accomplishments? And I am often Surprised, my dear Miss Stanley, that a young lady of your good sense should not be more warmly engaged in the same pursuit.

CECILIA. My pursuits, whatever they may be, are too unimportant to deserve being made public.

LADY SMATTER. Well, to be sure, we are all Born with sentiments of our own, as I read in a Book I can't just now recollect the name of, so I ought not to wonder that yours and mine do not coincide; for, I declare, if my pursuits were not made public, I should not have any at all, for where can be the pleasure of reading Books, and studying authors, if one is not to have the credit of talking of them?

CECILIA. Your Ladyship's desire of celebrity is too well known for your motives to be doubted.

LADY SMATTER. Well but my dear Miss Stanley, I have been thinking for some Time past of your becoming a member of our Esprit Party [her literary club] ... I'll tell you some of our regulations. The principal persons of our party are Authors and Critics; the authors always bring us something new of their own, and the Critics regale us with manuscript notes upon something old.

CECILIA. And in what class is your Ladyship?

<sup>27</sup> Quoted by Clayton J. Delery in his introduction to *The Witlings* (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Diary and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 260.

<sup>29</sup> *Thraliana*, Vol. I, p. 401.

<sup>30</sup> Kate Chisholm, *Fanny Burney: Her Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998), p. 88.



LADY SMATTER. O, I am among the Critics. I love criticism passionately, though it is really laborious Work, for it obliges one to read with a vast deal of attention. I am sometimes so immensely fatigued with the toil of studying for faults and objections, that I am ready to fling all my Books behind the Fire.

CECILIA. And what authors have you chiefly criticised?

LADY SMATTER. Pope and Shakespeare. I have found more errors in those than in any other.

Censor lampoons Lady Smatter:

This lady with Study has muddled her head  
 Sans meaning she talk'd and Sans knowledge she read  
 And gulp'd such a Dose of incongruous matter  
 That Bedlam must soon hold the Carcase of Smatter ...

A Club she supported of Witlings and Fools,  
 Who, but for her Dinners, had scoff'd at her rules;  
 The reason, if any she had, these did shatter  
 Of poor empty-Headed and little-Soul'd Smatter ...<sup>31</sup>

Threatened with publication of the above, Lady Smatter relents and permits the lovers to marry. The above lampoon, we may feel, is couched in surprisingly strong language for a demure young woman who has previously claimed 'I would 1000 times rather forfeit my character as a writer, than risk ridicule or censure as a female.' And the trap that Fanny fell into was to cross the line between her conscious intention, proper to the dutiful satirist, of ridiculing human folly in general, and her natural delight in anarchic comedy. As Samuel Crisp forcefully points out in a letter, she has descended 'to the invidious and cruel practice of pointing out individual characters and holding them up to ridicule.'<sup>32</sup>

Lady Smatter was thought to resemble in too many respects Elizabeth Montagu, bluestocking patroness and writer wife of the wealthy grandson of the Earl of Sandwich, aristocratic connections coming out of her ears. Author too of an *Essay on Shakespeare* of which she was very proud. According to Boswell some years later, 'neither Johnson nor Mrs Thrale could get through it.' Possibly, in her treatment of Mrs Montagu, Fanny may have reflected private remarks to her by her adored Mrs Thrale, however this cannot be proved. Like Lady Smatter, Mrs Montagu's main literary achievement lay in criticism; and like Lady Smatter she had not only a nephew dependent on her for his future wealth but also a young lady in her house, a Miss Gregory, to whom she expected to match him. When, two years later, Miss Gregory fell in love with someone else Mrs Montagu would disown her, an event which Fanny cannot possibly have predicted.

Due to seniority, to greater wealth and to her large new house currently being built in Portman Square, with ceilings designed by Angelica Kauffmann, Mrs Montagu was in a technically superior position to Mrs Thrale. On the surface the two were on terms of great civility:

<sup>31</sup> The text of *The Witlings* has been published in Clayton J. Delery's edition, note 27 above, in Peter Sabor (ed.), *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney, Vol. 1: The Comedies* (London: William Pickering, 1995), and in Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill (eds), *Frances Burney: The Witlings and The Woman-Hater* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> *Diary and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 263.



'Mrs Montagu' says Mrs Thrale in 1777 'desired my Friendship in a Way that flattered my Vanity. She is a very high bred Lady, a very conspicuous Character in the World, and her Conversation flows very freely from a very full Mind.'<sup>33</sup>

'Mrs Montagu's Bouquet' says Mrs Thrale, meaning her conversation 'is all out of the Hot-house—mine out of the Woods & Fields & many a Weed there is in it.'<sup>34</sup>

One example from *Thraliana*: 'There was Talk one Evening at Mrs Montagu's of the present State of Politicks: I have lived said She to see many an Opposition come over to the Ministry, but this is the first Time I ever saw a Ministry go over to the Opposition:—why really replied I, it does remind me of the Observation I once heard made by a Farmer who thought his Sister too forward with a man She wanted to marry—says he Madam it has no good. Look out, when the Haystack follows the Cow.'<sup>35</sup> which sounds as if Mrs Thrale sometimes got the upper hand. 'Mrs Montagu' says Fanny Burney 'reasons well and she harangues well but wit she has none. Mrs Thrale has almost too much.'<sup>36</sup>

According to Johnson 'Mrs Montagu does not make a trade of her wit; but Mrs Montagu is a very extraordinary woman; she has a constant stream of conversation, and it is always impregnated; it has always meaning.'<sup>37</sup> Mrs Montagu was no pompous fool. Throughout the rest of her life Fanny Burney could be reliably counted on for diplomacy and tact. Perhaps her uncharacteristic error may be attributed to three things: a post-*Evelina* euphoria for which she would pay a high price; the influence of her beloved Mrs Thrale, who certainly covered her tracks if so, and most of all, perhaps, to the Doctor himself.

'Down with her, Burney!' says Johnson just before Mrs Montagu comes to dinner. 'Down with her!—spare her not! ... You are a rising wit, and she is at the top; and when I was beginning the world, and was nothing and nobody, the joy of my life was to fire at all the established wits! and then everybody loved to halloo me on. But there is no game now; everybody would be glad to see me conquered: but then, when I was new, to vanquish the great ones was all the delight of my poor little dear soul! So at her, Burney— at her, and down with her!'<sup>38</sup>

Other characters in *The Witlings* include a father and son, Codger and Jack. Codger is a virtuous bore:

LADY SMATTER. Mr. Codger, your Servant. I hope I see you well?

CODGER. Your Ladyship's most humble. Not so well, indeed, as I could wish, yet, perhaps, better than I deserve to be.

LADY SMATTER. How is my friend Jack?

CODGER. I can't directly say, madam; I have not seen him these two Hours, and poor Jack is but a harem scarem young man; many things may have happened to him in the Space of two Hours.

LADY SMATTER. And what, my good Sir, can you apprehend?

CODGER. ... In the first place, he may be thrown from his Horse: in the second place, he may be run over while on Foot; in the third place –

LADY SMATTER. O pray *place* him no more in situations so horrible. Have you heard lately from our friends in the north?

<sup>33</sup> *Thraliana*, Vol. I, p. 135.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted by James L. Clifford, *Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mrs Thrale)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd corr. edn., 1968), p. 153.

<sup>35</sup> *Thraliana*, Vol. I, p. 234.

<sup>36</sup> *Diary and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 352.

<sup>37</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson* (edited G. B. Hill, revised L. F. Powell) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-64), (hereafter *Life*), Vol. IV, p. 275.

<sup>38</sup> *Diary and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 115.

CODGER. Not very lately, madam: the last Letter I received was Dated the sixteenth of February, and that, you know, madam, was five Weeks last Thursday.

LADY SMATTER. I hope you had good news?

CODGER. Why madam, yes; at least none bad. My Sister Deborah acquainted me with many curious little pieces of History that have happened in her neighbourhood: would it be agreeable to your Ladyship to hear them?

LADY SMATTER. O no, I would not take up so much of your Time.

CODGER. I cannot, madam, employ my Time more agreeably. Let me see, – in the first place – no, that was not first – let me recollect! ...

LADY SMATTER. Bless me, Mr. Codger, I did not mean to give you so much trouble.

CODGER. It will be no trouble in the World, if your Ladyship will, for a while, forbear speaking to me, though the loss upon the occasion will be all mine.

He then relates to Lady Smatter the dimensions of his sister Deborah's barn in Yorkshire.

CODGER. Here in my Pocket Book I have gotten the Dimensions of it ... It is fifteen Feet by thirty. And pray does your Ladyship remember the Old Dog Kennel at the Parsonage House?

LADY SMATTER. No, Sir, I never look at Dog Kennels ...

CODGER. Nay, if your Ladyship does not want to hear about the Dog Kennel –

LADY SMATTER. Not in the least! I hate Kennels, and Dogs too.

CODGER. As you please, Madam.

Driven mad by his father, Codger's son Jack can't keep still for a second, runs everywhere on little errands for his friends who have names like Will Scamper, Kit Filigree and Tom Whiffle.

JACK. I am going now as far as Fleet Street, to a Print shop, where I left Tom Whiffle. I met him in my way from Cornhill, and promised to be back with him in half an Hour.

CODGER. Cornhill? you said you were going to Hyde Park.

JACK. Yes but I met Kit Filigree and he hauled me into the City. But now you put me in mind of it, I believe I had best run there first, and see who's waiting.

CODGER. But what, in the mean Time, is to become of Tom Whiffle?

JACK. Oh hang him, he can wait.

CODGER. Son Jack, return ... You have almost made me forget what I wanted to ask you; let me see, – O now I recollect; pray do you know if the Fish was sent Home before you came out?

And Jack runs desperately out of the room, banging into another member of Lady Smatter's Esprit Party, Mrs Sapient, a lady who, as the character Censor, who criticises everybody, observes

CENSOR. She is more weak and superficial even than Lady Smatter ... and there is a degree of assurance in her conceit that is equally wonderful and disgusting, for as Lady Smatter, from the shallowness of her knowledge, upon all subjects forms a *wrong* Judgement, Mrs Sapient, from extreme weakness of parts, is incapable of forming *any*; but, to compensate for that deficiency, she retails all the opinions she hears, and confidently utters them as her own ...

SAPIENT. You must know, I am mightily for people's consulting their Time of Life in their choice of Cloathes: and, in *my* opinion there is a wide difference between fiveteen and fifty ... I often think what pity it is so much Time should be given to mere shew; – for what are we the better to-morrow for what we have worn to-day?

And in one elaborate speech of Mrs Sapien's I think I catch echoes of a letter to Miss Burney from Mrs Montagu, preserved in Volume 2 of the journal as an 'example of the epistolary style of so celebrated a person as the writer.'

Another member of the Esprit Party is the poet of fashion Mr Dabler, who writes derivative little verses:

DABLER. Ye gentle Gods, O hear me plead,  
And Kindly grant this little loan;  
Make me forget whate'er I read  
That what I write may be my own.

Dabler has been called a caricature of Charles Burney – who himself enjoyed composing impromptu verses, possibly one reason for his desire to suppress the play.<sup>39</sup>

Then there is Dabler's landlady Mrs Voluble of whom Censor says: 'Her Tongue is as restless as Scandal, and, like that, feeds upon nothing, yet attacks and tortures everything; and it vies, in rapidity of motion, with the circulation of the Blood in a Frog's Foot.'

MRS VOLUBLE. [entering a hat shop run by Mrs Wheedle and her young lady assistants] Mrs Wheedle, how do do? I'm vastly glad to see you. I hope all the young Ladies are well. Miss Jenny, my dear, you look pale. I hope you a'n't in Love, Child. Miss Sally, your Servant. I saw your Uncle the other Day, and he's very well, and so are all the children; except, indeed, poor Tommy, and they're afraid he's going to have the Whooping Cough ... I declare its the greatest treat in the World to me to spend an Hour or two here in a morning; one sees so many fine things, and so many fine folks, – Lord, who are all these sweet things here for? ... Miss Stanley? why I can tell you all about her. Mr Dabler, who Lives in my House, makes verses upon her ... He studies, sometimes, by the Hour together. O he's quite one of the great Geniusses, I assure you! ... I tell him he studies too much, but he says he cant help it; however, I think it's a Friend's part to advise him against it, for a little caution can do no harm, you know, Sir, if it does no good ... Pray, Sir, do you think he'll ever make a match of it with Mrs. Sapien? She's ready enough, we all know, and to be sure, for the matter of that, she's no chicken. Pray, Sir, how old do you reckon she may be?

Mrs Voluble has a pathetic son called Bob whom she hates and starves, a harmless young man who keeps turning up wanting his dinner 'You great, Tall, greedy, gormondising, lubberly Cub, you, what signifies whether you have any Dinner or no? go, get away, you idle, good for nothing, dirty, greasy, hulking, tormenting –' she drives him off and that's the end of Act I, Fanny in her low comedy vein.

Neither Dr Burney nor Crisp made totally clear to Fanny their reason for suppressing the play; it was thought too risky. 'Not only the Whole Piece' says Burney later 'but the *plot* had best be kept secret, from every body.'<sup>40</sup> Meaning the Esprit Club and the lampoon.

The ostensible reason given by Crisp for the suppression was that the play resembled Molière's *Les Femmes Savantes*, which Fanny denied ever having read. Even if she had, however, the excuse would not have held water. English writers had been openly imitating Molière for the last hundred years: Dryden, Wycherley, Vanbrugh, Fielding, Colley Cibber, and no doubt others.

<sup>39</sup> Doody, note 16 above, p. 97.

<sup>40</sup> Alvaro Ribeiro (ed.), *The Letters of Dr Charles Burney, Vol. I, 1751-1784* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 280.

Having agreed, after a number of emotional letters, to suppress her play, Fanny asks her father to call on Sheridan, who is still expecting to read it, telling him that there would be no play, the author was dissatisfied with it. To begin with, Sheridan puts up a fight.

Mr Sheridan was pleased to express great concern,—nay more, to protest that he would not accept my refusal ... he was glad I was not satisfied, as he had much rather see pieces before their authors were contented with them than afterwards, on account of sundry small changes always necessary to be made ... My father, ever easy to be worked upon, began to waver ...

This very much disconcerted me: I had now taken a sort of disgust to it, and was myself most earnestly desirous to let it die a quiet death. I therefore cooled the affair as much as I conveniently could ... when again Mr. Sheridan saw my father and asked his leave to call upon me himself. This could not be refused ... I have actually now rewritten the fourth act from beginning to end, except one scene.—Mr. Sheridan, however, has not yet called.<sup>41</sup>

And Mr Sheridan, by now given over to politics, never does call. Had he done so Fanny might have had a resounding success at Drury Lane Theatre, but might then have had to pay a high price for many years to come. The bluestocking ladies and their aristocratic connections would almost certainly have boycotted not the play but her later novels. We shall never know.

Soon Fanny's diaries are taken over by the death the previous year of Captain Cook, news of which had just reached England. Then Samuel Crisp pours further cold water on the play, and soon after that life becomes full. Fanny goes to Bath with the Thrales, writes a lot about Bath, begins a second novel, gives it the name of her play's heroine, *Cecilia*. This second novel, a huge success, would lead her father to hope that she would forget her theatrical ambitions and stick to the much safer path of novel writing.

While never again attempting anything so rash as *The Witlings*, she would never give up the idea of writing comedies for the theatre. Twenty years later, having read the *Memoirs of Goldoni*, she would try her hand at three more. In the year 1800, from Camilla Cottage on the grounds of Norbury Park in Surrey, bought with the proceeds of her third novel *Camilla*, subscribed to by Mrs Montagu among many others, Fanny, now Madame D'Arblay, writes to her father. A few years before, she had helped to cheer him, after the death of his second wife, by persuading him to continue with a poem on astronomy which he had abandoned some years before. We do not have the letter from Burney to which the following is a reply. But we know that when his daughter began again to consider writing for the stage Dr Burney was 'seized with a panic', not surprising perhaps.

The first of her three comedies was called *Love and Fashion*. Due partly to her father's fears, she withdrew this new play from Thomas Harris of Covent Garden, who wanted to stage it. Though giving in to her father's fears, she is determined to write another.

'Your unaccountable but most affecting displeasure' she writes to her father 'would have been ample punishment to me had I been guilty of a crime in doing what I have all my life been urged to and all my life intended — writing a comedy. Your kindness, your regard for my fame have caused both your trepidation which doomed me to certain failure, and your displeasure that I ran, what you thought, a wanton risk. But it is not wanton, dear father. My imagination is not at my own control or I would always have continued in the walk you approved. The combinations for another long novel did not occur to me; incidents and effects for a drama did. I hope, my dearest father, you will cease to nourish such terrors and disgust at an essay so natural and rather say to yourself "Tis but like father like child: for to what walk do I confine myself? Why should I lock her up in one paddock if she says she finds nothing more to nibble; while I find all the earth

<sup>41</sup> *Diary and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 315-6.

unequal to my ambition and mount the skies to content it? Come on then, poor Fan! Leap the pales of your paddock; and while you frisk from novel to comedy, I will try a race with Poetry and the Stars." I am sure my dear father will not infer, I mean to parallel our works. I only mean to show, that if my muse loves a little variety, she has an hereditary claim to try it.<sup>42</sup>

This confident rhetoric from his 48-year-old daughter silenced Dr Burney, by now in his mid-seventies. Crisp was long dead. By the skin of her teeth, just before an accidental ten years' stay in revolutionary France, Madame D'Arblay would manage to write three more comedies, including *A Busy Day*, first produced in Bristol a few years ago by Alan Coveney, and to be produced for a second time by Jonathan Church at the Bristol Old Vic, in April 2000.

But Frances Burney's theatre sense was not wasted. She would apply a dramatist's ear and eye to her own eventful life, thus making of her life-long journal a most compelling read, even today.

<sup>42</sup> Joyce Hemlow (ed.), *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D'Arblay)*, Vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 394.

10th April 1999

**CHARLOTTE SMITH AND THE LICHFIELD TWO**  
**Dr Loraine Fletcher**

Chairman: Dr Nicholas Cambridge

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CHARLOTTE Smith was born in the same year Samuel Johnson published his *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. In the next year he began *The Rambler*. For the rest of the century, his work had a widespread influence on, among other things, the way prose style was taught in schools. It is not surprising, given Johnson's immense prestige, that Charlotte's<sup>1</sup> prose is strongly marked by antithesis and parallelism as part of a complex latinate structure. She has too a habitual aphoristic tone that could fairly be called Johnsonian. Johnson's massive yet ironic style became a model for several generations, though his imitators often caught the mass without the irony.

Charlotte was born into a landed family, the Turners; she was the eldest of three children born in three years, her mother dying in childbirth when Charlotte was only three, though she remembered her, if indistinctly, all her life. Her father, Nicholas Turner, left England to travel in Europe for five or six years, leaving the children in the care of their mother's sister, Lucy Towers. Their aunt became a substitute mother, and they lived mostly at the principal family estate at Bignor Park in South Sussex as small children while Charlotte went to school in Chichester. Her love of botany and pleasure in the beechwoods, Downs and seascapes of Sussex emerged, as did Wordsworth's love of Nature twenty years afterwards, from her earliest years. She began to write poetry when she was very young, but nothing has survived from before her late twenties.

Her father came home when she was about eight or nine, and the family lived in London for much of the year, in King Street off St. James' Square, where the Turners had a town house, her birthplace. She went to a fashionable school in Kensington, where she was thought to be the best dancer, the best read and informed of the pupils; she was already writing poetry, and her sister remembered an elegy on the death of General James Wolfe. But her formal education finished at twelve, when she came out into society, her appearance and apparent sophistication making her seem much older than she really was. Nicholas Turner was a socialite and a gambler; he had already spent most of his ready money abroad, and by the time Charlotte was thirteen or so he was deeply in debt. He sold the other main estate of the Turners, Stoke Place near Guildford, and entered into negotiations of marriage with an heiress, Henrietta Meriton. Judging from much later fictional representations in her novels of this crucial time in her life, Charlotte at fourteen and Miss Meriton at forty took an instant dislike to each other. And so, by the time she was fifteen, her father and Lucy Towers had found her a husband. He was Benjamin Smith, the son of a wealthy West India merchant with plantations in Barbados. The family was now settled in London; Benjamin's father Richard Smith was a Director of the East India Company in addition to his other business interests.

<sup>1</sup> For reasons explained elsewhere, it seems more appropriate to use 'Charlotte' than her husband's name (which she came to hate), or her patronymic; see Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: a Critical Biography* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998), p. 4.

At fifteen Charlotte probably was not averse to the marriage. She could have known little about Benjamin except that he was handsome and amusing, and she did not want to live with her new stepmother. She married or, as she put it in much later, she was 'sold, a legal prostitute,'<sup>2</sup> when just short of sixteen.

There would be little point in tracing all the vicissitudes of her early married life. Enough to say that Benjamin proved entirely irresponsible, not only without literary or intellectual interests but unable to concentrate on anything for more than a few minutes. He was feckless, unfaithful, and frequently absent, his only merit. She lived in Cheapside over the warehouse part of this time and helped her father-in-law Richard Smith in the business. Over twenty-one years of marriage she had twelve children. The first died when at seventeen she was giving birth to the second, and there were to be four more almost unbearably painful deaths of children. Richard Smith married her aunt, Lucy Towers, and Charlotte and Benjamin eventually moved out of London to Lys Farm near Bramdean in Hampshire. Here she continued to educate herself, to learn Italian and to write poetry, especially sonnets. From this period in the late seventies comes the first of her verse that survives, survives for reasons that will emerge soon. But first it is worth noting how in a typical early sonnet the aphoristic and Johnsonian manner is juxtaposed with a close attention to the botanical detail of the natural world.

Written at the close of Spring

The garlands fade that Spring so lately wove,  
Each simple flower, which she had nursed in dew,  
Anemonies, that spangled every grove,  
The primrose wan, and hare-bell, mildly blue.  
No more shall violets linger in the dell,  
Or purple orchis variegated the plain,  
Till Spring again shall call forth every bell,  
And dress with humid hands her wreaths again.—  
Ah! poor Humanity! so frail, so fair,  
Are the fond visions of thy early day,  
Till tyrant Passion and corrosive Care  
Bid all thy fairy colours fade away  
Another May new buds and flowers shall bring;  
Ah! why has happiness—no second Spring?<sup>3</sup>

This is a good example of her dramatic speaker's habitual melancholia: in some other sonnets in this volume, Werther is the speaker, longing for the oblivion of suicide. The Swan of Lichfield, Anna Seward, called her sonnets 'everlasting lamentables ... and ... hackneyed scraps of dismality',<sup>4</sup> and one can see what she meant. But they have a musical fluidity of metre, and they hit or helped to create the literary taste of their time.

The speaker is set against a harmonising, Rousseauesque landscape sympathetic to her mood, yet she recognises her alienation from the natural as from the social world. Nature here can provide no lasting consolation. But species are named; the botanist's eye is already focusing, though this will be more marked later: the flowers have their own characters and are lightly anthropomorphised. For modern

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte to Sarah Rose, 15th June 1804.

<sup>3</sup> *Elegiac Sonnets*, Sonnet 2. Poems are quoted from Stuart Curran (ed.), *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> A. Constable (ed.), *Letters of Anna Seward*, (Edinburgh: Longman, Hunt and Rees, 1811), Vol. 2, p. 287.



readers the octave may be more attractive than the aphorisms, exclamations and rhetorical question of the sestet. For the contemporary reader however the sententia were a great part of the appeal, part of that questioning of the natural world which is the main intellectual engagement of the second half of the eighteenth century.

In *Persuasion* when Anne Elliot walks to Winthrop, she is in much the same mood. She is unhappy about Captain Wentworth's flirting with Louisa Musgrove, and thinks her own hopes of marriage to him are over. Anne's mind turns to poetry, and from time to time 'some tender sonnet, fraught with the apt analogy of the declining year, with declining happiness and the image of youth and hope, and Spring all gone together, blessed her memory.'<sup>5</sup> It is Charlotte's sonnet Anne is thinking of. Later in *Persuasion* when Anne wonders if she is to be 'blessed with a second Spring of youth and beauty,'<sup>6</sup> her mind is reverting to Charlotte's Sonnet 2, but now with the hope that her experience will differ from Charlotte's speaker. That 'blessed her memory' suggests how much Smith's poetry meant to Austen, not just to Anne, at some stage in her life. Blessed is not a word she would use lightly.

Charlotte's father-in-law died in 1776, leaving £36,000 and more substantial assets in land and businesses in Trust for his many grandchildren. Benjamin's dead brother and sister had children, as did his stepsister. Benjamin was left as guardian to some of them. While Benjamin was Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire and the Smiths lived an apparently dazzling social life, another child died, Charlotte poured her melancholy into her poems and Benjamin's mounting debts, despite his wealth, encouraged his embezzlement of his father's Trust fund.

He was arrested in December 1783 at his brother-in-law's suit and sent to the King's Bench Prison. Charlotte joined him at least part of the time, as wives often did. Eventually through long negotiation she effected his release, though only on condition of his transferring his executorship of his father's will to other branches of his family. The Trust was tied up with claims and counter claims from now on. The Smiths lost their lovely house, Lys Farm, now an International School, Brockwood Park, and much changed. Benjamin went to Dieppe as he still had creditors he couldn't pay.

But while he was in prison Charlotte decided to publish her poems to raise some money, which she did through Richard Dodsley, at her own expense initially. He grudgingly agreed to publish, though without payment until his printing costs were covered. William Hayley, whom she had never met, allowed her to use his name as dedicatee, and her *Elegiac Sonnets* came out in June 1784, selling out almost at once. She had seized the moment for Sensibility and solipsistic melancholy: there were ten editions in the late eighties, the nineties and the early years of the nineteenth century. Her sonnets were never out of print in her lifetime.

Benjamin insisted she join him in Normandy. By this time he had taken a large decaying chateau on the way to Rouen. She went out on the packet in October 1784 with her nine surviving children and pregnant with another. Here she experienced at first hand the desperate condition of the French peasantry, and translated Prevost d'Exiles' *Manon L'Escaut* which she found in the library there, possibly with the intention now of supporting herself. She had her last baby in that freezing winter probably without trained medical help though despite her misgivings it was the easiest birth of the twelve. But it was a cold and hungry winter for them all. The villagers were sullen, and priests abducted the new-born baby boy from her bedroom, taking him through thick snow to baptise him. Charlotte and the children came home, though Benjamin stayed in France a little longer.

Charlotte's *Manon Lescaut* was published by Thomas Cadell, who published Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, Gibbon and Hayley. It was an elegant and lively free translation, but was at once attacked by the critic and editor of Shakespeare, George Steevens, as importing French moral poison into England. He accused her, unfairly, of plagiarism and Cadell withdrew the book. This is an extremely rare edition, and

<sup>5</sup> Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

I have never been able to find one. But a cheaply bound reprint with the two volumes combined was published the next year anonymously.

This fracas was painful, but she pressed on with another French translation, *Les Causes Célèbres*, Famous Lawsuits, by de Pitaval, which she called *The Romance of Real Life*. This was successful and brought more than £330 from the first edition alone. The stories included 'Martin Guerre' and 'The Marchioness de Gange', both reworked later, the former in a play and two films, the latter by the Marquis de Sade.

£330 was enough to support her and the children for about 18 months. She now took the decision to separate from Benjamin, all the children choosing to go with her. She thought they would soon begin to receive allowances from the Trust for maintenance and education, but that hope was always deferred. *Elegiac Sonnets* however continued to bring in money every year, and her literary output from now on was tremendous. She produced 63 volumes in all, often long volumes, of novels, poetry and children's books.

*Emmeline* was her first full length novel, and it shows an ease and confidence together with an original feminist streak that made it extremely popular. It is satiric in the Burney manner, of the marriage market, of fashionable vice and snobbery. But it also well exemplifies the other side of Charlotte's mind and talent: it is a novel of Sensibility in its landscapes and in its orphaned, alienated heroine, who is more a child of nature, and more independent, than Burney's heroines are ever allowed to be. *Emmeline* grows up in Wales near the Pembrokeshire coast. Charlotte is a Romantic of prose more certainly than she is a pre-Romantic in poetry:

On those evenings of summer, when her attendance could for a few hours be dispensed with, she delighted to wander among the rocks that formed the bold and magnificent boundary of the ocean, which spread its immense expanse of water within half a mile of the castle. Simply dressed, (and with no other protection than Providence), she often rambled several miles into the country, visiting the remote huts of the shepherds, among the wildest mountains.<sup>7</sup>

*Emmeline* grows up to regard fashionable manners with a critical eye, and is her own mentor, though as the heroine of a courtship novel she eventually marries and accommodates to a life in society. Dr Johnson would not have approved, nor would Burney, of some aspects of *Emmeline*: there is a fallen woman, Lady Adelina, an unfaithful wife to a vicious husband, who has her lover's baby but is allowed a happy ending when her husband dies and she marries the lover. Charlotte was much more sympathetic to the fallen woman than most of her contemporaries, though not for interested reasons: she never lost her reputation before or after the separation. There is also a strong autobiographical element in the wise and forbearing Mrs Stafford and her feckless husband, who were meant to be recognised as Charlotte and Benjamin Smith. Such self-representation Anna Seward considered 'as wrong as indelicate ... sickening in its boundless vanity.'<sup>8</sup> Charlotte vies with Philip Roth for putting herself into her novels, and Seward continued to disapprove.

Mary Wollstonecraft reviewed *Emmeline* in *The Analytical*, rather disapprovingly: she did not like the Adelina episodes, the 'feverish cheeks, tears ever ready to flow, white gowns, black veils and graceful attitudes.'<sup>9</sup> Sir Walter Scott remembered in old age the sensation the novel caused when he was young. Austen at twelve loved its bad-boy antihero Delamere, rejected by the heroine for a more sober and reliable husband. Poems written supposedly by characters in the novel went into the next edition of

<sup>7</sup> Anne Henry Ehrenpreis (ed.), *Emmeline* [1788] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Seward, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 215.

<sup>9</sup> Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (eds.), *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Pickering, 1989), Vol. 7, pp. 26-7.

*Elegiac Sonnets*, an innovation Charlotte continued throughout her career. *Elegiac Sonnets* had expanded to two volumes by 1797.

Her next novel, *Ethelinde* (1789) is perhaps the most appealing, especially for its evocation of Lakes scenery. Austen loved the passages about Grasmere; Kitty and Camilla in 'Catharine, or The Bower' discuss *Ethelinde*, and Kitty is enthusiastic about the Lakes descriptions. Ethelinde goes on holiday to the Lakes with a rather rackety party more attuned to London ways, and walks down to the water on her arrival:

It was now evening: the last rays of the sun gave a dull purple hue to the points of the fells which rose above the water and the park; while the rest, all in deep shadow, looked gloomily sublime. Just above the tallest, which was rendered yet more dark by the woods which covered its side, the evening star arose, and was reflected in the bosom of the lake, now perfectly still and unruffled.<sup>10</sup>

What Ethelinde sees in Grasmere Water – Romantically or pre-Romantically would be the expected critical comment, though it is questionable whether the term has any useful content left now – is the reflection of her own mood, still and unruffled. She has gone down to the water to escape a quarrel between hostile ladies in the party on holiday there. Thomas Grey's *Journal in the Lakes* had made the area better known to travellers, and Charlotte capitalises on this interest. Ethelinde holds his book in her hand. But her perception is more coloured and more impressionistic than Grey's. Elsewhere she sees 'the tall blue heads of the fells' and 'an immense pile of purple rock'.<sup>11</sup> It is a quality of the fading light Charlotte is trying to catch.

The hero Montgomery and his mother live in a small white cottage with a square walled garden in front, a little apart from the village of Grasmere, and this is the moral centre of the novel, the Good Place the heroine often thinks of throughout the five volumes and returns to at the end. Wordsworth was distantly related to Charlotte and knew her work well. He read her *Elegiac Sonnets* as a sixteen year old at Hawkshead School, and visited her as a fellow pro-Revolutionary when he was on his way to France in 1791. His first published poem, 'An Evening Walk,' quotes her 'To the South Downs' in its opening. His career would follow the trajectory of hers: sympathy with the Revolution followed by retreat into a Green World. In 1799, ten years after *Ethelinde* came out, he took, on an impulse we are told, a small white cottage with a rectangular walled garden in front, a little apart from the village of Grasmere. He read her, and intermittently praised her, all his life.

By 1789 she had moved to Brighton, a fast and fashionable city but also a centre for radical intellectuals interested in the Revolution now in its early stages just across the Channel. Brighton people got the news first. Charlotte was forty by now, successful, visited by prominent radical writers, a natural Oppositionist with pronounced ideas on reform in the constitution and in the legal status of women. Already in her first two novels she had been making the castle or Great House significant to her plot: the reader is encouraged to ask who owns it, who deserves to own it, and whether it should be altered. But this useful way of shorthanding a political stance was focussed more precisely after Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* of 1790. He uses throughout a castle as an emblem of the state. We must repair it, patch it, nail down the warping wainscot when necessary, not pull the building down as the French were doing. Charlotte elaborated that metaphor in her next novel, *Celestina*, which ends in France just as the Revolution is beginning. The heroine's family castle, once a prison for women and rebellious sons, though ruinous in places is greening over with plants and lively with birds nesting in its crevices. It is more natural, more Rousseauesque, and can be comfortably inhabited again.

<sup>10</sup> *Ethelinde* (1789), Vol. 1, p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> *Ethelinde*, Vol. 1, pp. 30-31.

She uses the same metaphor in *Desmond*, where the grim castle that represents the old regime belongs to a Marquis who will not accept the loss of his titles, while his nephew, a reforming aristocrat, has pulled down his old Gothic house and built something more modestly egalitarian. Uncle and nephew aristocrats with these divergent political attitudes appear later in *A Tale of Two Cities*. *Desmond* is Charlotte's only epistolary novel, and her most pro-Revolutionary. It is reformist in its domestic politics too: the heroine Geraldine is an unhappily married woman and the mother of three children, struggling with problems imposed by her husband's authority: the private is carefully integrated with the national life. Charlotte can distance herself a little from Desmond's commitment to the Revolution and to divorce by the epistolary mode, though her Preface, where she defends the right of women to involve themselves in politics, is as forthright as she always was in the first person. She was a Girondin, however, not a Jacobin.

Through these years her children were growing up, the boys going into the East India Company or the army, the four girls still mostly at home. She was often hard up and harassed by duns, and complained often about the Trust and her continuing tie to Benjamin, but these seem to have been relatively happy years. She switched from Cadell as publisher of her novels: he would not accept *Desmond*, though he continued to publish her *Sonnets* editions.

In the summer of 1792 she went to Earham to stay with William Hayley who had remained a friend and patron, to meet his new friend William Cowper. She had admired *The Task* since its first publication. George Romney was there as usual each summer and early autumn: he drew her and Cowper in pastels. Here she wrote in two weeks the first volume of her most generally admired novel, *The Old Manor House*, writing in the morning and reading her work aloud in the evening to the visitors and Hayley. 'I think her a woman of astonishing powers',<sup>12</sup> Romney said, and Cowper only regretted his own poverty when he saw someone like her, 'chained to her desk like a slave to his oar'.<sup>13</sup> It was a happy few weeks for her. This novel's great house, Rayland Hall, is fully realised as a metaphor for the condition of England, cross-sectioned so we see a social spectrum from owner to servants. The house emerges slowly as England, but there are pointers to help us, as in this reminiscence of Burke's warping wainscot. The servant Jacob, probably a significant name, is repeating the reflections of the housekeeper Mrs Lennard here:

But she says to me, says she, — 'When you have done that job, Jacob, I wish you would just look at the wainscot under the window, and under them there drawers of mine; for it's as rotten as touchwood, and the rats are forever coming in,' says she; and says she, 'I never saw the like of this old house — it will tumble about our ears, I reckon, one day or 'nother, and yet my lady is always repairing it,' says she; 'but the wainscotting of this here end of the wing,' says she, 'has been up above an hundred years; and we may patch it, and patch it, and yet never be the nearer: but for my part, I suppose it will last my time,' says she.<sup>14</sup>

By the 'above an hundred years' the reader is reminded of the Act of Settlement of 1688. The plot raises questions about who should own Rayland Hall, and therefore England. The novel is subtle and imaginative, less polemical than earlier ones because the politics have been thoroughly subsumed into the house metaphor. The heroine is a servant, educated by a kind younger son in an otherwise hostile household. She has a fierce and greedy aunt and spends a lot of time in her turret bedroom, but eventually

<sup>12</sup> George Romney, quoted by Morchard Bishop in *Blake's Hayley: The Life, Works and Friendships of William Hayley* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1951), p. 165.

<sup>13</sup> William Cowper to William Hayley, in Thomas Wright (ed.), *The Correspondence of William Cowper* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904), Vol. 4, p. 363.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Henry Ehrenpreis (ed.), *The Old Manor House* [1793] (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 248.

the narrative takes her downstairs to the state-rooms where her merits are recognised. Austen, nineteen when she read it, took up the house metaphor and some aspects of the plot for *Mansfield Park* twenty-one years later; and from that derive many more England-houses.

*The Old Manor House* starts out quite pro-Revolutionary, but the political situation was changing as she wrote, with the prison massacres of September 1792, which happened just as she finished volume one, and the novel's politics grow more cautious as the narrative goes on. Louis XVI was not executed until after it was published early in 1793, but clearly power was passing from the Girondins to the Jacobins. The Girondins went to the guillotine in October of that year. Both Jacob the servant and the smuggler Jonas Wilkins, sympathetically represented early in the novel, become untrustworthy in later chapters. Other factors besides the increasing brutality in France helped to change Charlotte's point of view. A son in the Bedfordshires lost a leg at Dunkirk against the patriot forces, her beloved daughter Augusta married an émigré aristocrat. The critics were amused by Charlotte's abandoning the pro-Revolutionary cause, but in fact the Revolution changed more than she did. Her first blank-verse poem, *The Emigrants*, was published only a few months after *The Old Manor House*, but already the shift of sympathy is evident. The poem is personal as well as national. She constructs herself as a victim of legal injustice like the emigrants: remembering May Day festivals in Sussex, she reflects

How little dream'd I then the time would come  
When the bright Sun of that delicious month  
Should from disturb'd and artificial sleep  
Awaken me to never-ending toil,  
To terror and to tears!—Attempting still,  
With feeble hands and cold desponding heart,  
To save my children from the o'erwhelming wrongs  
That have for ten long years been heap'd on me!—  
The fearful spectres of chicane and fraud  
Have, Proteus like, still chang'd their hideous forms  
(As the Law lent its plausible disguise),  
Pursuing my faint steps; and I have seen  
Friendship's sweet bonds (which were so early form'd  
And once I fondly thought of amaranth  
Inwove with silver seven times tried) give way,  
And fail.<sup>15</sup>

*The Emigrants* also recollects distant childhood pleasures when she was free to play beside – and in – the tidal waters of the Arun:

There (where, from hollows fring'd with yellow broom,  
The birch with silver rind, and fairy leaf  
Aslant the low stream trembles) I have stood  
And meditated how to venture best  
Into the shallow current, to procure  
The willow herb of glowing purple spikes  
Or flags, whose sword-like leaves conceal'd the tide,  
Startling the timid reed-bird from her nest...<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *The Emigrants* (1793), Vol. 2, 347-362.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 335-342.

The passage catches her absorption in these Sussex landscapes, resembling the lines in Wordsworth's *The Prelude* where the child makes 'one long bathing of a summer's day'. Charlotte too traces the growth of her individuality and impulse to write to her early passion for Nature.

This strong personal voice, in the poems, in Prefaces and in author-representative characters provides a serial narrative about her life which her readers obviously responded to. It was part of her professionalism to be so unprofessional, so intrusive into her own work. She knew how to run a serial story, her own. Her griefs and injustices qualify her, she constantly suggests, to comment on her country's treatment of women and children generally.

The most detailed and amusing self-portrait comes in *The Banished Man*, which is set partly in France, partly in England, contemporaneously with its writing. It is Royalist and counter-Revolutionary, with a love-interest based on Augusta Smith's courtship and marriage. There is a novelist, Charlotte Denzil, who is plainly intended to be recognised as Charlotte herself, with children to support and tricky lawyers and rude publishers to deal with. Charlotte had promised her publisher for *The Old Manor House*, Joseph Bell, a sequel in two volumes. In fact she only produced one, and Bell had her arrested in the street: a broken contract was a type of debt. Two friends stood bail, so she did not go to prison, but she was shaken, and furious. She takes her revenge in *The Banished Man*: Charlotte Denzil's publisher Joseph Clapper is clearly a response to the insult. This was at the time of the Holcroft-Hardy treason trial, when members of The London Corresponding Society were arrested for assembling to discuss Parliamentary reform. Publishers were nervous. Clapper writes that he

... must insist on having an hondred pagges at least by Satturday night. Also the Odd to Liberty mentioned by you as a close to the same, but I shall change the tittle of that, having promised the trade there shall be no liberty at all in the present work, without which assshurance they would not have delt for the same.<sup>17</sup>

In this novel too she places a poem she had written on the death of her best friend Henrietta O'Neill of Stourhead – where two stunning portraits have recently been identified by Alastair Laing of The National Trust as O'Neill's – as an elegy written by Charlotte Denzil on her friend's death. Charlotte constantly tried to blur the boundaries of life and fiction, and to write her own life while she wrote her novels.

Even in her unhappiest times she was witty in her satiric portraits. Augusta died when she was writing her next novel, *Montalbert*, and this was a bereavement she never recovered from. But her Mr Jasper Blagham, a lawyer, writing to his sister-in-law Rosalie after her return from a disastrous visit to Italy, is a wonderfully comic creation, rather like one of the Branghtons in *Evelina*:

Dear Madam, They say that wondering makes one grow old, so my Kate and I will not wonder, but must confess ourselves a little surprised at hearing you were so near us, and had stolen a march upon us, when we thought you were among your Signors and Signoras, Italianos, and people quite out of our line; and my Kate is not so ready in the writing way as some ladies, (which I don't reckon among her faults, I promise you), so you'll excuse my replying to yours of the 2<sup>nd</sup> inst.—To be sure you must have dropped from the clouds, and been quite in terra incognita, not to know that our good mother has quitted Hampstead these five or six months. I settled her affairs for her when I went up on the matter of Poulcat versus Periwinkle, last Hilary; and she went to live with her son Francis, who, you know, was always a sort of favourite; but there was a rumpus at the house of Crab and Widgett, and he quitted and settled with his new-married wife at Carlisle. Sir Francis, when the King pleases, has picked up a pretty fortune, I assure you, and is better off than our episcopus, who has also married a wife, and so lost his

<sup>17</sup> *The Banished Man* (1794), Vol. 2, p. 231.



fellowship. But he's got a living, though a small one, and I dare say will have a house full of sons and daughters. As to our olive branches, they flourish and increase, and my Kate has no chance of seeing much of the world this year, as we expect a third before its end...I am somewhat at a nonplus how to direct, as my Kitty and I wonder why you should have an alias to your name; but I suppose you have good reasons.

I am, dear Madam, Your humble servant, Jasper Blagham.<sup>18</sup>

Johnson particularly relished the Branghtons and teased Burney by accusing her of thinking no more of him than if he were a Branghton. Charlotte catches the same prying, uneasy self-satisfaction. The olive branch reappears in Mr Collins' letter to Mr Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, and there seems to be some affinity between them too. Blagham's portrayal reveals very clearly that Charlotte's landed attitudes remained constant, however her politics changed: his impertinence and his semi-educated language patterns go together. As a radical rather than a conservative satirist, however, and lacking Anglican and Tory norms to form a template for behaviour, her criterion of value is Sensibility, sensitivity of feeling, above more specifically Anglican standards. One does not find in her work the security and consistency of Austen's moral norms.

Augusta died in 1795, and some of Charlotte's sonnets allude to this loss, as does her last novel, *The Young Philosopher*. 'To the Goddess of Botany' presents Nature as partial retreat from this blow as it had been from others:

To the Goddess of Botany

Of Folly weary, shrinking from the view  
Of Violence and Fraud, allow'd to take  
All peace from humble life; I would forsake  
Their haunts forever, and sweet Nymph! with you  
Find shelter; where my tired and tear-swoln eyes,  
Among your silent shades of soothing hue,  
Your "bells and florets of unnumber'd dyes"  
Might rest—And learn the bright varieties  
That from your lovely hands are fed with dew...<sup>19</sup>

Her title comes from *The Economy of Vegetation* by Erasmus Darwin, that other giant of Lichfield who never moved to London, Johnson's polar opposite in many ways. Charlotte knew Darwin personally though only towards the end of her life and his. But *The Loves of the Plants* had been a favourite poem from its publication, and one can see his influence increasingly in her own verse. Here, the eyes may rest, but the mind catalogues species. She follows him in providing explanatory notes with Linnaean names and botanical information. She glosses quotations in her own text or adds a Shakespearean reference as she does here where a note says that 'botany seems to be a resource for the sick at heart, for those who from sorrow or disgust may without affectation say, "society is nothing to one not sociable".' The quotation is from *Cymbeline*, Act 4, scene 2, 12-13. She attempts to link the literary and scientific spheres, the Johnsonian and the Darwinian, and to indicate that science is changing the apprehension of Nature. She is beginning to avoid traditional 'feminine' ways of inscribing Nature, the association of women and flowers, for instance, in favour of a more intellectual analysis.

<sup>18</sup> Montalbert (1795), Vol. 3, pp. 133-5.

<sup>19</sup> *Elegiac Sonnets*, Sonnet 79.



She wrote two more novels after *Montalbert*, *Marchmont* and *The Young Philosopher*, the latter a retrospective comment on the French Revolution with characters, now middle-aged, who had taken some part in it. This novel appeared the year after Mary Wollstonecraft's death and contains Charlotte's own tribute to her in the Preface. The feminist cause Wollstonecraft sponsored was in disarray now following Godwin's *Memoir* of his late wife, which was much too frank for his contemporary readers. He referred to her illegitimate daughter by Gilbert Imlay, suicide attempts and premarital relationship with himself. The book excited a strong reaction against the feminist movement of the 1790s, perhaps against radical views in general. As in some of Charlotte's earlier novels, *The Young Philosopher* offers a double narrative of mother and daughter: she increasingly made that bond central to her plot.

In addition to works already mentioned she wrote a play, a collection of novellas and four children's books. By 1800 her family were scattered, only her youngest daughter, Harriet, remaining at home after an ill-judged visit to India on the fishing fleet, as it was called, with a brother, to find a husband in Bengal: she appears to have changed her mind. At all events she fell ill and came home. Charlotte's last few years were to some extent wasted in correspondence over her father-in-law's will, which remained unsettled; her health was poor and she became obsessive about the money denied to her children.

But though she had lived out of London for most of her life, she remained a well-known literary figure, the celebrated Mrs Charlotte Smith. A short biography appeared in *British Public Characters*, by Mary Hays, and perhaps the most distinguished publisher of his time, Joseph Johnson, at last became her publisher for a final volume of verse, *Beachy Head, Fables and Other Poems*. She was fifty-seven when she finished 'Beachy Head,' a long blank verse meditation on Sussex landscapes, history and archaeology. She had continued to read Erasmus Darwin, and his influence is evident here as she describes the shells and fossils in the Sussex chalk, attesting to a more ancient Creation than the Genesis account allows; the intellectual's preoccupation with science as a threat to revealed religion would increase through the nineteenth century, though Charlotte is tactful and tentative. A shorter poem in this collection, 'The Lark's Nest,' also shows the influence of Darwin in its depiction of the struggle for survival between and within species. Here a dog, a setter, eats the parent larks' first eggs, and they try to raise a second brood late in the season:

But this took time; May was already past,  
The white thorn had her silver blossoms cast,  
And there the Nightingale to lovely June  
Her last farewell had sung;  
No longer reign'd July's intemp'rate noon,  
And high in Heaven the reaper's moon  
A little crescent hung,  
Ere from their shells appear'd the plumeless young.  
Oh! Then with how much tender care  
The busy pair  
Watch'd and provided for the panting brood!<sup>20</sup>

It is of course her own struggle to bring up her family that she recognises across species. But she did it largely on her own, unlike the lark. She was beginning to register the cruelty and wastefulness as well as the beauty of Nature, unlike the Romantics and more like later, nineteenth-century poets, like Tennyson and Hardy. Her voice was still developing in maturity. She died at fifty-seven and was buried at St John's, Stoke-Next-Guildford near her mother, Anna.

<sup>20</sup> *The Lark's Nest*, 65-75.

Despite the grim circumstances of much of her life, the endless work and the deaths of children, she had the intellectual energy always to counter depression with a new writing project. Her last poem, 'To My Lyre', found among her papers after her death, was faintly written, but with immense bravado:

Such as thou art, my faithful Lyre,  
For all the great and wise admire,  
Believe me, I would not exchange thee

she begins, and one can believe her. Her self-esteem encounters even imminent death with pride in the career that had maintained her and her children for as long as she could hold a pen.

### THE WREATH-LAYING

THE annual wreath-laying ceremony took place in Westminster Abbey on 12th December 1998. Mr Frank Delaney said that it was an honour to be asked to lay the wreath on Dr Johnson's stone. To approach such an illustrious figure was quite intimidating, especially for someone who, like Johnson, makes his living from the English language. Johnson is an overwhelming figure, because of the perfection and purity of his own speech, but, at the same time, an inspiring one. One is bound at least to attempt the kind of thing which he himself would have enjoyed, and would have felt pleased that he had stimulated somebody to do. Mr Delaney therefore offered his own tribute in the form of a Shakespearean sonnet.

#### TO SAMUEL JOHNSON

Today we gather by your famous tomb  
To celebrate the triumph of your life;  
Here amid genius' dust in holy gloom  
All lie at peace, released from art's wild strife.  
You, Samuel Johnson, suffered to the bone;  
Sad doubts and fears and anguish cut you deep;  
Now, 'neath the stillness of this singular stone  
May you rest easy. We, your memory keep.  
A friend to all things plain, a foe to sham,  
Fine thoughts in language pure, your words distilled;  
A sovereign figure, Literature's Great Cham  
Your truth ground small from Life's hard grain new milled  
To all men equal, and to all kind, kin  
And nothing of the Bear except your skin.

The ceremony was followed by the Annual Luncheon of the Society, which was held at the *Vitello d'Oro* restaurant. It was organised by Mrs A. G. Dowdeswell, and was attended by a good number of members and guests.

### IN MEMORIAM

#### John Comyn

WE were saddened to hear of the death of John Comyn on 27th December 1999, at the age of 67. He had been a member of the Society for many years, served on the Committee, and took over as Chairman from 1975 to 1991. He laid the annual wreath in Westminster Abbey in 1975, saw the Society through its major events – establishment in its new home at St Edmund's in 1976, and the Golden Jubilee dinner in 1978, for which he organised the souvenirs – and negotiated the cleaning of the Johnson statue by St Clement Danes in conjunction with the *Evening Standard*.

On retirement from Hambros Bank he left London for his home in Herefordshire, but became a Vice-President in 1992. Among admirers of Dr Johnson and his circle he had the distinction of being descended from Johnson's friend Dr Charles Burney, and thus collaterally from the novelist Fanny Burney, friend of Mrs Thrale.

John is survived by Mrs Comyn and their son and daughter, to whom we extend our sympathies.

## AN ASSOCIATION COPY OF MRS PIOZZI'S ANECDOTES

ONE of our members, Mr James A. Gow, of Fergus, Ontario, has drawn to our attention an interesting copy of Mrs Piozzi's *Anecdotes*, which is in his possession. The volume is the third edition, and was the property of the Revd Lancelot St Albyn, Rector of Paracombe, and Vicar of Wembleton, who corresponded with Johnson in 1782.

St Albyn submitted the correspondence to the *Gentleman's Magazine*,<sup>1</sup> and also transcribed it in his copy of the *Anecdotes* as follows:<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Urban

Bath Feb:14. 1786

As a very dangerous Misconstruction of a passage in a Work of the late Dr. Johnson appears to have been made by some persons, & though the Dr. kindly condescended to correct the Error, through the same Channel that the Remark was first intended to be conveyed to him; yet as the Misconstruction arising from a Book may long survive the Explanation contained in a Newspaper, I beg leave through your lasting Repository, in Justice to the Character of a most worthy Man, to perpetuate the Dr's Vindication of himself, as well as to communicate to the World the Steps which led to it. I am

Yours & c A.B.

Bath, May 4, 1782.

Sir,

Conscious of the Motive from which I write & trusting that it will readily & clearly appear, I shall leave it to plead my Excuse for the Trouble I may hereby give you. Without farther preface, therefore, I take the Liberty to inform you that, in the Morning Chronicle of Dec 12, last, a person in the Character of a Master of an Academy recommended the "Beauties of your Writings", a Book published last year, to all persons, who have the Care of Youth, as well calculated to convey both Pleasure and Instruction, particularly to young Minds. However, he pointed out one passage in it, under the Article Death which, he said, is supposed by some Readers to recommend Suicide; but, knowing your Principles too well to join in this Opinion, he hoped you would favour the publick, through the channel of the same paper with an Explanation, which will effectively remove so erroneous an Idea. The passage is as follows: "To die, is the Fate of Man; but to die with lingering Anguish is generally his Folly."

I confess, I have joined in the Wish of the Letter-Writer, but have not had the pleasure of seeing it gratified. Possibly the Letter has not come to your Knowledge, and, therefore, I take this Method of acquainting you with it; or probably the passage, when taken with its Context, loses its exceptionable Appearance. I own, I do not recollect my having met with it in any of your Works, though I cannot but suppose it is to be found there, and on that Account you may have thought unnecessary to give it any farther Explanation. Whatever may be the Cause of your not having taken any Notice of the Letter, I cannot be satisfied, whilst any Thing, which has the Sanction of your Name, even appears, uncontroverted, to recommend Suicide; whilst the acknowledged Friend of Religion and Virtue is supposed, uncontradicted, to have published any Sentiment inconsistent with the Christian Religion. I shall still hope, therefore, that you will not

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* 1786, Vol. 56(1), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Spelling, punctuation, paragraphing and capitalization are reproduced as in the MS.

think your Time mis-spent by publicly removing this, possibly, "Stone of Stumbling," this, as it appears, "Rock of Offence"; especially as your Silence may tend to confirm the Opinion of those who understand the passage in this very unfavourable Sense: and if you shall think this deserving of your private Notice, you will thereby confer an Honour, as well as an Obligation, on, Sir,

Your obedt humble Servt.  
Lanct. St. Albyn

p.s.  
My Address is  
To the Rev. Mr. St. Albyn  
at Bath

To Dr. Johnson, & c.

Sir,

May 15, 1782.

Being now in the Country in a State of Recovery, as I hope, from a very oppressive Disorder, I cannot neglect the Acknowledgement of your Christian Letter.

The book, called "The Beauties of J—n", is the production of I know not whom: I never saw it but by casual Inspection, and considered myself as utterly disengaged from its Consequences. Of the passage, which you mention, I remember some Notice in some paper; but knowing that it must be misrepresented, I thought on it no more, nor do I now know where to find it in my own Books. I am accustomed to think little of Newspapers, but an Opinion so weighty & serious as yours has determined me to do, what I should, without your seasonable Admonition, have omitted & I will direct my Thought to be shown in its true State.

If I could find the passage, I would direct you to it. I suppose the Tenour is this—Acute Diseases are the immediate & inevitable Strokes of Heaven; but of them the pain is short, & the Conclusion speedy; Chronical Disorders, by which we are suspended in tedious Torture between Life and Death, are commonly the Effect of our own Misconduct and Intemperance. To die, & c— This Sir, you see is all true, and all blameless.

I hope, some Time in the next Week, to have all rectified. My Health has been lately much shaken, if you Favour this with any Answer, it will be a Comfort to me to know that I have your prayers.

I am, Sir,  
Your most humble Servt,  
Sam: Johnson.

Sir,

Bath, May 18, 1782

I am to acknowledge, & thank you for your Favour of the 15<sup>th</sup>; & I am happy to find, that you did not think Business, on which I wrote to you, undeserving of your Attention. The Sentiment, as you have prefaced & explained it – as I doubted not would be the Case – is quite unexceptionable

I am very glad to find, that you are better than you have been, and on the Recovery – Indeed, I should be wanting in Gratitude, as well as Benevolence and Charity, if you had not, in return for the great pleasure I have recd from your Writings, my best Wishes and prayers, & particularly as my last & best, that, when the Period of the present State of your Existence shall approach you may have a short & easy passage from this Life to that in which Good Men "rest from their Labours & their Works follow them." I am, Sir,

With great Esteem,  
 Your obliged & obedt humble Servant, & c.  
 Lanct. St. Albyn  
 To Dr. Johnson &c.

St Albyn also transcribed the following:<sup>3</sup>

The following item appeared in the Morning Chronicle of May 29, 1782.

A Correspondent having mentioned, in the Morning Chronicle of Dec. 12th, the last clause of the following paragraph, as seeming to favour Suicide; we are requested to print the whole passage, that its true meaning may appear, which is not to recommend Suicide, but Exercise.

"Exercise cannot secure us from that Dissolution to which we are decreed; but while the Soul and Body continue united, it can make the Association pleasing, and give probable Hopes that they shall be disjoined by an easy Separation. It was a principle among the Ancients, that acute Diseases are from Heaven, & chronical from ourselves; the Dart of Death indeed falls from Heaven, but we poison it by our own Misconduct; to die is the Fate of Man, but to die with lingering Anguish is generally his Folly."

Vide Rambler, Vol: 2 No. 85.

St Albyn was clearly sufficiently interested to be an early purchaser of the *Anecdotes*. Only 1,000 copies of the first edition were printed, and they all sold out within a few hours on the first day, 25th March 1786. A second edition of 1,000 was ready by 5th April, and the third edition (in fact printed from the same type) of 500 was published on 11th April. Another edition (called the fourth) appeared on 5th May.<sup>4</sup> Also inscribed in St Albyn's copy of the *Anecdotes* is the following tribute, one which Mrs Piozzi always believed was the work of Sir Herbert Croft.<sup>5</sup>

On reading Mrs Piozzi's *Anecdotes* of Dr Johnson

In these few pages, strongly mark'd, we find  
 The Idiosyncrasy of Johnson's Mind.  
 Motley the Mixture, & yet just the plan  
 To represent the strange but Great Good Man:  
 For in the pleasing Composition meet,  
 Like punch, the Strong, the Weak, the Sour, the Sweet

N.B. I sent the above to the printer of the Gentleman's Magazine; & it was inserted in that for April 1786.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *Gentleman's Magazine* 1786, Vol. 56(1), p. 94.

<sup>4</sup> James Clifford, *Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mrs Thrale)*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, reprinted 1968), p. 264; Thomas Cadell to Mrs Piozzi, 8th May 1786, quoted in Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (eds), *The Piozzi Letters*, Vol. I, 1784-91, (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989), p. 198.

<sup>5</sup> Clifford, note 4 above, p. 273, note 2.

<sup>6</sup> It appears in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 1786, Vol. 56(1) p. 340.

Johnson's views on suicide are recorded in a number of places. It has been suggested by James Clifford that after leaving Oxford, 'In one depressed moment Sam even "strongly entertained thoughts of suicide" and actually talked to Taylor about the possibility.'<sup>7</sup> Clifford's source is a letter of November 1785 from one Mrs Mary Nicholas.<sup>8</sup> She recounts that she has received a letter from her brother, who passes on various anecdotes which he has heard from Johnson's friend, the Revd John Taylor of Ashbourne:

[T]he aforesaid faithful Friend of Johnson assures him that he [the Doctor] certainly at one time strongly entertained thoughts of Suicide, that he talked with him upon the subject who [word torn away] knocked up the Doctr.

It is difficult to judge the accuracy of this account. Mrs Nicholas makes it clear that her brother had a low opinion of Johnson, and also that she distrusts Taylor: 'The person it comes from to my brother was never famous for veracity or any other good quality.' The rumour also reached the Revd James Hutton, who wrote to Boswell in 1792:

I recollect having heard in Derbyshire that Dr Taylor had boasted at a Table there that Dr Johnson had consulted Him about the admissibility of Suicide, and that He had set him right by the most paltry common place Stuff that could be. I grew so angry and so disgusted that I despised Taylor as unworthy of Society, if what he uttered was in any Degree True, as a Confessors Breach of Confession Fidelity, and if not True, it certainly was not, how disgraceful.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, as Mrs Piozzi records in her *Anecdotes*: 'Taylor ... is better acquainted with my heart than any man or woman now alive; and the history of my Oxford exploits lies all between him and Adams.'<sup>10</sup> Some doubt may be cast on the anecdote by Johnson's comment (albeit made many years later), when Johnson and Boswell 'talked of a man's drowning himself' and Johnson commented: 'I should never think it time to make away with myself'.<sup>11</sup> Johnson does not, however, appear to have regarded suicide as invariably wrong, nor as unforgivable. Dr Campbell records in his diary:

Talking of suicide – Boswell took up its defence for argument sake – & the Doctor said that some cases were more excusable than others but if it were excusable it shd. be the last resource & c for instance says he if a man is distressed in circumstances (as in the case I mentioned of Denny) he ought to fly his country & c.<sup>12</sup>

In 1783, Johnson gave it as his opinion that:

If a man has been seven years good and afterwards is by passion hurried to commit what is wrong, he'll have the reward of his seven years. God won't take a catch of him. So Richard

<sup>7</sup> James Clifford, *Young Samuel Johnson* (London: Heinemann, 1955), p. 124.

<sup>8</sup> Aleyn Lyell Reade, 'A New Admirer for Dr Johnson', *London Mercury*, XXI (1930), p. 247.

<sup>9</sup> Marshall Waingow, *The Correspondence and Other Papers of James Boswell Relating to the Making of the Life of Johnson* (London: Heinemann, 1969), p. 468.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Sherbo (ed.), *Mrs Piozzi's Anecdotes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 70; cf. Katharine Balderston (ed.), *Thraliana* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, 1951), p. 173.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick A. Pottle and Charles H. Bennett (eds.) *Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, 1773* (London: Heinemann, 1963), p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> James Clifford (ed.), *Dr Campbell's Diary of a Visit to England in 1775* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), p. 79.



Baxter says a suicide may be saved. 'If' (says he), 'this should encourage suicide, I am not to tell a lie to prevent it.'<sup>13</sup>

Johnson's letter of 15th May 1782 was subsequently printed by Boswell, identifying the correspondent only as 'a clergyman from Bath'.<sup>14</sup> In preparing his edition of the letters, Dr Chapman had been referred to the edition of the *Anecdotes* now in the possession of Mr Gow, and was therefore able to identify St Albyn.<sup>15</sup>

St Albyn, who matriculated at Balliol College in 1741-2, aged 19, then transferred to Magdalen Hall, Cambridge, graduating BA in 1745, and MA from King's College in 1762, was Rector of Paracombe, Devon and Vicar of Wembledon, Somerset from 1762.<sup>16</sup> He died on 22nd January 1791. A brief obituary appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*:

After a long and very painful illness, in his 69th year, the Rev. Lancelot St. Albyn, M.A. formerly of Baliol [*sic*] College, Oxford, late rector of Paracombe, and vicar of Wembledon, in the counties of Devon and Somerset.<sup>17</sup>

We are grateful to Mr Gow for drawing this volume to our attention, and providing copies of the annotations.

M. B.

<sup>13</sup> Irma Lustig and Frederick Pottle, *Boswell: the Applause of the Jury, 1782-1785* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 151.

<sup>14</sup> Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (edited G. B. Hill, revised L. F. Powell), Vol. IV, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> R. W. Chapman (ed.), *The Letters of Samuel Johnson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), Vol. II, p. 482. Dr Chapman states that he had been referred to a third edition of the *Anecdotes*, which 'contains a number of MS. Notes by the Rev. Lancelot St Albyn, from which it is clear that he was J's correspondent.' See also Bruce Redford (ed.), *The Letters of Samuel Johnson (The Hyde Edition)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), Vol. IV, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses* (2nd series) (Oxford: James Parker & Co, 1891), IV, p. 1242; J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), Pt II, V, p. 398; Bruce Redford (ed.), *The Letters of Samuel Johnson (The Hyde Edition)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), Vol. IV, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* 1791, Vol. 61, p. 94.

within India and around the globe at the close of the eighteenth century' (p. 207). Abjuring dry political analysis, Curley examines the personal and intellectual antagonisms that surfaced among leading figures in sweltering, eighteenth-century India – a wise approach, since some of the defining moments in Chambers's life came when he tried, in vain, to persuade people vastly less educated in law and legal history of the wisdom of his views. Certainly one of the most engrossing chapters of the book concerns Chambers's failed attempt to save the life of Nanda Kumar, who had been convicted of forgery in a notorious trial. Although scholars have long debated whether the trial of 1775 was unjust, Curley presents a hitherto unknown letter written by Chambers – an insider's account, in essence – that undeniably 'corroborate[s] the injustice of the proceedings' (p. 215). The case was something of a culmination of Chambers's thinking. In arguing against punishing forgery with hanging, Chambers deployed a range of thoughtful arguments, including a lively argument on why 'underdeveloped Bengal had less of a paper economy and proportionately less need for a death penalty to protect it from fraud' (p. 218). This and much more distinguishes Chambers as a forward-looking legal thinker – at least in hindsight. In Chambers's own time, alas, political skulduggery and corruption won out, and by late summer of 1775, '[n]othing could save the convicted Brahmin from the gibbet' (p. 225). Curley aligns the entire affair alongside Johnson's own penetrating thinking on capital punishment, not only in *Rambler* 114, but in his more personal response to the conviction of Dr. William Dodd for forgery in 1777. 'The two cases,' Curley sagely observes,

bear an uncanny resemblance to each other in the circumstances of the crime, the priestly rank of the offender, the obduracy of the legal establishment despite a public outcry for mercy, the grim penalty of hanging, and the beneficent impact of the trial in ameliorating the future punishment of forgery (pp. 230-231).

As this passage suggests, Curley presents eighteenth-century debates with an eye toward attracting contemporary readers interested in the perennial legal and ethical arguments surrounding capital punishment.

I should think for most readers, the biography's most conspicuous – and admirable – characteristic will be its interdisciplinary scholarship. With 543 pages of text, over 100 pages of footnotes, a 25-page bibliography, and a thorough index worthy of Chambers's own wide-ranging interests and contacts, Curley covers a range of topics that today have become their own academic sub-specialties, such as eighteenth-century journalism, eighteenth-century British India, the history of British legal education, Indian law, and the history of the development of Asian studies – as well as the life and works of Samuel Johnson. Yet the scholarship never seems recondite. Inevitably perhaps, a work of such magnitude and scope, written and considered over a number of years, contains minor repetitions. Here and there Curley reintroduces people and topics needlessly, in my view. But perhaps such a distraction stands out more to one who reads the book in a few sittings, as a reviewer does, than it will to those who read with a specific purpose in mind or those who read according to inclination – as Johnson himself shamelessly said he did.

If the unostentatious tenor of Chambers's life allows Curley few opportunities for flamboyant interpretation, it nonetheless supplies Curley with ample material to present a life of a 'scholar who passed his life among books' as indeed a 'proper object of public regard', to invoke an important principle of *Rambler* 60. Further, *Sir Robert Chambers: Law, Literature, and Empire in the Age of Johnson* profitably reminds us that eighteenth-century lawyers and authors, though they did not always live in similar social circumstances, often depended on similar habits of mind when they wrote. To its credit, I think, the book reflects many of the literary proclivities of Samuel Johnson himself.

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Isobel Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Comet of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Pp xxiii + 680. Hardback £30.00.

FOR Isobel Grundy, this remarkable biography is the fruit of nearly thirty years of almost continuous engagement with its subject. In 1977, she collaborated with Robert Halsband, whose own biography of Lady Mary was a pioneering academic study, to edit *Essays and Poems and Simplicity: a Comedy*. Recently, Grundy has published Montagu's *Romance Writings*, her *Selected Letters*, and numerous articles on aspects of her life and work. This biography builds on Halsband's, in the light of a very large range of new scholarship, and above all, of new work on women's writing in the eighteenth century, and its publishing history – if any – and reception. 'It is' Grundy writes here, 'the feminist movement and the consequent rewriting of women's literary history that have given Lady Mary the audience she commands today' (pp. 627-8).

But Montagu's life was so remarkable that areas of research also had to include orientalism in the eighteenth century, the controversy surrounding inoculation for smallpox, Jacobitism in France and Britain, European wars, local history in French and Italian, the eighteenth-century coal industry in Northern England, as well as the lives and works of those contemporary writers – friends and enemies – that we should expect, notably, of course, Pope, Gay, Hervey, and Horace Walpole, and including feminists like Mary Astell. Friends like Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, Robert Walpole, and Lord Bute, Montagu's son-in-law, connected her to the Courts of George II and III, and the Court-in-waiting of Frederick Prince of Wales.

Grundy finds that even the choice of name to discuss Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was problematic. She has chosen, following contemporary academic practice, to use 'Montagu' only for her subject as writer. In her lifetime, 'Lady Mary' was the normal address: defined as a woman and an aristocrat, she was inhibited from herself publishing anything she wrote, although some verse and letters were published in her lifetime. Because of this, and because of her daughter's regard for family reputation, a great deal of her writing – fiction, letters, poems, diaries, translation – is now lost.

'Lady Mary' was admired or reviled by her contemporaries as learned, celebrated as a beauty, even after smallpox had ravaged her face, and was a friend and correspondent of some of the most prominent thinkers of Europe, including Voltaire, Montesquieu, the Venetian Pietro Grimani, the Turkish Achmet Beg, and the Italian free-thinker Antonio Conti. As a girl, she 'stole' Latin, working with grammar and dictionary in her father's library, devouring, later translating, classical writers, while believed to be reading romances. As an adolescent, in the female society of sisters and friends, she wrote her own first romances, a genre to which she returned much later in life with *Princess Docile*. She eloped with Edward Wortley Montagu – with whom she was not in love – rather than marry the man her father chose for her, and was disinherited for it. (She recognised her own plight in *Clarissa* many years later). Her marriage was difficult, but it survived even her thirty years of self-imposed exile in Europe, from where she wrote dutifully to Wortley about her movements, about political events, and about their unsatisfactory son. In the early years, he saw her beauty as a political tool at court, and was reported to be 'inconsolable' when the smallpox disfigured her.

In London, however, her writing took off in the congenial company of Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot, and her satires on the court circulated, and were pirated and printed by Curl. Later, she edited and wrote for a short-lived pro-Walpole periodical, *The Nonsense of Common Sense*. When writing the life of such a lively writer and copious correspondent as Montagu, there is surely a temptation to quote extensively: Grundy has chosen to limit quotations, instead paraphrasing letters, weaving phrases and lines of verse into her exposition. She has translated most of Halsband's lengthy French quotations from Montagu's letters. In a work of 680 pages, this must be the right decision, although the reader may sometimes wish for more.

When in 1717 Wortley was made ambassador to Turkey, Lady Mary was the first Christian European woman to involve herself intimately with Turkish life, and to penetrate into the harem. Her *Embassy Letters*, edited from diaries, give a richly absorbing account of her studies of the language and culture of this Muslim society, including her celebrated description of the Turkish bath, still material for feminist and orientalist discussion. Everywhere she travelled, now and later, 'the greatest happiness of life' was intellectual conversation with the learned and agreeable, whether with Turkish sages or in Enlightenment Europe (p. 124). The most lasting practical result of her journey was the introduction to England of inoculation for smallpox. She had her own son inoculated in Turkey, and, on her return, fought a long and successful campaign to promote the practice.

Grundy's research has been able to uncover no more certain reason for the rift between Pope and Lady Mary than that of her predecessors. Probably we shall never know, but for readers who first came to 'Sappho' through Pope's satires, this biography splendidly redresses the balance. For Pope, she became an 'image of the Bad Woman, dirty, degraded and unnatural', standard condemnation, as Grundy points out, for the threateningly clever woman (p. 329). Whether it was because of Pope's increasingly savage attacks on Lady Mary, and the sense of exposure this brought her, or simply her passion – aged 47 – for the brilliant, bisexually charming young Francesco Algarotti, in 1739 she left England for twenty-three years, returning only to die of breast cancer in 1762.

Her travels read like a romance, as she moved from Venice to Avignon to Brescia, first in fruitless hope of being joined by Algarotti, later in the thrall of the confidence trickster Ugolino Palazzi, who kept her virtually prisoner in her succession of crumbling palaces in Italy. There were, however, many pleasures, and her account of the paradisaic smallholding she cultivated at Loverè is delightful. Eventually, she escaped back to Venice, and finally returned to England. In every city, even in the heart of the Italian countryside, she exchanged ideas with fellow-savants, was respected and consulted by her local country people. She sent a stream of letters, often with great difficulty, across a Europe torn by wars and political turmoil, to Wortley, to her daughter, and to friends. At any time in history, hers would have been an extraordinary life, especially for a woman, but this biography makes engrossing reading for anyone interested in the eighteenth century. It richly justifies its title, and while it is a work of impressive scholarship, it is also compellingly entertaining.

Dr Eithne Henson

Peter Martin, *A Life of James Boswell* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999). Pp x + 613. Hardback £25.00.

At first sight, Boswell's is an immensely attractive life to write: a complex personality, both lively and depressive, both self-obsessed and self-effacing, moving amongst the most energetic and celebrated figures in a fascinating period; an existence crammed with events, travels, publications, emotion and debauchery; and, above all, an absolute mass of primary material on which to draw. With hindsight, however, the task is daunting and thankless. How does one write the life of a man who has already written it so frankly, painfully and engagingly himself? However well one manages the materials, selects the choice quotations, attempts to see the wider picture, the work is only ever going to be a pale reflection of the life of the original. Frederick Pottle and Frank Brady, in their volumes on the earlier and later Boswell, wrote as academics, producing solid, informative, standard works to rank alongside the best in the field. But Peter Martin has not chosen that model – wisely, in that Brady's volume in particular only appeared in 1984 and is hardly due for replacement. Nevertheless, it is not easy

to see where *A Life of James Boswell* is intended to fit. Martin manages, selects, summarises adequately enough, and his work is illuminated by his sympathy with Boswell himself and his lively appreciation of the achievement that is Boswell's journal – 'What is striking is that he wrote at great speed and yet his manuscript is virtually free of corrections' (p. 97). It is still, however, an old story: the finding of the Boswell papers, the meetings with the great and the notorious, the pedestrian rehearsing of Boswell's and Johnson's respective motives for their visit to the Hebrides and for writing about it (pp. 303-4). No one who has any interest in Boswell already will find anything new in this biography, or any new light shed on their existing knowledge. It is essentially a book for the beginner.

The text, unfortunately, even for the novice reader, is full of irritations. Typographical errors are frequent and widespread, not least in quoted material – for example 'thing' for 'thinking' (p. 72), the word 'love' missing (p. 258), 'ever' for 'never' (p. 390). The poet Cowper is referred to as Thomas (p. 14), and Boswell himself as 'she' (p. 498). There are inaccuracies and omissions. Martin writes about Boswell's friendship with John Wilkes, stating that 'he never showed the least inclination to fall in with his politics' (p. 200), omitting therefore Brady's confirmation that Boswell actually submitted a paper to Wilkes' *North Briton*, which Wilkes rejected. Mention of Boswell's freemasonry is delayed until late in the narrative (p. 297), when it receives scant attention. Of the Hebrides aftermath, Martin has the threat of a duel come from Sir Alexander Macdonald (p. 483), where Brady, again, has shown that it was actually Boswell who offered to call Macdonald out. Two errors occur in the ages of Boswell's children, one where Veronica and Euphemia are each given the age of the other (p. 419) and one where Veronica, who was born in March 1773, is declared as being sixteen in May 1788 (p. 505). Part of the problem here is Martin's not keeping track of the years sufficiently clearly, so that he can open one section with 'The new year began dismally' (p. 421), meaning 1780, which has already been under discussion for two pages, and elsewhere begin a paragraph by stating 'Nine months of hypochondria and vexation later, in September 1793' (p. 539) when there has been nothing mentioned nine months previously. Part of it, too, must derive from inattentive rewrites. 'Pringle was right' suddenly appears in the middle of the narration of Boswell's search for a wife (p. 242), with no sign at all of whatever it was he was right about. Missing, too, is an explicit statement that 'The Hypochondriack' essays were published anonymously, which makes a large difference in our understanding of Boswell as 'totally honest with his readers' and of being 'in danger of exposing too much of himself in public' (p. 395). Nor does he point out that Boswell's 'Memoirs of James Boswell, Esquire', published in the *European Magazine* in 1791, in which he 'felt his importance enough' to review 'his life and writings chronologically, down to his wife's death and the publication of his "great literary work"' (pp. 532-3) was also anonymous, again a factor in judging Martin's assessment of its significance. The index, too, is a great disappointment. Over fourteen columns of entries under Boswell certainly is generous, with good coverage of other family members, of Johnson and of Boswell's closest friends and correspondents. But the choices made of who to include and who omit of the wider social and cultural circle are odd. Pope, to whom constant reference is made, nevertheless has only a single entry; Gray, 'one of Boswell's favourite poets' (p. 117), is missing entirely though widely cited, including his assessment of Boswell's book on Corsica (p. 219); Cowper and Smart are absent, along with Mrs Love and 'Louisa' (except under Boswell: Affairs) and the 'charming' Lady Diana Beauclerk whom Johnson refers to as 'a whore' (p. 296), though Yale University is in, with two references. Of those included there are several mistakes, with entries for Henry Dundas, Mary Ann Boyd and Jean Heron that give wrong references while missing others altogether.

Martin does have a thesis: it is that 'melancholy determined the course of Boswell's existence' (p. 13). A 'prominent theme' of the narrative is therefore 'to trace the link between his contradictory and confused self and his hypochondria or melancholia which, from adolescence onwards, set in motion causes and effects that often wrecked his behaviour' (p. 3). Here, too, however, the book fails to deliver. Martin's tracing of Boswell's hypochondria is largely limited to accounts of his low periods, and his analysis is no more probing than an occasional attempt to link hypochondria and creativity, as he remarks

of the first, happy years of Boswell's marriage: 'If he was to have something to write about, either the spectral forces of hypochondria and gloom needed to regain their hold or he had to extricate himself from his uxorious, sober, busy domestic cocoon and throw himself into the more complicated and thrilling literary world of London.' (p. 265) Like so much else in an initially promising book, this disappoints. That it should do so, though, was almost inevitable. No one writes Boswell like Boswell.

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Leo Damrosch (General Editor), *Major Authors on CD-ROM: Samuel Johnson and James Boswell* (Primary Source Media, 1997). Special offer price £195 + VAT (£229.13 inclusive).

**I**N recent years, a number of Johnson's works have become available in electronic form. Anne McDermott edited for CD-ROM the first and fourth editions of the *Dictionary*, and many sources are now available on-line, particularly on the Johnson pages developed by Jack Lynch. The Primary Source Media CD-ROM adds substantially to the materials now available in readily searchable form. It contains a large collection of the writings of Johnson and Boswell, and some related publications. The sources are a mixture of old and modern editions; in some cases, more than one edition is included.

The editions of Johnson's works include all the volumes of the *Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* which have so far appeared, the Birkbeck Hill *Lives of the Poets* (as well as Clarence Tracy's edition of the *Life of Savage*), Allen Hazen's edition of *Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications*, and David Fleeman's collection of Johnson's *Early Biographical Writings*. The *Debates in Parliament* (yet to appear in the *Yale Edition*) are taken from the 1825 edition. The first edition (1755) of the *Dictionary* is included, as is the 1765 edition of Shakespeare's plays. Johnson's letters are from the Birkbeck Hill edition. Although not included in the table of contents, the 1805 edition of the *Annals* also appears.

The CD therefore gives ready access to a very substantial collection of the standard editions of Johnson's works. Of modern editions, the only major omissions (doubtless for copyright reasons) are the editions of the letters by R. W. Chapman and Bruce Redford (the Hyde Edition), and David Fleeman's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*.

There is also a good selection of important biographical sources. These include Mrs Piozzi's *Anecdotes* (4th edition, 1786), and also *Thraliana*, which, for some reason, appears in the first edition (1942), not the second (1951). Sir John Hawkins' *Life* is also included, but in the form of the first edition of 1787, not the revised one issued later the same year. The CD also includes Tinker's collection of the Johnsonian passages from the works of Madame D'Arblay, the Hill-Powell edition of the *Life of Johnson*, and Birkbeck Hill's *Johnsonian Miscellanies*. (One is reminded by the list of contents how much Johnsonian studies owe to George Birkbeck Hill.)

The selection of Boswell's works is less complete. As well as the *Life* and the *Tour to the Hebrides*, Margery Bailey's edition of *The Hypochondriack* is included, as is *An Account of Corsica* (3rd edition, 1769), and a few other minor pieces. However, none of the Yale-Edinburgh editions of the *Private Papers* is included.

As with all publications in this format, the CD is a research and reference tool; one cannot imagine anyone using it as a reading edition. The advantages are those of all such works; the CD makes it possible to search an extensive library of sources, giving ready access to references to a particular author, theme or concept. Cross-references to the relevant page in the hard copy sources are given. It will prove invaluable for libraries, and in academic research.

The CD is being made available at a special price to readers of the *New Rambler*; for details, see the advertisement in this issue. It is not cheap, but those involved in serious research in this area may think a price somewhat lower than that of a second-hand Hill-Powell *Life* is one worth paying.

M. B.

#### ALSO RECEIVED

The following have also been received, and may be reviewed in a future issue of the *New Rambler*:

Scott D. Evans, *Samuel Johnson's 'General Nature': Tradition and Transition in Eighteenth-Century Discourse* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press/Associated University Presses, 1999). Pp 168. Hardback £26.00.

Kevin Hart, *Samuel Johnson and the Culture of Property* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Pp 244. Hardback £35.00.

Ian McIntyre, *Garrick* (London: Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, 1999) xiii + 678. Hardback £25.00.

Bruce Redford with Elizabeth Goldring, *James Boswell's Life of Johnson: An Edition of the Manuscript in Four Volumes, Volume 2, 1766-1776* (Edinburgh, New Haven and London: Edinburgh University Press/Yale University Press, 1998). Pp xviii + 303. Hardback £50.00.

David F. Venturo, *Johnson the Poet: The Poetic Career of Samuel Johnson* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press/Associated University Presses, 1999). Pp 336. Hardback £38.00.



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