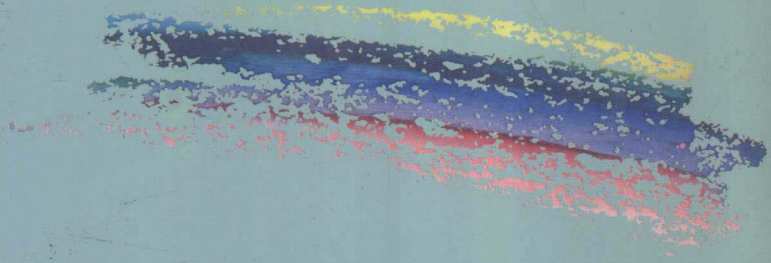
SAMUEL JOHNSON



The Oxford Authors

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SAMUEL JOHNSON

EDITED BY
DONALD GREENE

Oxford New York
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1984

Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
London Glasgow New York Toronto
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town
Melbourne Auckland
and associated companies in
Beirut Berlin Ibadan Mexico City Nicosia

Oxford is a trade mark of Oxford University Press

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Johnson, Samuel, 1709–1784
Samuel Johnson.—(The Oxford authors)
I. Title II. Greene, Donald
821'.6 PR 3530
ISBN 0–19–254179–X
ISBN 0–19–281340–4 Pbk

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Johnson, Samuel, 1709–1784.
Samuel Johnson.
(The Oxford authors)
Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
I. Greene, Donald Johnson. II. Title.
PR3522.G73 1984 828'.609 83–17280
ISBN 0–19–254179–X
ISBN 0–19–281340–4 (pbk.)

Set by Eta Services (Typesetters) Ltd.
Printed in Great Britain by
Cox & Wyman Ltd.
Reading, Berks.

THE OXFORD AUTHORS

General Editor: Frank Kermode

SAMUEL JOHNSON was born in 1709 in Lichfield, Staffordshire. The son of an impecunious bookseller, he experienced poverty throughout the first part of his life, and, in spite of his formidable mental endowments, was able to attend Pembroke College, Oxford, for only a year. After moving to London in 1737, he earned his living by miscellaneous journalism for many years, until his *Rambler* essays and the first historical dictionary of the English language brought him fame. A government pension of £300 a year relieved him from necessity, and in the later part of his life he came to be regarded as the greatest literary figure of his time in England. Among his most noted works are his poem 'The Vanity of Human Wishes', his periodical essays, his moral tale *Rasselas*, his edition of Shakespeare's plays, and his long series of *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical*, to the works of the English poets. He died in 1784 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

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INTRODUCTION

ONE reason why Samuel Johnson, more than any other major figure of English literature, is better known as a 'personality' than as the great writer he was has been the difficulty of access to the large and varied canon of his writings. This is being remedied by the steady, if slow, appearance of the first full scholarly edition of his works. But it will be some time before that edition is complete, and in any case it is likely to be of most use to the specialist. The aim of the present volume is to provide the discerning general reader, as well as students of English literature, with a substantial sampling of Johnson's achievement as a writer: to bring him into contact with Johnson's wide-ranging curiosity about the world and its inhabitants; his intense concern for their problems and the penetrating insight he brought to them; and the verbal artistry with which he set down his observations and reflections on the human condition.

The biography of Johnson has become a field of specialization in itself, and it would be useless here to try to summarize what its many practitioners have discovered, or thought they have discovered, about his life and his psychology. (Without detracting from the excellence of some of this work, it may still be useful to repeat Johnson's remark, when pressed for an introduction to some writer much in the public eye, 'The best part of every author is in general to be found in his book, I assure you.') In fact, the outline of Johnson's life, like that of most dedicated professional writers, is not a very eventful one. He was born in 1709, in Lichfield, Staffordshire, to an impecunious fifty-two-year-old bookseller and his forty-year-old wife. He received the traditional classical education at the Lichfield grammar school, and was able to attend Pembroke College, Oxford, for a little more than a year before poverty made him withdraw. There followed some locust years in the Midlands, with Johnson trying his hand unsuccessfully at schoolmastering, and undertaking sporadic ventures in writing. There was a strange marriage with a widow twenty years older than he, whose modest fortune he invested in a boarding school, which soon failed. At last, in 1737, accompanied by his former pupil, young David Garrick, he made his way to London, to try to make a living in Grub Street by his pen.

Then came a decade of ill-paid miscellaneous journalism, the bulk of it for the pioneering 'first magazine', the *Gentleman's*, which

Johnson helped to convert from a rather dreary collection of reprints from current newspapers to the prototype of the modern 'intellectual' journal, designed to inform and stimulate the minds of the educated and educable general public. When he was about forty, his name began to be known, with the moderate *succès d'estime* of his long poem 'The Vanity of Human Wishes' and his blank-verse tragedy *Irene*, written long before, but only now produced, through Garrick's influence.

In the 1750s, with his acclaimed series of *Rambler* essays and his great *Dictionary of the English Language*, Johnson began to be recognized as one of the most important literary figures of his time. There was still financial hardship. The payment for the *Dictionary* had been exhausted during the eight years of work on it, and Johnson undertook the editorship of the *Literary Magazine*—an appointment which lasted for only a few months because of his intransigent opposition to the popular Seven Years War—and two other sets of periodical essays, *The Adventurer* and *The Idler*. The decade also saw the deaths of the two people dearest to him, his wife in 1752—there had been no children—and his mother in 1759. To pay for the expenses of his mother's last illness, he wrote ('in the evenings of a week') his fine *conte philosophique*, *Rasselas*.

When he was fifty-three, he was relieved of financial worry by the award of an annual pension from the new government of George III and Lord Bute (a good deal of mystery still surrounds the pension: that Johnson had written much in virulent opposition to the Whig regimes of Walpole and the Pelhams in the previous reign is surely not irrelevant). The pension of £300 (multiplied by perhaps twenty-five to arrive at its current equivalent) also relieved him from some incentive to effort, and it was not until after much prodding that his edition of Shakespeare, announced nine years before, appeared in 1765. A related effect may have been the intensification of the periods of severe depression to which he was subject. From the worst of these, in 1766, he was rescued by a new-found friend, the charming and intellectual Hester Thrale, wife of a wealthy brewer. For the rest of his life he cultivated friendships, often with the young—the amusing, if erratic Scot, James Boswell, the learned and solemn Bennet Langton, the young Oxford professor Robert Chambers, to whom he secretly gave much help when Chambers was faced with the formidable task of preparing a course of lectures in English law in succession to the *Commentaries* of his predecessor in the Vinerian chair, Sir William Blackstone. At the famous 'Club' which he and Sir Joshua Reynolds

founded in 1765 (the second of three dining clubs organized by Johnson), he took part in the brilliant conversational exchanges reported by Boswell, with men like Burke and Gibbon. He travelled a good deal, spending many summers in his native Midlands, with his stepdaughter Lucy Porter in Lichfield, and his old schoolfellows the surgeon Edmund Hector in Birmingham and John Taylor, rector of Ashbourne, Derbyshire. In 1773 he made his astonishing tour, with Boswell, of the remote and scarcely-known Highlands of Scotland, and later travelled with the Thrales through Wales and France.

He now wrote, not to earn his living, but as occasion and impulse offered: in the 1770s, four hard-hitting pamphlets in defence of actions of the government of the day; an account of his travels in Scotland; fifty-two *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical* (commonly but inaccurately called *The Lives of the Poets*) for an anthology of English verse brought out by a syndicate of London booksellers. Though he suffered from a multitude of ailments throughout his life, and was given in a hypochondriacal way to self-diagnosis and treatment, he was basically robust—his tall, muscular frame is not done justice to by Reynolds's most frequently reproduced portrait, which overemphasizes his obesity—and he lived to the respectable age of seventy-five, dying in December 1784.

This brief sketch can be supplemented by the Chronology (p. xxix), and of course by the many biographies. What follows is a more detailed account of Johnson's career as a writer, attempting to show how the various pieces printed in the body of this volume fit into his *oeuvre* as a whole.

Before 1730. Like other skilled writers, Johnson began to compose early. A good deal of his juvenilia has been preserved. Six pieces of Latin composition survive—'themes', in which a gnomic quotation from a Latin author is set by a schoolmaster (or college tutor), on which the pupil has to write a page or so of Latin prose (and, with the two preserved from his Pembroke days, a quatrain of Latin verse). They are of some interest: a diatribe against European exploitation of distant lands; one (p. 39) based on the lines from Juvenal's tenth satire that Johnson was later to render in 'The Vanity of Human Wishes' as 'This pow'r has praise, that virtue scarce can warm,/Till fame supplies the universal charm'; one on a tag from Macrobius's *Saturnalia* (so that the credit Johnson gained for quoting Macrobius when entering Pembroke perhaps belongs rather to the schoolmaster

who set him the assignment). They also show young Johnson's Latin not to have been impeccable.

Much more that has survived is verse—sometimes English, sometimes Latin; some obviously deriving from schoolwork (translations from Horace, Virgil, and Homer), some 'original'. His earliest known poem, 'On a Daffodil' (Romantic critics would have stared), was written when he was about fifteen; it is not very good, and contains the kind of 'traditional imagery'—'lambent zephyrs', 'Sol's bright chariot'—he was later to deplore. A religious poem, 'On the Feast of St Simon and St Jude', in the six-line *Song to David* stanza, and a version, in heroic couplets, of Addison's Latin 'Battle of the Pygmies and Cranes' show increasing competence. A good example of this early work is the translation of Horace, *Odes*, ii. 20 (p. 1), where the quatrain form imposes an economy suitable to that of Horace's Latin. There are conventional poems of compliment to ladies, some perhaps done at the request of friends, which Johnson continued to write in the 1740s. The best is 'To Miss ——, On Her Playing upon the Harpsichord' (p. 9), which has a fascinating 'metaphysical' quality.

For all that Johnson is usually thought of as a prose writer, poetry was dear to his heart, and he composed much of it, especially in his youth and in old age, when he whiled away insomniac nights by turning the lyrics of the Greek *Anthology* into Latin verse. His first publication, written when he was nineteen and a Pembroke undergraduate, was a translation of Pope's *Messiah* into Latin dactylics, published in John Husbands's *Miscellany of Poems*, 1731, to which Pope himself is said to have given the highest praise. Johnson's collected poetry runs to a good-sized volume. Much of it displays his talent for 'light' and epigrammatic verse, sometimes made extemporaneously, of which a sampling is included here. In considering Johnson as a poet, it is well to keep in mind T. S. Eliot's magisterial pronouncement, concerning the Charles XII passage in 'The Vanity of Human Wishes', 'If these lines are not poetry, I do not know what is.'

1730–1740. During Johnson's peregrinations in the Midlands, he may have contributed to Thomas Warren's *Birmingham Journal*. Nothing known to be by him has survived from it, but there is a presage of Johnson's later extensive involvement in journalism. What *has* survived from his Birmingham days is his translation (or rather adaptation), from the French version by Joachim LeGrand, of the Portuguese Jesuit Jerome Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia*, together with LeGrand's

'dissertations' appended to it. The 400-page volume touches on some highly controversial matters, mentioned in Johnson's preface (p. 41). The attempt by the Portuguese Jesuit mission in the early seventeenth century to 'convert' the Ethiopians, who had long had their own brand of Christianity, was denounced by Protestants as a cynical power-play by Portugal to protect its commercially profitable sea-route to India. Johnson comes down firmly on the Protestant side, and, though paying tribute to Lobo's honesty as an observer, spares no emphasis in reprobating Roman Catholic missionary methods. He is said to have been able to finish the work only through the efforts of Hector, who took down the words Johnson dictated as he lay in bed, too depressed to rise. For this substantial task, Johnson received five guineas.

Once in London, however, and attached to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, Johnson found plenty to do—its shrewd proprietor, Edward Cave, believed in getting full value out of his employees. Among Johnson's contributions to the *GM* were several short biographies: of the Venetian Fra Paolo Sarpi, a considerable amount of whose great *History of the Council of Trent*, written from an anti-Papal point of view, Johnson translated (only three paragraphs of the translation survive); of Sir Francis Drake and the Cromwellian Admiral Robert Blake, whose successful exploits against the Spanish and Dutch were perhaps intended to shame Sir Robert Walpole's feeble efforts in the War of Jenkins's Ear; of the scholarly prodigy Jean-Philippe Barretier and the great Dutch scientist Boerhaave, both recently dead. They are of course derivative—Johnson had no opportunity for original research—but they are competent journalism. The life of Boerhaave is given here (p. 54), partly because it has been said, with some justice, that much in Boerhaave's life formed a personal ideal for Johnson's.

Throughout his life Johnson was concerned with human attitudes towards death; the two essays on epitaphs given here (pp. 51, 96) testify to that concern. A significant early piece in the *GM* is 'The State of Affairs in Lilliput' (p. 44), which introduces Cave's ingenious device for evading Parliament's ban on the reporting of its debates; the popularity of such pseudo-debates contributed much to the prosperity of Cave's journal and its rival, the *London Magazine*, in the hectic political climate of the years preceding the downfall of Walpole. Though one can't be absolutely sure, recent scholars agree that Johnson had a large share in this introductory diatribe. The hair-raising suggestion of an uprising in which the royal family and the

ministry are massacred is not inconsistent with Johnson's violently anti-government views at the time, and the opinions expressed about European aggression in other continents coincide with Johnson's throughout his life.

Johnson published much else outside the pages of the *GM*. The Swiftian tone of 'The State of Affairs in Lilliput' is continued in two anti-Walpolian pamphlets of 1739, *Marmor Norfolciense*, which it was reported impelled the ministry to issue a warrant for his arrest, and *A Complete Vindication of the Licensers of the Stage* (p. 71). The heavy-handed irony is better controlled in the latter—a mock defence of the Lord Chamberlain's office, under the Stage Licensing Act, 1737 (passed to protect the administration from such assaults), for refusing to license the performance of Henry Brooke's near-seditious *Gustavus Vasa*. Under the auspices of Cave, Johnson was involved in the controversy over Pope's 'Essay on Man' initiated by the Swiss theologian Jean-Pierre de Crousaz, whose *Examen* and *Commentaire* on the poem detected dangerous Leibnizian fatalism and deism in it. The *Examen* was translated by Johnson's colleague on the *GM*, Elizabeth Carter, and the *Commentaire* by Johnson. In his elaborate apparatus, Johnson gave an interlinear re-translation into English of the French translation of the *Essay* by Du Resnel on which Crousaz had relied, and had no difficulty showing that it shockingly misrepresented what Pope had written. A handful of his annotations are given here (p. 84); they provide early examples of the 'close reading' critical technique Johnson was later to apply to Shakespeare, Milton, Gray, and other English poets, as well as a good deal of significant moral and theological commentary.

The best known of Johnson's works during this decade is 'London' (p. 2), an 'imitation' of Juvenal's third satire ('variations on a theme' by Juvenal might be a better description of this and other contemporary 'imitations'). Pope again praised this exuberant work, which, full of standard anti-Walpole propaganda of the time, is best read in the context of *Marmor* and *A Complete Vindication*. In that context, the vexed questions 'Could Johnson have been sincere in his denunciation of London and praise of rural retirement?' and 'Was Thales Richard Savage, and did Johnson know him personally at the time?' lose some of their importance.

1740–1750. Savage, always a great self-publicist, died in 1743, and Cave and Johnson decided to take advantage of the publicity. In his *Life of Savage*, 1744 (abridged, p. 128), Johnson produced his first—

perhaps, strictly speaking, only—full-scale biography. Though much of it derives from an earlier anonymous *Life of Savage*, a good deal comes from personal knowledge. It has often been remarked how Johnson sometimes seems to identify himself with Savage ('SLOW RISES WORTH BY POVERTY DEPRESSED', as he wrote in 'London'), and yet can distance himself from his subject and view Savage's near-paranoia objectively. His passionate adoption of Savage's dubious tales about his persecution by his supposed mother has given rise to speculation about Johnson's relations with his own mother.

During this decade, Johnson began to withdraw from his connection with the *GM*; in 1746 he signed the contract for the *Dictionary*. Earlier, however—as well as contributing an interesting review of the memoirs of old Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough (p. 113), a shrewd comment on the limits of historical scepticism—he seems to have been the chief writer of the *GM*'s debates in Parliament (that of 'Lilliput', of course). These, totalling around half a million words, are the part of Johnson's writing that has been most, and most unjustly, neglected. Modern students agree that, whatever Johnson may have said later about not letting the Whig dogs get the best of it, they are a fair representation of the gist of the arguments the various speakers actually used; they appear in Cobbett's *Parliamentary History*, the precursor of Hansard, and are still quoted by historians, sometimes unaware that the words are actually Johnson's. They contain some splendid rhetoric. A small sample of it is given here (p. 103) from the debate in the House of Commons on 13 February 1741, on a motion to request the King to dismiss Walpole. So vicious is the attack upon Walpole that the *GM* did not venture to print it until two years later, when Walpole was safely out of power. It has not before been printed in a collection of Johnson's writings.

For a considerable time Johnson was employed, along with William Oldys, by the bookseller Thomas Osborne, who had bought the great Harleian library collected by the Earls of Oxford (not to be confused with the Harleian collection of *manuscripts*, which later became one of the initial collections of the British Museum). How much Johnson may have contributed to the descriptions of the books in the formidable five-volume sale catalogue still needs study. But his prefatory material to it, and to the selection of pamphlets from the collection reprinted as the eight-volume *Harleian Miscellany* (p. 117), provides a brilliant exposition of the importance of book-catalogues and the preservation of 'ephemera', which every serious scholar should ponder. Johnson also contributed a dozen brief but

interesting notes to pieces in the *Miscellany*. His apologue 'The Vision of Theodore' (p. 165), printed in *The Preceptor*, a manual of self-education published by Dodsley in 1748, for which Johnson also wrote the preface and which he may have had a hand in organizing, he is said to have called 'the best thing he ever wrote'.

Johnson had come to London in 1737 with a blank-verse tragedy, *Irene*, partly completed; as with Addison's *Cato*, the performance of such a play could lead to fame overnight. It did not however succeed in finding a producer until 1749, when Garrick, now patentee of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, staged it. It had the respectable run of nine nights, and earned Johnson £300. The plot, taken from Knolles's *General History of the Turks*, had been popular with earlier playwrights, and indeed is one that might have appealed to Racine. The central story is that of the beautiful Greek Christian, Irene, taken captive at the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, with whom the Sultan Mahomet falls passionately in love. He offers to make her his bride, on condition that she change her religion. She succumbs to the temptation, but in the end falls victim to a palace intrigue of Mahomet's followers, while her virtuous friend Aspasia, who holds firm to her religion, escapes to freedom with her faithful lover Demetrius. Johnson's handling of the complex psychology is skilled, but many have complained of the monotony of the versification, in which almost every blank-verse line is end-stopped. The scene given here is the climactic exchange between Mahomet and Irene (p. 21).

At the same time, Johnson's greatest poem, 'The Vanity of Human Wishes' (p. 12), was published, bearing (unusually) his name on the title-page. The density of its poetic texture, the richness of its imagery, make it necessary to read it slowly and thoughtfully. It is wrong to misread its title as 'the vanity of human life': the conclusion points out emphatically that a happy life *is* possible for those who adopt the higher values of faith, hope, and love rather than the merely 'human' ones of fame, wealth, and power. As in Eliot's *Waste Land* ('vanity' and 'waste' both derive from Latin *vanus*, 'empty'), the bulk of the poem pictures the dreary frustration of lives directed by mere this-worldly values, and concludes with the affirmation that another kind of life is possible.

1750–1760. This was Johnson's most prolific decade. Although Arthur Murphy stated, on what authority we do not know, that his semi-weekly *Rambler* essays had a circulation of only five hundred, far below that of *The Spectator*, recent study has shown that they were

among the most popular of those reprinted, as they came out, by the provincial press. The twenty-four essays here (p. 175) (of the total of 208) give a sampling of their chief subject-matter—'interpersonal' relations, literary criticism (nos. 4 and 60, on the realistic novel and biography, are noteworthy), general human psychology and morality. He was one of four collaborators in *The Adventurer* (p. 261), in which his contributions maintain the general level of high seriousness of *The Rambler* (the striking conclusion of no. 85 helps us to understand many of Johnson's other pronouncements on the human condition). The weekly *Idler* essays (p. 277) are shorter and generally lighter, although nothing else he wrote exceeds in ferocity his denunciation of man's inhumanity to man in nos. 81 and no. 22 (original numbering), both inspired by the slaughter of the Seven Years War.

The beginning, in 1756, of that war, from which Great Britain emerged as a great imperial and commercial power, coincided with Johnson's appointment as editor of a new monthly, the *Literary Magazine, or Universal Review*. Although he contributed many incisive reviews to it (pp. 488–543), one of them his devastating refutation of Soame Jenyns's 'great chain of being' and 'whatever is, is right' theodicy, much of the journal was concerned with the war, which Johnson bitterly opposed. It opened with a long 'Introduction to the Political State of Great Britain', which traces with acidity the history of European colonial expansion. This was a prelude to the 'Observations' on the present war (p. 501), which apparently was too much for the proprietorship of the magazine: in the next number a new and patriotic hand took over the political commentary, though Johnson continued sporadic attacks on the war-makers in *The Idler* and the short-lived 'Observations' in the *Universal Chronicle*. As the war drew to a close, he published two compassionate postscripts, a defence against 'patriots' who objected to charity given to French prisoners of war (p. 547) and 'On the Bravery of the English Common Soldiers' (p. 549).

Other notable pieces from this busy period are his review of a study of the famous 'casket letters' which were supposed to establish the guilt of Mary, Queen of Scots (p. 551); the drily hostile life of the obstreperous Puritan Cheynel, one of Johnson's best pieces of short biography (p. 476); and one of several manifestoes he was called on to write for new periodicals (p. 544)—(as well as an experienced practical journalist, Johnson seems also to have been regarded as the principal theorist of journalism of the time). Included here, though we really have no idea when it was written, is one of the twenty-six

sermons that have survived of the forty he is supposed to have written for clerical friends. Like the 'Debates', they have been unjustly neglected. They contain some of Johnson's most thoughtful and powerfully expressed theological and moral statements. No. 5 in the traditional numbering (p. 467), on 'the origin of evil', should be read in connection with the Soame Jenyns review.

Johnson's most famous publications of the decade were *The Rambler*, the *Dictionary of the English Language*, which he, with the help of six amanuenses, had laboured on for eight years, and *Rasselas*. Two common mistakes about the *Dictionary* should be avoided. One is that it was intended to be 'normative', and to 'fix the language'. Although he had expressed such a hope in the 1747 *Plan* addressed to Lord Chesterfield, in the 1755 Preface (p. 307) he firmly states that experience has proved this impossible: his task as a lexicographer is not to 'form, but register, the language'. The second is to follow Boswell's 'confused and erroneous' account—so called by Bishop Percy, who corrected it long ago—of how the *Dictionary* was compiled. According to Boswell, Johnson first wrote down the list of words it was to contain, composed definitions for them, and then sought in books written in English for 'authorities' to justify the definitions. Life would not be long enough to put together a dictionary in this fashion. In fact, as Percy describes it, Johnson's method was the empirical one of modern dictionary makers. First, the books were read; passages containing significant uses of words were marked, and given to the amanuenses to be copied on to slips, which were then assembled under the words exemplified in each. Then, from a study of the quotations containing a word, its various significations were discriminated, definitions formulated, and a selection of the protocol quotations chosen to exemplify each definition. (It has been estimated that the two large folio volumes contain over 116,000 quotations, and that these represent perhaps half of those originally assembled.) As the Preface says, 'all-purpose' verbs like *take* and *get* have very many different shades of meaning: under *take* Johnson lists no fewer than 134, a feat not unworthy of the *Dictionary*'s great successor, the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Since many readers know little more of the *Dictionary* than a few 'quaint' or prejudiced definitions (without their supporting quotations), a few pages are given in facsimile (p. 329) in the hope of familiarizing them with the real nature of the work. It is well, too, to remember that it was not designed primarily to help the ordinary user to look up the spelling or meaning of 'hard words': that purpose was

served by the octavo abridgement Johnson brought out the next year (the one thrown by Becky Sharp), which omits the quotations. As he writes in the preface to the abridgement, the full *Dictionary*, 'like those compiled by the academies of Italy and France', is for 'the use of such as aspire to exactness of criticism or elegance of style'.

Rasselas (p. 335)—Johnson's original title for it was 'The Choice of Life'— is probably Johnson's most widely-read work: hundreds of editions and translations into many languages have circulated since its publication in 1759. It teaches much the same lesson as the conclusion of *The Adventurer*, no. 85: 'Some deficiency must be forgiven all, because all are men. . . . It is, however, reasonable to have perfection in our eye: that we may always advance towards it, though we know it never can be reached.' As with Voltaire's *Candide*, so similar in form and plot and written at almost the same time, whether its ending be thought 'pessimistic' or not must depend on the reader's own philosophy of life.

1760–1770. However later editions may have improved on it, Johnson's edition of Shakespeare's plays, which finally appeared in eight volumes in 1765 (Johnson having lost the list of subscribers who had paid for it nine years earlier), is a notable advance on its predecessors, those by Rowe, Pope, Hanmer, and Warburton. It is the first 'variorum' edition, printing not only Johnson's own notes, but those by earlier editors which he thinks useful to the interpretation of a passage—as well as some he thinks are mistaken and should be corrected. A few pages are given here in facsimile (p. 457), so that the reader can see what is actually being done in it. The famous Preface (p. 419) is perhaps Johnson's most beautifully written and memorable piece of criticism. It has been argued that some of its doctrines, such as the rejection of 'the unities' and of the distinction between the genres of tragedy and comedy, are not so 'advanced' for the time as used to be thought; though, as in *Ramblers* nos. 4 and 60, Johnson's insistence on basing his critical principles on the psychology of 'reader' (or audience) 'response', unfashionable not so long ago, seems to be becoming popular again. The best place to see 'Johnson's criticism in action', a recent student maintains, is in the annotation—the careful explication of Elizabethan language (not only was Johnson the first editor of Shakespeare to have a historical dictionary of English available: he had compiled it himself), and the record of his

own emotional responses to the plays and moving incidents in them. Space permits only a small sampling of it here (p. 462).

Only recently have students become aware of the large amount of time and energy Johnson spent in the 1760s helping Robert Chambers compose the course of lectures in the elements of English, or common, law he delivered to Oxford undergraduates. Johnson had come to know and befriend him when the seventeen-year-old Chambers came down from his native Newcastle to enrol as a law student in the Middle Temple (where Johnson was then living) and as an undergraduate at Lincoln College, Oxford. At Oxford he became a pupil of William Blackstone, the first holder of the chair of English law established by the will of Charles Viner, and at the age of twenty-nine was appointed to succeed Blackstone in that chair. Chambers, unnerved by the thought of competing with his formidable teacher (whose own Vinerian lectures began to be published in 1765, as his famous *Commentaries*), had great difficulty beginning to compose them, and called on Johnson for help, which was willingly given.

A manuscript of the series of fifty-six lectures written for George III, in the hands of professional scribes, was discovered only in the 1940s by the late E. L. McAdam in the British Museum, to which the King's library had been donated, and McAdam published some excerpts, which he thought were from Johnson's pen. The whole series, running to around 450,000 words, deserves to be published. It gives a lucid introduction to the common law, different in approach from Blackstone's but not unworthy of comparison with the *Commentaries*. The work is divided into four sections: an Introduction, dealing with general principles of jurisprudence; Public Law—i.e. the British constitution; Criminal Law; and Private (civil) Law, dealing chiefly with the law of property. What is given here (p. 570), printed in full for the first time, is the introductory lecture to the section on Criminal Law. The problem of distinguishing between Johnson's and Chambers's prose is perhaps harder than McAdam thought, but one recognizes Johnsonian ideas and expressions in the lecture.

Johnson's charming and poignant 'fairy tale' 'The Fountains' (p. 558), a kind of miniaturization of *Rasselas* or 'The Vanity of Human Wishes', was written for the volume of *Miscellanies*, 1766, which he organized for the benefit of the blind lady, Anna Williams, who shared his home.

1770–1784. In the 1770s Johnson demonstrated that the fire of his

earlier diatribes against Walpole and the promoters of the Seven Years War was not extinguished, in four *Political Tracts* (collected under that title in 1776), in defence of various policies of the North administration. *The False Alarm*, 1770, ridiculed those who wished to make a major issue of the House of Commons's expulsion of John Wilkes; *Thoughts on the Late Transactions Respecting Falkland's Islands*, 1771, provided a clear historical account of the issue of sovereignty over the islands disputed between Britain and Spain (whose claim Argentina later took up), and a blistering condemnation of those who urged that the matter be settled by war rather than by the delicate diplomatic manoeuvres by which the ministry did in fact settle it (for the time being); *Taxation No Tyranny*, 1775, gave a closely reasoned legal and historical defence of the British claim, against the American revolutionaries, that Parliament had full power to legislate for British colonies. Given here (p. 580) is the shortest of them, *The Patriot*, written to assist his friend Henry Thrale's re-election as MP for Southwark, and to expose the falsity of his opponents' claim to 'patriotism' ('the last refuge of a scoundrel', as Johnson once memorably put it); in it the themes of the other pamphlets are repeated.

A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, 1775 (abridged, p. 593) gives a shrewdly and compassionately observed 'social anthropological' account of the little known Highland culture Johnson encountered on his memorable tour. An even more ambitious undertaking was the *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets* that he wrote in his late sixties and early seventies for a syndicate of London booksellers, who planned their bulky anthology (sixty-eight volumes in all) of English poetry of around 1650 to 1750 in answer to what they thought a threat to their claim to copyright of it. They chose the poets to be anthologized, though Johnson got them to add James Thomson, Isaac Watts, and one or two others to the list. For the £300 they offered, they perhaps expected no more than the few perfunctory pages a modern publisher might expect from some 'celebrity' whom he commissions to write a preface to a reprint of an older work in hope of increasing the sales. Indeed, the short prefaces Johnson provided for the great majority of the poets in the list—most of them forgotten and forgettable, as the majority of fifty English poets drawn from any century would be—*are* fairly perfunctory, enlivened here and there by personal reminiscences, as when Johnson uses his preface to the works of Edmund 'Rag' Smith to pay a touching tribute to Gilbert Walmesley, who had