‘JOHNSON NE SERA PLAISANT?’ : SAMUEL JOHNSON’S FRENCH CONNECTIONS

by

DOUGLAS TREVOR ROOT

(Under the Direction of John A. Vance)

ABSTRACT

Since James Boswell’s seminal biography The Life of Johnson (1791), there has been a myth of Samuel Johnson (1709-84) as recalcitrant anglophile, essentially relegating him to the position of cultural monolith. After writing the Dictionary in 1755, Johnson assumed the role of England’s literary emperor, even if it was a title that he was perhaps leery of accepting. His hesitancy notwithstanding, Johnson felt an almost innate responsibility to defend his homeland, and particularly its literature, against the assaults of outsiders. Johnson’s literary clashes with Voltaire (1694-1778) and philosophical qualms with Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) epitomize the squabbles Johnson had with his French neighbors across the channel; however, I will show that the three men were not actually far removed from one another--in both their writing and ideology.

I believe that my work is a worthwhile contribution to existing scholarship on Samuel Johnson because the vast majority of scholars have either chosen to ignore or overlook any potential intersections between Johnson and the French. Simply dwelling upon the glaring number of English/French distinctions between has relegated Johnson to a static figure--one which is completely antithetical to the dynamic and ever-changing ideas presented in his own writing. As such, I believe that by blindly subscribing to the Johnsonian myth, in part
perpetuated by Boswell, scholars and readers are inadvertently cheating themselves out of a
wider appreciation of Johnson’s versatility as a writer and individual. Attempting to minimize
Johnson’s Francophobia is not a simple proposition and is admittedly unpopular with ardent
Anglophiles, but it does seek to rescue him from the shackles of cultural elitism in which he has
been constrained for over two centuries.

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2010
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May 2010
DEDICATION

First and foremost, I would like to thank my Mom and Dad for not only helping to fund my academic endeavor, but for their unyielding encouragement. Many days I believed that I did not have enough gas left in the tank to see this pursuit to the end, but you two were there to sympathize with my difficulties and remind me to stay the course. So Mom, although I admit to taking some liberties with the quotation, I’d like to end this part of my dedication with the words of the apostle Paul: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race.” I love you both more than I can express.

I would like to conclude by noting that academia can be an exceedingly cruel mistress; therefore, I want to express my gratitude to all those people who stuck with me through the good times and the bad. In short, the life of a “scholar” has not always left me much time for meaningful relationships, and it usually wreaks havoc on the few that I have been able to maintain. That noted, for those of you who have been a part of my life, whether in Virginia, Florida, or Georgia, I want to let you all know that I will not forget any one of you, and there is no need to mention any single name here because you all know who you are. Thank you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Professionally speaking, I would not have made it this far without the patience, sagacity, and dedication of so many professors and mentors that I have encountered during the last decade.

At the risk of omitting anyone specific, I want to thank all those professors at Virginia Tech, Florida State, and the University of Georgia that gave me a helping hand. There were many of you, at least too many to mention in a page; however, your efforts are not forgotten and have not gone unappreciated. I am not always the easiest person to work with, but this part of the trek is over and I owe much of it to your diligence and patience.

Specifically, though, I want to give credit to Dennis Welch. You have been more than a professor and enthusiastic voice to me; you made me believe that I had the talent and ability to do great things even when I was uncertain. I consider you a confidant and friend, and hope that you get the opportunity to read this dissertation.

Finally, my doctoral work has been overseen from start to finish by John Vance, whose kind words and critical eye have been a constant since our first meeting in early 2006. Your guidance and supervision have helped keep me focused on the task at hand, and our frequent football conversations helped maintain my sanity.

Though the trek was long, all of you helped make it a distinct pleasure it would otherwise not have been.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</th>
<th>v</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 THE PERILS AND PEARLS OF IMAGINATION IN JOHNSON AND ROUSSEAU</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 “I REFUTE IT THUS!” JOHNSON AND VOLTAIRE ON ENGLISH LITERATURE</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 CANDIDE AND RASSELAS: TWO (NOT SO GOOD) EXAMPLES OF LOCKEAN EDUCATION</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 JOHNSON AND ROUSSEAU: DISCIPLES OF DISCIPLINE</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 BOSWELL’S TRIUMVIRATE OF SAGACIOUS AND SOMETIMES SALACIOUS FATHER FIGURES</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 CONCLUSION</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Samuel Johnson (1709-84) was very much a trendsetter, whether he considered himself to be one or not. With the publication of his influential Dictionary (1755) Johnson attempted to civilize the English vernacular, and in a manner of speaking, constrain it; but in the process he also established a canon of what he considered to be the finest literary works of the English language. As noted in his Preface to the Dictionary, Johnson makes clear that even if his commentary is not intended to serve as a pointed dig at the French, he is not going to spend a great deal of time crediting them for their contributions to his native tongue, explaining: “In assigning the Roman original, it has perhaps sometimes happened that I have mentioned only the Latin, when the word was borrowed from the French; and considering myself employed only in the illustration of my own language, I have not been very careful to observe whether the Latin word be pure or barbarous, or the French elegant or obsolete” [my emphasis].

The Dictionary, arguably Johnson’s most important work, evidently aims largely to omit any sort of French involvement with the English; thus, it stands not only an important reference for people (then and now) interested in the history of the English language, it also becomes a living document of perpetually tenuous Anglo-French relations. However, to infer that Johnson
simply dismissed France as a nation, or the French as a people is an egregious error that has been
dodder for many scholars. This failure has detracted worthwhile attention from the profound
influence the French had not only Johnson’s literary productions, but on his reputation as well.

For starters, Johnson went to France with his friends The Thrales in May 1775. Even
though the irascible and sometimes curmudgeonly Johnson seemed less than overwhelmed with
the sights there, a letter to his friend Robert Levet indicates that the now sixty-six year old
Johnson seemed more than amenable to absorbing some element of French culture. But, he was
equally quick to admit that it was difficult for old dogs to learn new tricks, lamenting, “I will try
to speak a little French; I tried hitherto but little, but I spoke sometimes. If I heard better, I
suppose I should learn faster” (Life II, 385). Readers wishing to think of Johnson as the
recalcitrant English bull in a French china shop would almost certainly lick their chops after
perusing such a passage, but W. Jackson Bate offers a more sensible explanation.

Instead of fulfilling his designated position of overzealous Anglophile, Johnson was
simply a man proud of his own intellect, and he refused to participate in endeavors of which he
was not knowledgeable. Accordingly, Bate adds that Johnson was not demonstrating “contempt
for the French language. He simply felt that he should talk in the best way he could. Next to
English, Latin was the language that allowed him to do so. Nor was there anything unusual or
eccentric about this. Latin was still regarded and widely used by scholars as an international
language.” Therefore, if Johnson were the obstinate Englishman of repute, would it not stand to
reason that even in a foreign country, he would speak English exclusively regardless of
whomever his company might have been? Johnson chose to interact largely with scholars while
in France, and those individuals could converse with him in Latin, not English; as such, Johnson
shifted his own paradigm to accommodate the situation in which he found himself, a trait he was known for throughout his entire life, but for which he tends to receive little credit.$^5$

Johnson, though, did not solely commingle with scholars in France; in fact, he nonchalantly wrote to Robert Levet that he and the Thrales “went to see the King and Queen at dinner” (Life II, 385). In his journal notes outlining the entirety of his trip to France, Johnson devotes a few lines to describing the time he spent with the King: “We saw the King’s horses and dogs.--The dogs almost all English.--Degenerate . . . The King fed himself with his left hand as we” (Life II, 394-5). Although it is unclear if Johnson is referring to the King as a degenerate in either sense of the definition provided in his Dictionary,$^6$ there is a sense that Johnson (the “quintessential” Englishman) again recognized his place, this time amongst French royalty, and presumably followed the custom of eating with his left hand because failure to do so may have been construed as disrespectful to the King. Indeed, one of Johnson’s favorite topics was that of subordination, and he believed it a rule that “order cannot be had” without it (Life III, 383); clearly Johnson’s respect for authority was not influenced by a ruler’s nationality.

Moreover, Johnson was knowledgeable enough about the French to comment upon their government and their history copiously throughout Boswell’s Life of Johnson (1791) and in his own writing he objectively suggests that the English look to the French as an example of what not to do in their own country. Rather than lambasting Louis XIV for his cruelty, Johnson objectively tells readers that they can learn from his errors, recommending, “While we blame Lewis the Fourteenth, for his dragons and his gallies, we ought, when power comes into our hands, to use it with greater equity.”$^7$ That is not to say that Johnson’s views of the French are universally praiseful or even cordial, but one must also consider the source for the majority of Johnson’s so-called anti-French sentiment: the Life of Johnson. In fact, the advertisement to the
second edition, written by Boswell, immediately creates opposition between Johnson (the pious Englishman) and French (heathen) writers. It is Boswell’s hope that Johnson’s strong moral fiber will “prove an effectual antidote to that detestable sophistry which has been lately imported from France, under the false name of Philosophy” (I, 11-2), by which he presumably means the attitudes against subordination that led to the French Revolution.

The portrayal of dissimilarities between Johnson and his French counterparts is epitomized by the Life of Johnson. Johnson reputedly had many unflattering things to say about the French, and their writers in general, such as, “French writers are superficial, because they are not scholars, and so proceed upon the mere power of their own minds; and we see how very little power they have” (I, 454). The greatest emphasis of this study will be placed upon similarities between Johnson, Voltaire (1694-1778) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), arguably the two most recognizable French writers of the era (although Rousseau was actually Swiss, he most closely associated with the philosophes during his formative years of writing). In the process, I will show that while Johnson may not have been the first in line to eat croissants or drink Chardonnay, much of his purported dislike of Gaul was little more than bluster. This bombastic component of Johnson’s personality was not reserved only for the French; it was simply Johnson being Johnson, and I believe he enjoyed it immensely.

Johnson’s close friend Sir Joshua Reynolds would no doubt argue that Johnson’s aversion to the French and other non-English persons was pure and simple hyperbole, and that Boswell was simply taking the Great Moralist too seriously. Reynolds remarks: “The prejudices [Johnson] had to countries did not extend to individuals. The chief prejudice in which he indulged himself was against Scotland, though he had the most cordial friendship with individuals [of that country]. This he used to vindicate as a duty. In respect to Frenchmen he rather laughed at
himself but it was insurmountable. He considered every foreigner as a fool until they had convinced him of the contrary.”

To ignore the account of Reynolds in favor of Boswell exemplifies what some scholars have come to identify as the “Boswell Problem,” which must at the very least be mentioned here.

Donald Greene—the most outspoken critic of the validity of Johnson’s depiction in Life of Johnson—notes, “Boswell’s reports of Johnson’s sayings are not biography, but rather material that should be scrutinized for inclusion in a biography.” The accuracy of Greene’s commentary notwithstanding, this examination will treat Boswell’s documentation as by and large, reflective of reality. And, while John Vance’s Boswell’s Life of Johnson: New Questions, New Answers (1985) features a collection of critical essays tackling the “Boswell Problem,” Vance’s essay, “The Laughing Johnson,” provides a critical framework from which I hope to expand, in part noting that Johnson “has been perceived as someone who must always speak literally, because to think otherwise might diminish his importance . . . readers of the last two centuries have helped encourage this monolithic view.”

The idea that Johnson, as a character, must never speak facetiously or pompously may be in part owed to Boswell himself, who “was a literal-minded man,” and apparently tended to take nearly everything Johnson uttered at face-value.

The vast majority of modern critics, apparently inspired or inveigled by Boswell’s depiction of Johnson as John Bull, have taken the path of least resistance when addressing the topic of Johnson and France. By devoting vast attention to the glaringly obvious differences between Johnson and his French counterparts, they have shown themselves as taking nearly everything Boswell writes about Johnson literally. For instance, by considering Voltaire’s Candide and Johnson’s Rasselas as polar opposites because one is typically considered satire and the other is not; or, by labeling Johnson and Rousseau’s philosophies as universally incongruous
because Johnson believed that “Rousseau knows he is talking nonsense” (*Life* II, 74), critics have only further galvanized the entertaining legend of Johnson the cultural chauvinist. Some recent scholarship, however, shows that Johnson was not nearly the prejudicial figure he was often painted out to be.

James Gray’s “Arras/Hélas!” (1986) is noteworthy for its fairly evenhanded treatment of Johnson’s Anglophilia, as Gray contends that Johnson’s ability to write and translate French was above average, but his “pride and stubbornness made it impossible for him to be at ease in conversational French.” Also standing as a unique take on Johnson’s so-called antipathy toward the French is Howard Weinbrot’s “Johnson before Boswell in Eighteenth-Century France” (2005). In the article, Weinbrot argues that despite modern critics’ tendency to treat Johnson as a non-entity in France, in many ways his reception there actually echoes that of how he was received in England from the years 1750-1825 (272). These works are examples of exceptions, rather than rules, in Johnsonian scholarship, as the majority of critics have taken the path of least resistance when addressing the issue of Johnson and the French, opting instead to focus upon the disparities rather than any existent similarities that should be brought to light.

Greene’s *Samuel Johnson’s Library* (1975) notes a surprisingly prolific number of books by French writers that Johnson owned and maintained in his own personal collection. Indeed, Johnson’s library included works by well-known French writers and thinkers such as René Descartes and Voltaire, whose historical accounts Johnson praised on more than one occasion, suggesting that “Hume would never have written History, had not Voltaire written it before him. He is an echo of Voltaire” (*Life* I, 53). Johnson again went on to remark favorably about Voltaire’s credentials as a historian, theorizing that time alone would determine the Frenchman’s fame, for “what makes Voltaire chiefly circulate is his collection; such as his *Universal History*”
Further, Johnson owned copies of Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire* (1697) and Abel Boyer’s *Dictionnaire Royal François-Anglois* (1699), which Allen Reddick explains were, at least at times, integral to the contents of Johnson’s *Dictionary*, for: “If [Johnson’s] amanuensis questioned how he should write the entry heading and arrange the entry, a glance in to Boyer . . . would have confirmed that “To Stand Up” should be given a separate heading.”  

It should also be noted that in Johnson’s rather voluminous stock of French writings were much lesser-known authors like René Rapin (a horticulturist) and Étienne Ranchin (a court reporter); obviously, then, Johnson was not merely interested in France’s major literary figures.

Like Greene, Richard B. Schwartz believes that “the ultimate weakness of the *Life of Johnson* is its lack of a coherent, sophisticated image of Johnson based on all available details, an image which would enable Boswell to shape his materials in such a way as to present a reasonably reliable sense of the personality and character of his subject; within his own works Johnson provides this image.” Indeed, Johnson’s own published work, particularly when not written with any sort of patriotic motivation, indicates that he was not the Francophbic figure he is commonly presented as in the *Life of Johnson*. In an *Observation on the Present State of Affairs* (1756), Johnson likens his vaunted homeland to that of France, a country he supposedly loathed, by observing that both countries’ participation in the Seven Years’ War (1756-63) was nothing more than “the quarrel of two robbers for the spoils of a passenger . . . the English rail at the perfidious French, and the French rail at the encroaching English.”

So, by taking the *Life of Johnson* for what it is--an, at times, artful rendering of Johnson’s life though by and large reflective of reality--we are forced to ask ourselves why Johnson as a *public figure* presented himself as being so resistant to imbibing French culture. Was it really, in the words of James Gray, Johnson’s “pride and stubbornness” that impeded his willingness to
favorably acknowledge the French or their writers publicly and openly? Or, was it something else entirely? I believe that Johnson—no stranger to grandiloquent displays—knew just enough about Voltaire and Rousseau to disapprove of them, and did so in a public forum because it was what his audience expected. Conversely, Johnson’s writing—not only Rasselas but his Notes on Shakespeare—shared many similarities both stylistically and content-wise with Voltaire; in addition, Johnson’s thought process (according to his close friend Hester Thrale) frequently resembled that of Rousseau. 19 Johnson simply did not know this because, as indicated by his personal library, he was not an avid reader of Voltaire or Rousseau, even if he did own works by them. Further, because Johnson never met either member of this French contingent in person, he had no way of knowing what such an encounter may have been like, and it is with this fundamental idea that my investigation hopes to grapple.

My first chapter will illustrate similarities between the lives of Johnson and Rousseau, in particular their respectively overactive imaginations which facilitated fears about relinquishing ownership of their texts to a sometimes ravenous or critical public. Obviously, Johnson and Rousseau would not have been able to know each other’s personal histories during their own lifetimes (Rousseau’s autobiography The Confessions was published in 1781, three years after his death, and there is no evidence to indicate that Johnson read it or would have been interested in reading it). The earliest biography of Johnson was Thomas Tyers’s A Biographical Sketch of Dr. Samuel Johnson, written in 1784, six years after Rousseau died; however, despite a lack of detailed familiarity with one another’s personal history, each man’s reputation clearly preceded him.

In a conversation with Boswell, Rousseau admitted that he would like to see Johnson, but only as a spectator, for he feared the robust Englishman “might maul” him, in fact believing that
Johnson would “detest me. He would say, ‘Here is a corrupter; a man who comes here to milk
the bull.’”20 Frederick Pottle notes that Rousseau did know enough about Johnson to understand
that Johnson was referring to Rousseau as a man whose search for “truth” was analogous to
milking a bull after the cow had gone dry in an effort to maintain appearances. Johnson
confirmed Rousseau’s suspicions in a 1766 conversation where the former angrily railed against
the latter’s intentions, perhaps hyperbolically, but nonetheless furiously declaring that,
“Rousseau, Sir, is a very bad man. I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation, than
that of any felon who has gone from Old Bailey these many years. Yes, I should like to have
him work in the plantations.” Boswell was routinely appalled by Johnson’s vehemence in regard
to both Rousseau and Voltaire, and as someone who was acquainted with both men, he believed
that Johnson’s “violence seemed very strange” (Life II, 12) and was certain that if the two should
ever meet they would be surely able to establish some common ground upon which to stand.

Indeed, in a 1766 letter to Rousseau, Boswell’s confidence in the joyous union of the
philosophe and the moralist is exemplified by his testimony that, “I know you both [Rousseau
and Johnson], and although the one employs his powers to uphold the wisdom of the centuries,
and the other to feed the firs of his own sublime and original spirit, I am sure that your great
souls will acknowledge each other with warmth.”21 Clearly, even a young and unpolished
intellect like Boswell was able to detect the supposedly fundamental differences between the two
men (one is orthodox, one unorthodox). When considering Boswell’s tendency to accept and
even promulgate the opinions of others, his statement inadvertently illustrates an underlying
aspect of my study: the genesis of the public sphere in eighteenth-century England, exemplified
by groups like Johnson’s Ivy Lane Club, greatly accelerated the spread of knowledge and
conjecture.22 As such, the English court of public opinion’s ruling against Rousseau’s
eccentricity, in addition to Johnson’s intrinsic need to exude Englishness, were the primary reasons he and the English castigated Rousseau.

The second chapter shifts the focus from Rousseau to Voltaire, but the premise is very much the same. Johnson’s lack of exposure to Voltaire’s literary criticism compelled the former to assail Voltaire for no other reason than defending English literature and, by extension England itself, from foreign onslaughts. I contend that Johnson did not read, or at least closely read, Voltaire’s commentary on Shakespeare, because much of what Voltaire disliked about Shakespeare’s writing involved its violence and barbarity: characteristics of the great playwright’s work with which Johnson was likewise not overly enamored. Yet, Johnson does not acknowledge this aspect of Voltairean criticism, one which is readily apparent in Voltaire’s 1731 Discourse on Tragedy.

Johnson undeniably knew some of the features of Voltaire’s criticism, but it is fairly apparent that (if he actually read it for himself) he took many of the philosophe’s opinions out of context, treating Voltaire as a universal complainant of Shakespeare, and of English literature as a whole, which is simply not accurate (for example, Voltaire believed Paradise Lost to be the single greatest epic poem ever written). Pottle notes that, “Voltaire’s sincere belief from first to last that Shakespeare was a barbarian of genius, but in the years following his return from England he had more to say about Shakespeare’s merits than about his defects” (Grand Tour I, 298). Voltaire returned to France in 1729, some thirty-five years before Johnson referred to him as “petty minded” in his 1765 Preface to Shakespeare, which shows that Johnson understood part of Voltaire’s position as it stood at one time in Voltaire’s life. Although Johnson took the opportunity to disparage Voltaire’s criticism of Shakespeare, he nevertheless shared more than
one of the Frenchman’s opinions about England’s celebrated playwright, despite failing to acknowledge as much.

While Johnson did not have a problem occupying the position of instigator in a literary battle (i.e. calling Voltaire “petty minded”), he made it a habit not to respond to the attacks of others. Voltaire, though, retaliated against Johnson by referring to him as a drunkard with a perverse sense of humor, and Boswell was of the opinion that “Voltaire was an antagonist with whom I thought Johnson should not disdain to contend. I pressed him to answer. He said, he perhaps might; but he never did” (Life I, 499). Clearly, Voltaire and Johnson were aware of one another, but each man’s refusal or reluctance to understand his counterpart’s ideology had more to do with respective cultural mores than a personal grievance. In France, drama contained little humor and lacked the amount of violence and bawdiness which was becoming a trademark of the English theatre. Johnson attributed much of this “propriety” to the lingering French tendency to strictly abide by Aristotle’s three unities, a practice Johnson would be among the first to challenge, and one which Voltaire himself confessed to be greatly restrictive.

Chapter three compares Johnson’s Rasselas and Voltaire’s Candide, each written in 1759. While Johnson commented at length on Candide in Life of Johnson, Voltaire’s documented response to Rasselas was much briefer, and his somewhat glib remark that Johnson’s novel contained “une philosophie aimable” (a kind philosophy) lends credence to the belief that Voltaire either did not read the work; or, if he did he may not have completely understood it. A third possibility also remains: perhaps Voltaire did not want to understand Rasselas. To fully comprehend Johnson’s work would conceivably force Voltaire to recognize it, to at least some extent, as parallel to Candide. Doing so would strip much of the novelty from Voltaire’s novel, something the temperamental philosophe would certainly have rued. In his Philosophical
Dictionary (1764) Voltaire admits, “Artists are competent judges of artistry, it is true, but these competent judges are almost always corrupt. An excellent critic would have to be an artist possessing great knowledge and taste, devoid of prejudice and envy. That is difficult to find.”

After all, a great number of Johnson’s English contemporaries--and friends--went so far as to label Johnson’s novel gloomy, morbid even, as opposed to Voltaire’s classification of Rasselas as “kind.” In documenting French translations of Johnson’s writings in the 1750’s, Weinbrot includes the belief of at least one French journalist, who noted that Johnson’s writing could benefit from “un peu plus de vivacité, de variété & de enjouement” (a little more animation, variety, and joviality) (Before 273). If these journals can be said to represent French intellectual thought of the era, then Weinbrot is certainly accurate in his assertion that Johnson’s writing received a similar reception, at roughly the same time, in both England and France.

Consequently, both men were writing about the same events at the same time; regardless of their geographically disparate locales, their beliefs are actually quite similar. The Seven Years’ War looms heavily in the background of each work, and despite both writers’ admiration of John Locke’s empirical philosophy, each presents it as insufficient or unrealistic for young people seeking to learn the ways of the world. In fact, despite advising Boswell to tour Europe only a few years after he wrote Rasselas, Johnson (and Voltaire) are clearly skeptical as to what such an excursion will ultimately accomplish, as both works illustrate. “The Grand Tour of the continent,” according to historian Christopher Hill, “was becoming normal for young men of the upper class. Their horizons were being widened by first-hand knowledge of all things foreign.” Johnson was not of the privileged class and never experienced a grand tour of his own, and Voltaire’s exile from France should certainly not be considered as commensurate with a voluntary grand tour. Surely Candide and Rasselas can be perceived as pessimistic and
fatalistic, but the failure of each work to conclusively conclude--in a positive or negative manner--shows the realistic nature of both tales, for seldom is life cut and dry or black and white. The same can be said about Johnson and Rousseau’s political perspectives, the subject of chapter four.

Johnson and Rousseau were both active political thinkers, although the form each man used to communicate his thoughts differed. Johnson’s poetry, the Dictionary, and even his fiction all contain political overtones, and his pamphlets of the 1770’s are perhaps his most direct foray into social commentary. Although Johnson correctly believed that a great deal of Rousseau’s ideas about a “return to nature” were paradoxical, both men nonetheless believed that subordination was the key feature to any successful government, and that there was an element of honor in foregoing one’s individual desires for the betterment of the collective. Further, although Rousseau decried the idea of property and believed that it created the first social distinction between men, he and Johnson both realized that it was a fact of life, and that threats made to one’s property are almost always the impetus for conflict. Even if Johnson’s remark that, “When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life” (Life III, 178) were genuine and was intended to depict London as a perfect society, it is nonetheless interesting to note that in Thomas More’s Utopia (1516), talebearer Raphael Hythloday observes that even among the Utopians, squabbles over property are “the most just cause of war.”

Both men likewise understood the value and danger of patriotism, and while Johnson’s later pamphlets, most notably The False Alarm (1770), The Patriot (1774), and Taxation no Tyranny (1775) are examples of a more fervent brand of patriotism than Johnson was known to endorse in his earlier writings, they epitomize Johnson’s dynamism and ability to oscillate between positions based upon changing circumstances. Johnson, who discretely lamented (and
lampooned) England’s involvement in the Seven Years’ War in *Rasselas*, performed a rather dramatic about-face in *Taxation no Tyranny*, boldly positing that England should “increase our army, and double our militia.” Many critics both then and now have suggested that Johnson accepting a pension in 1762 not only thrust him into the role of patriot, but the pension itself was a premeditated effort by the government to employ Johnson to write political essays like those of the 1770’s; however, no solid evidence has emerged to prove such an assertion.

Rousseau told Boswell that Johnson was wrong to accept a pension while refusing to swear allegiance to the king that provided him with it, but Rousseau was likewise enigmatic in his view of government. While Rousseau believed that the hand of civilization greatly impinged upon man’s independence, he was more than once accused of disingenuousness, not only by Johnson (who never met him), but by Boswell—who caballed with Rousseau several times, and at one time greatly revered him. In a 1766 letter, Boswell writes of Rousseau’s hypocrisy, “I have an idea that M. Rousseau would have been willing enough to accept a pension. But he wished to have it on footing that no man can ever have a pension on. He has ideas of independence that are completely visionary and which are unsuitable for a man in his position” (*Grand Tour* II, 300). Boswell also discussed Johnson and Rousseau with Voltaire, whom he also met on his first grand tour. Voltaire had nothing but negative things to say about Rousseau and after hearing Boswell refer to Johnson as “a most orthodox man,” Voltaire responded (in English), “He is then a dog. A superstitious dog,” but ultimately concluded that Johnson was “a sensible man” (*Grand Tour* I, 300-1). Is it any wonder that Boswell seemed to have a hard time figuring out where he stood with this triad of great, yet mercurial, minds?

Boswell’s important role as a conduit to the three writers focused upon in this study makes it seem logical and appropriate to conclude by describing his relationship with his adopted
“fathers.” The young Scot first met Johnson in May 1763 and, as already mentioned, was encouraged by Johnson to tour the continent as a means of gaining experience and education, specifically by way of communicating with learned and wise men. In late 1764, while on his tour of Germany and Switzerland, Boswell met up with Rousseau and Voltaire and was quite obviously overwhelmed by their “larger than life” personas, just as he was with Johnson’s. The fact that Boswell attempted to maintain written correspondence with Rousseau and Voltaire after his few initial, and often brief, meetings with them illustrates how desirous he was of having lasting relationships with his esteemed mentors. Further, it shows the extent to which he believed their guidance was necessary in regard to the future course of his life.

Voltaire, the oldest of the three writers by fifteen years, had the most minimal contact with Boswell and, as such seems to have offered him the least “fatherly” advice, although Voltaire knew what it was like to be admired by younger “disciples.” Rousseau (eighteen years Voltaire’s junior) sent a copy of his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* to the legendary author in 1755 in hopes of gaining Voltaire’s approval, but instead received scorn for his efforts. All three authors were accustomed to being approached by younger individuals wishing to speak with them, and while each man was a unique entity, the advice they provided (in this case to Boswell) was often quite similar. In fact, to see the commonality between the temperaments of Voltaire and Johnson, one need look no further than comparing Voltaire’s scathing commentary of Rousseau’s essay with Johnson’s attributed remark to a young writer who implored to great wordsmith to read a copy of his manuscript. After perusing the work, Johnson swiftly rebuked the novice author’s efforts, dismissively jesting, “Your manuscript is both good and original; but the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good.” Perhaps it was lucky for Boswell that, almost universally, he was seeking advice on life and not about his
writing, or else he may have ended up feeling the same way about his triumvirate of father-figures that he did about his real father.

I will demonstrate that Johnson, in addition to Rousseau and Voltaire, was in his own way a victim of “cultural chauvinism” before such a concept became a pervasive form of nomenclature. All three were clearly very intelligent, talented, and perhaps above all else, opinionated; this last characteristic did not aid them in their perceptions of others, and it clearly did not help in others’ perceptions of them. In fact, the reason the three men would never have been able to coexist with one another—even if they somehow ended up together in the same room—is actually because they had too much in common. Sir John Hawkins’s less than flattering assessment of Johnson’s disposition seems an apt character profile of all three men, for Hawkins explains how Johnson seemingly thrived upon alienating people: “He was scarce settled in town before this dogmatical behavior and his impatience of contradiction, became a part of character, and deterred many persons of learning, who wished to enjoy the delight of his conversation, from seeking his acquaintance” (LL.D 71).

Later, Hawkins compares Johnson’s dominating oratory to the conquests of Caesar, and although this threesome of gifted and somewhat eccentric eighteenth-century minds would certainly not meet the same end as the Triumvirate of Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus, their highly combustible personalities would almost certainly have led to a confrontation of some kind.41 One can readily imagine that if Voltaire said England was the greatest country in the world, Johnson would have argued on the side of France simply for the sake of debate. Meanwhile Rousseau would probably have blamed social interaction for the argument and retreated to a far corner of the room to watch Johnson, as so many others were invariably forced to do, “dogmatize and [be] contradicted, and in this conflict of opinions and sentiments . . . find delight” (LL.D 49).
CHAPTER 2

THE PERILS AND PEARLS OF IMAGINATION IN JOHNSON AND ROUSSEAU

“Imagination never takes such firm possession of the mind, as when it is found empty and unoccupied.” –Johnson, Boswell’s Life of Johnson

“When alone I have never known boredom, even if absolutely without occupation; my imagination can fill all voids, and is in itself enough to occupy me.” -Rousseau, The Confessions

Having gained his fame largely as an essayist and author of the greatest English dictionary to date, Samuel Johnson appears to many as a moral philosopher or factual writer with little use for imagination in his own writings. Similarly, Jean-Jacques Rousseau is more well-known as a backward-looking philosopher than a writer of fiction. Almost without fail, each man’s works present his own unique philosophy: Johnson depicted himself as the rugged realist struggling against society’s expectations and perceptions while Rousseau simply eschewed society as a means to compensate for his own shortcomings. Mark Temmer may well sum up the common view of both writers in modern terms: “Men and women--rather than his own self--are Johnson’s subjects of inquiry, whereas Rousseau makes his moi the alpha and omega of his quest.”

Rousseau’s self-obsession affords readers a great advantage in attempting to psychoanalyze him that we lack in trying to do the same with Johnson. Because Rousseau’s posthumously published autobiography The Confessions (1781) probes the depths of Rousseau’s own mind--in the process showing him as a fallible, and at times, despicable individual--we can achieve a better understanding of how Rousseau perceives himself and how
he rationalizes his own behavior. Leopold Damrosch sheds light upon why Rousseau’s
*Confessions* truly deviated from the style of his contemporaries: “Most writers at the time tried to keep their lives and their writings separate. Rousseau developed a uniquely new kind of personal image . . . and he was driven to explain his behavior to himself as well as the public” (*Jean-Jacques* 195).

On the other hand, the details of Johnson’s “life” are found predominantly in the anecdotes or recollections of those who were acquainted with him in varying capacities (resulting in what Thomas Macaulay called the “table-talk” biographies for which Johnson would be most well remembered). Donald Greene comments upon the phenomenon of readers mistakenly believing they *know* Johnson, and his writing, because they have read James Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* (1791), and the damaging repercussions that have occurred as a result: “The continuing currency of the legend of Life’s supreme excellence has greatly hindered the acceptance, even in academic circles, of Johnson as one of the very greatest of English writers . . . he is the figure of mild fun that emerges in Boswell’s biography” (*Pretty* 115).

While it is up to readers to determine if Johnson’s own writings portray him as a “figure of mild fun,” it is likewise incumbent upon Rousseau’s audience to decipher whether or not he is making liberal use of the term *poetic license*. Regardless of the degree of imagination exhibited in each man’s writing, viewing their literary works alone as a means to assess their often overactive imaginations is a vastly reductive proposition. In order to grasp the truly remarkable degree to which imagination affected both Johnson and Rousseau--positively and negatively--we must examine the immense role imagination played in their daily lives, as well as in their writings.
Johnson and Rousseau alike seemed to find solace through creative expression; however, as independent as each man was, it is clear that both had great reservations regarding how their works would be received by the public. Nowhere is Rousseau’s imagination more greatly evidenced than in the ranting of his later life, particularly during the years he was writing The Confessions (which he completed in 1770). He came to believe that former associates were plotting a conspiracy to defame him, not only during his life, but after his death as well. In Rousseau: Judge of Jean-Jacques (1772), his paranoia is evident, as the tone of voice frequently morphs into third-person, almost as if he is watching himself the same way he believes others are watching him.

Rousseau’s motivation in writing is, to his way of thinking, clear and straightforward: upon his death, his words will restore him to the public’s good graces, for he “must live his remaining days in scorn and humiliation. But I have the most lively presentiment that after his death and the death of his persecutors, their plots will be uncovered and his memory vindicated.” Meanwhile, Johnson’s imagination manifested itself in a self-loathing, essentially passive-aggressive attitude toward his readers in the Preface to the Dictionary (1755). Like Rousseau, Johnson seems to recognize that his writing has only served to exacerbate his misery, lamenting: “I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please, have sunk into the grave . . . I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquillity, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise” (113). Both men realized that once a piece of writing left their hands, judgment would soon be rendered by the court of public opinion. Johnson convinced himself that he was never a favorite of the people and may have done so in order to allay the potential scrutiny to which his works may have been subjected. Rousseau, on the other hand, believed that his writing would serve as a last will and testament of sorts, and that the immortality of his
written words alone would justify him in the eyes of the public, a public whose approval he claims to have long since ceased attempting to gain.\textsuperscript{48}

The act of writing, then, only intensified each man’s preexisting belief that imagination can be beneficial and dangerous, pleasurable and painful, in forcing an individual to create unattainable and unrealistic scenarios to escape the unpleasant aspects of quotidian existence—or, to dwell on them.\textsuperscript{49} Both men were afflicted with melancholy,\textsuperscript{50} yet seemingly dealt with their problems in differing fashions: whereas Johnson dreaded solitude and believed that it would only exacerbate his inherent proclivity towards insanity, Rousseau preferred an isolated lifestyle where he was devoid of public judgment. Interestingly, Hester Thrale notes that Johnson and Rousseau were in agreement that “solitude is the nurse of [love] as well as every other passion” (\textit{Dr. Johnson} 58).

Rousseau and Johnson had intriguingly similar childhoods in which each were sickly and had strained relationships with their parents. Rousseau’s birth was fraught with complications, and for his entire life he battled poor eyesight.\textsuperscript{51} His mother died shortly after his birth causing his father, Isaac, to blame Rousseau for her death. In addition, Isaac unfairly expected his son to serve as sort of a “replacement” for her, which may in fact be why Rousseau had lifelong difficulties with adopting a masculine persona. In book one of his \textit{Confessions} Rousseau laments that his father “seemed to see [Rousseau’s mother] again in me, but could never forget that I had robbed him of her; he never kissed me that I did not know by his sighs and his convulsive embrace that there was a bitter grief mingled with his affection.”\textsuperscript{52}

Yet, although Rousseau harbors at least some resentment toward his father for particular elements of his upbringing, he also has fond childhood memories, which apparently only serve to torment an older Rousseau as he writes \textit{The Confessions}: “No royal child could be more
scrupulously cared for than I was in my early years. I was idolized by everyone around me and . . . always treated as beloved son, never a spoiled child . . . How could I have turned out wicked when I had . . . the best people in the world around me?” (21-2). If Rousseau’s memory is accurate in this circumstance, then obviously Isaac Rousseau had an indulgent side as well, and while Rousseau seems unable to comprehend the origin of his own descent into depravity, the specific role of Samuel Johnson’s parents in his adult difficulties is likely one of which he was well aware.

Johnson’s infancy was also one of great tribulation. Sarah and Michael Johnson, Samuel’s parents, unknowingly hired a tubercular wet nurse to care for their son. Although Johnson’s parents were completely unaware of the caregiver’s ailment, Bate notes that “Sarah, unwilling to admit that an action of the parents could have been even indirectly responsible [for the tuberculosis], preferred to think that the boy inherited the disease” (7). The disease, an infection of the lymph glands known as scrofula, left Johnson nearly blind in one eye and completely deaf in his left ear. Several symptoms of tuberculosis, specifically a high fever, may be directly responsible for the somewhat peculiar habits that Johnson exhibited as an adult, which have been likened to Tourette’s Syndrome by many current scholars. Regardless of how the disease manifested itself over the course of his life, Johnson’s parents’ self-aggrandizement may have compelled them to overcompensate for his deformities (and their own guilt for contributing to them) by egregiously coddling their child.

Evidence for Johnson’s parents putting their son on display can be found in Sir John Hawkins’s Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D (1787). In it, Hawkins chronicles the famous story about a three-year-old Johnson accidentally killing a duck and frantically demanding that his mother record the following poem for posterity: “Here lies good Master Duck, / That Samuel
Johnson trod on, / If’t had lived t’would have been good luck, / For then there’d been an odd one” (*LL.D* 3). The fact that Hawkins’s *Life* appeared four years prior to Boswell’s *Life*, and because Hawkins interviewed fewer sources, his account falls short in revealing the affair in as great a detail as Boswell, who definatively states: “[Johnson] assured me, that his father made the verses, and wished to pass them for his child’s. [Johnson] added, ‘my father was a foolish old man; that is to say, foolish in talking of his children” (*Life* I, 40). In *Young Sam Johnson* (1955), James Clifford adds pertinent details to both Boswell’s and Hawkins’s anecdotes:

[Johnson] insisted that [his father] had done almost all of it. Johnson even claimed he remembered his father making the verses . . . His parents so teased him “to exhibit his knowledge, etc. to the few friends the had, that he used to run up a tree when company was expected, that he might escape the plague of being showed off to them.” Ultimately he came to dread his father’s caresses because he suspected they were merely the prelude to some attempt to make him perform.53

Like Rousseau, who realized that with his father’s embraces came an unspoken expectation about what Rousseau was supposed to symbolize (his mother), Johnson began to believe at a young age that his father’s attentions were predicated upon his reputation as a prodigy, and such behavior likely fueled Johnson’s apparent lifelong dismay with his father.

In his autobiography, *The Words* (1964), French existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre sums up his own childhood treatment in terms that seem to echo Johnson and Rousseau’s: “My truth, my character, and my name were in the hands of adults. I had learned to see myself through their eyes. I was a child, that monster which they fabricated with their regrets . . . worst of all, I suspected adults of faking. The words they spoke to me were candies, but they talked
among themselves in quite another tone.”54 Perhaps frustrated by attempting to interact with others--particularly adults--Johnson and Rousseau both turned to books at a young age for amusement. Their immersion in literature remained well into their respective adulthoods and this preoccupation quite likely served as the wellspring for each man’s imaginative prowess.

In his *Confessions*, Rousseau notes that he has little memory of his “early” childhood, and when considering the painful circumstances of his youth, we might surmise that it is because he repressed a great deal of this period. Though when his memories actually commence, they appear to be facilitated by books and the alternate world they presented, in addition to the comfort and distraction reading provided: “I know nothing of myself till I was five or six. I do not know how I learnt to read . . . it is from my earliest reading that I date the unbroken consciousness of my own existence. My mother had possessed some novels, and my father and I began to read them after our supper” (19-20). It may be quite telling that Rousseau makes sure to inform the reader that the novels he read belonged to his mother, as reading them perhaps served as a vicarious way with which to remember her. Considering Rousseau’s tendency to fetishize objects in *The Confessions*,55 such an interpretation certainly seems reasonable.

According to Hester Thrale, Johnson also felt a lifelong indebtedness to the woman he associated with his introduction to reading (oddly, *not* his mother). Johnson’s maid, Catharine, read the tale of *St. George and the Dragon* to a young Johnson, and this story clearly invigorated his young imagination--an experience that he would later advocate adults to follow in raising their children. Thrale notes: “The recollection of such reading as had delighted [Johnson] in his infancy made him always persist in fancying that it was the only reading which could please an infant . . . ‘Babies do not want’ said he, ‘to hear about babies; they like to be told of giants and castles, and of somewhat which can stretch and stimulate their little minds’” (*Dr. Johnson* 6).
The obligation Johnson felt for his former maid is evidenced by a journey he made to Lichfield some fifty-five years later to assist Catharine in her final days. Ironically, a few years earlier Johnson was unable (or unwilling) to return home to be with his mother before she passed away, and perhaps his internalized remorse served as the impetus for him to make a more concerted effort to see his former maid one last time. Sadly, the trip was a microcosm of so many instances in Johnson’s life, as his effort proved fruitless: when he finally arrived in Lichfield, Catharine had already died.

While Boswell’s claim that “Johnson as a boy was immoderately fond of romances of chivalry, a preference which he retained throughout life” (Life I, 49) clearly evinces Johnson’s admitted interest for fables like *St. George and the Dragon*, Rousseau’s reading list, as he presents it, is clearly more complex. However, both men were equally complimentary of a work considered by many to be the first English novel: Daniel Defoe’s 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe*. Interestingly, but perhaps not coincidentally, Rousseau begins the second chapter of his *Confessions* with the epochal comment, “The novels gave out in the summer of 1719” (20)—the very year *Robinson Crusoe* was published; it was subsequently translated into French a few months later. Rousseau’s mother’s books, largely romances, were now beginning to lose favor in the face of the new realistic novel, which Johnson described in his *Rambler No. 4* as “the comedy of romance . . . it can neither bewilder its personages in deserts, nor lodge them in imaginary castles” (*Rambler* Vol. III, 19).

Again, we see Johnson’s reference to castles as narrative features capable of intriguing readers of all ages, and while *Robinson Crusoe* lacks castles in the formal sense (although Crusoe refers to a hovel as his castle and plays the role of benevolent monarch), it is certainly an example of the “new realistic novel” about which Johnson was writing. Rousseau and Johnson
were boys when Defoe’s novel was published, and clearly its impact was not lost on either man: Johnson purportedly stated that Robinson Crusoe, in addition to Don Quixote and Pilgrim’s Progress, was one of three books wished longer by its readers, while in Émile (1762) Rousseau--despite claiming a universal abhorrence for books--explains that he would teach his imaginary pupil to live his life by one book, Robinson Crusoe.

Bate notes that Johnson’s love for the three aforementioned books was based upon the fact that Johnson envisioned himself, and his life, in similar terms: “[Johnson] would have gone on reading [the three books] . . . because here --as in no other works--his identification was almost complete. These three wanderers--one a castaway, one a pilgrim, and one on an impossible quest--were prototypes of what he felt to be his own life” (276). Rousseau, writing of himself in Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques, likewise places himself in Crusoe’s shoes, hypothesizing: “[Rousseau’s] fondness for the novel Robinson Crusoe made me judge that he would not have thought himself as unhappy as Crusoe did confined to his desert island . . . without ambition and without vanity, it is less cruel and less difficult to live alone in a desert” (117-8).

Almost to a degree of ludicrousness, Rousseau takes such personifications a step further in his Confessions in a chapter dated 1743-44, at which time he was in his early thirties. He was quarantined for three weeks in Genoa to avoid an outbreak of the plague, and rather than panic or succumb to self-pity, he instead equates the entire state of affairs to those of his favorite protagonist:

Like another Robinson Crusoe I started making arrangements for my twenty-one days, as if it were for my whole life . . . I made myself a good mattress out of my waistcoats and shirts, some sheets from several napkins which I sewed together, a
Rousseau’s fancy (or delusion) here is abundantly displayed, and as readers we are left to wonder if this romanticized account actually has any factual basis whatsoever. The enormity of Rousseau’s imagination, particularly as a middle-aged man, is patently obvious from his subject of comparison: Crusoe, shipwrecked on a deserted island, must learn through trial-and-error how to survive in isolation. Rousseau, on the other hand, has his meals served to him by armed guards—so while Rousseau clearly revered *Robinson Crusoe*, it seems bizarre, or even inappropriate for him to compare his quarantine experience with the harrowing conditions endured by Defoe’s immortal hero.

Rousseau seems to differ from Johnson in the fact that—even as an adult—the former apparently possessed a childlike perspective of a surprisingly intricate work like *Robinson Crusoe*. Rousseau views his own temporary inconvenience in amplified terms by comparing it to Crusoe’s twenty-plus-year solitary existence, but for him the underlying similarity of his situation to Crusoe’s is the sense of adventure or precariousness it entails. Odd as it may seem, perhaps Rousseau actually coveted Crusoe’s separation from social constraints despite the fact that Defoe frequently portrays such isolation as one step shy of psychosis. Meanwhile, Johnson was seemingly a more realistic reader, interested largely in thematic applications to real-life
situations. Howard Weinbrot describes “Johnson’s didactic framework [where] narrator, character, and subject each must be within the imperfect limits of the best human achievement, as often guided by spiritual models.” Such an assessment can be readily applied to Crusoe, a clearly flawed individual who eventually credits God’s providence with his success and liberation from the island.

Johnson, ever the pragmatist, was nonetheless susceptible to flights of fancy when enthralled with a particular literary work. Akin to Rousseau, the impressions made on Johnson as a child by certain works sometimes remained with him for extended periods of time. Modern biographers of Johnson (Krutch, Clifford, and Bate specifically) all tell a similar account of a nine-year-old Johnson’s terror when reading the ghost scene in Hamlet. Clifford’s version, though, is the most detailed:

By his ninth year he had fallen under the spell of Shakespeare. One day when he was reading Hamlet in the kitchen, he was so powerfully moved by the ghost scene that he suddenly rushed upstairs to the street door in order to see people about him. His imaginative involvement in what he read was so great that Cordelia’s death in King Lear came as a terrific shock. Horrified by this apparent violation of poetic justice, he could not force himself to reread the last scenes of the play until many years afterward. (Young 63)

The concluding lines of Clifford’s passage paraphrase Johnson’s comments on King Lear (1765) and the long-lasting impact it had on Johnson. Well into his fifties, Johnson was still emotionally invested enough in the play to write indignantly of Cordelia’s execution: “If my sensations could add anything to the general suffrage, I might relate, that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia’s death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last
scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor.” Hester Thrale adds that “[Johnson] was not unwilling to tell [this story] as a Testimony to the Merits of Shakespear” (Dr. Johnson 7).

Rousseau’s romanticized recollections of *Robinson Crusoe* certainly differ from the didacticism that Johnson apparently found in Defoe’s novel; but Rousseau was not averse to the notion of “writing to instruct” that Boswell applied to Johnson’s literary productions (*Life* I, 224). In his *Émile*, Rousseau relates a parable from his youth that he claims is told for the express purpose of helping adults understand how they can foster a sense of independence in their children, in addition to helping quell childish fears:

One autumn evening, when it was very dark, [M. Lambercier] gave me the church key, and told me to go and fetch a Bible he had left in the pulpit . . . I had to pass through the graveyard. I crossed it bravely, for as long as I was in the open air I was never afraid of the dark. As I opened the door I heard a sort of echo in the roof; it sounded like voices and it began to shake my Roman courage . . . Without losing my way, without groping about, I reached the pulpit, took the Bible, and ran down the steps . . . You will ask if I am giving this anecdote as an example, and as an illustration, of the mirth which I say should accompany these games. Not so, but I give it as a proof that there is nothing so well calculated to reassure any one who is afraid in the dark as to hear sounds of laughter and talking in an adjoining room.  

The same active imagination, and reassurance in knowing that they were *not* solitary beings, was clearly possessed by Johnson and Rousseau as boys. Much like Johnson recounts the impact *Hamlet* had upon him as a child in order to prove Shakespeare’s greatness, Rousseau’s childhood
tale—in which he uses *himself* as an example—is intended to provide insight to parents about how they might create a less frightening nighttime atmosphere for their children.

Had Rousseau’s aforementioned childhood recollection, told with the goal of edifying the reader, been found in *The Confessions* it may be more difficult to take Rousseau at his word regarding his noble intentions. Rousseau acknowledges that, in his old age, he was jaded and often lacked the total recall necessary to accurately provide fine details to some of his anecdotes. In *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1776-8), he admits, “I wrote my *Confessions* when I was already old and disgusted with the vain pleasures of life... I wrote them from memory. This memory often failed me or only furnished me imperfect recollections, and I filled in the gaps with details which I dreamed up.” Although Johnson never formally dabbled in autobiography, it is also easy to see his presence in many of his works, *Rasselas* (1759) and *Lives of the Poets* (1781), for example. Leopold Damrosch notes that in Johnson’s *Life of Dryden*, for instance, Boswell and other contemporaries of Johnson believed there was “a good deal of Johnsonian self-portrait.”

In a short philosophical treatise entitled *My Portrait* (1756), Rousseau ponders the age-old notion that anything an artist produces is in some way autobiographical, convolutedly stating: “It is impossible for a man ceaselessly moving about in society and endlessly occupied with disguising himself with others not to disguise himself a little with himself and, if he had the time to study himself, it would be almost impossible for him to know himself.” Johnson was just such a person, and he thrived on misleading others, whether in jest or simply because he wanted to avoid being labeled, particularly his close acquaintances. John Vance avers, “If Johnson did anything consciously to shape his image for posterity... he did so with the intention of
misshaping it, leaving it shrouded in a haze of confusion, contradiction, and ambiguity”

(Laughing 222).  

The sardonic tone of the conversations depicted in Boswell’s Life or the often surgical critiques he offers in Lives of the Poets present Johnson in a curmudgeonly light; however, as the old cliché goes: appearances can be deceiving. Johnson actually cohabitated with several dependents who could be labeled as his social and intellectual inferiors, and indeed took a great concern in the welfare of the impoverished, as Thrale comments that Johnson “really loved [the poor] as nobody else does” (Dr. Johnson 42). Meanwhile Rousseau, for all his pejorative illusions of social interaction, may actually have had some legitimate rationale for feeling like a pariah in public settings. Damrosch mentions the spectacle that was Rousseau’s 1766 trip to England, highlighting an evening Rousseau spent at Drury Lane Theatre with David Hume. When compared to the play being performed, “Rousseau himself was the chief attraction that evening. Hume noticed that the king and queen, seated in the opposite box, looked at Rousseau more than at the stage” (Jean-Jacques 409). Therefore, while readers then and now often attribute Rousseau’s fear or hatred of social interaction to an uneven temperament or paranoia, incidents like those at Drury Lane may well lend validity to his somewhat self-centered belief that in the public eye he was, at least at times, the subject of novelty.

A third party (in this case, Hume) recognizing Rousseau as the victim of scrutinizing eyes may astound those who had merely written Rousseau off as an antisocial or self-important misanthrope. Likewise, to the many readers that did not know Johnson personally, his defense of downtrodden individuals—quite possibly epitomized by Rambler 170—must have been quite a shock to the system. Johnson, writing under the guise of a prostitute, describes her struggles in such a way as to evoke sympathy rather than scorn from readers: “I often withdrew to my
chamber to vent my grief . . . my schemes and sorrows were interrupted by a sudden change of my relation’s behaviour . . . the wretch took advantage of the familiarity which he enjoyed as my relation, and the submission which he exacted as my benefactor, to complete the ruin of an orphan whom his own promises had made indigent, whom his indulgence had melted, and his authority subdued” (Rambler Vol. V, 137-8).

The power of Johnson’s language in the Rambler essay is undeniable, yet in reading the narrative, one may well notice a similarity to Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novel Pamela (1740). Hawkins notes that Johnson, besides being friends with Richardson, purportedly thought quite highly of his works, but that this opinion “seemed not firm . . . and could at any time [turn] into a disapprobation of all fictitious relations, of which he would frequently say they took no hold of the mind” (LL.D 96-7). While according to Hawkins, Johnson’s enthusiasm for Richardson’s novels was at best inconsistent, Rousseau’s commentary is by far more definitive. Rousseau’s epistolary novel Julie (1761) was clearly influenced by Richardson’s Clarissa (1748) in no small degree; however, in his Confessions, Rousseau questions Richardson’s qualities as a novelist although his greater motivation is likely an attempt to dispute or criticize his rival Diderot:

Diderot has paid Richardson high compliments on the prodigious variety of his scenes and the number of his characters . . . but, as for their number, that is a feature he shares with the most mediocre of novelists who make up for the sterility of their ideas by multiplying their characters and adventures. It is easy to rouse the attention by incessantly introducing amazing events and new faces, which pass like the figures in a magic lantern. But it is certainly more difficult to
hold that attention always to the same objects without the aid of marvellous adventures. (505)

Johnson, while never as scathing or critical of Richardson’s work as Rousseau, is obviously of a like mind regarding what Rousseau believes to be the formula of novels like *Clarissa*. In *Rambler No. 4* Johnson lays down the gauntlet to novelists by suggesting that the only requirement for writing a fiction at the time was to invent unlikely scenarios based on little to nothing involved with reality—in other words, any fanciful literate person could write a novel, but the end product will remain uninformed and counterproductive. He laments, in verbiage reminiscent of Rousseau’s, the writer of such novels “had no further care than to retire to his closet, let loose his invention, and heat his mind with incredibilities; a book was thus produced without fear of criticism, without the toil of study, without knowledge of nature, or acquaintance with life” (*Rambler III*, 20).

Despite the apparent similarities between *Pamela* and *Rambler 170*, the fundamental premise of each work differs drastically. *Pamela* is a highly sentimental story about a young woman’s struggle to maintain her virtue despite the advances of her master; but more importantly, it is a fictional conduct book. In *Ramblers 170* and *171*, Johnson assumes the persona of a bona fide prostitute as a means of justifying a young woman’s entry into the profession, not as a preachy way to advise readers (particularly women) as to how they should behave. Again, Johnson breaks the mold by infusing his own ideology into an already existent idea: yes, there are socially undesirable or morally bankrupt individuals amongst us, but they are not always to blame for their lot in life. He then goes a step further by depicting the young woman’s situation as reality, and his uncanny ability to project a female voice evidences an
imaginative flair in effectively conveying the deplorable situation of this unfortunate young woman—one not typically associated with the great moralist.

Rousseau relates a similarly sordid tale, though from his own perspective as opposed to a prostitute’s. He explains that while in Venice (1743-4), his friend devised a plan to purchase a concubine so that he would not feel compelled to use prostitutes. Rousseau’s friend ultimately purchased a girl from her mother, but Rousseau’s conscience was clearly burdened by the idea of having sexual relations with a child. Furthermore, the idea of serving as her pimp was equally disturbing to him: “As we had to wait till she was mature [to prostitute her], we had to sow a great deal before we could reap . . . I should be as horrified at approaching this child, once she was old enough, as at committing the crime of incest” (Confessions 302-3). Although it is certainly speculative to suggest that the French as a whole were as sympathetic to the plight of such girls or women, Rambler 171 oddly shows Johnson—the stout Englishman—looking to France for solutions to problems he views as endemic in England.

Judging by the conclusion of Rambler 171 we might not only infer that Johnson was subtly praising France, but that he was simultaneously denigrating England’s treatment of prostitutes: “It is said that in France they annually evacuate their streets, and ship their prostitutes and vagabonds to their colonies. If the women that infest [London] had the same opportunity of escaping from their miseries, I believe very little force would be necessary . . . For my part I should exult the privilege of banishment, and think myself happy in any region that should restore me once again to honesty and peace” (Rambler Vol. V, 145). Ironically, Johnson did not actually go to France until 1775 when he visited with his friends, the Thrales; therefore, Ramblers 170 & 171 were written nearly a generation before he would have had any real firsthand knowledge of France or what the situation there would have been like for prostitutes.
However, if we ascribe accuracy to Hawkins’s somewhat off-putting depiction of the relationship between Johnson and Robert Levet, Johnson may have believed that he had extensive knowledge of the medical climate across the channel without ever having set foot there himself. Hawkins writes that Levet “took a resolution to travel, and visited France and Italy for the purpose, as his letters mention, of gaining experience in physic . . . after this he went to Paris, and, for improvement, attended the hospitals in that city” (LL.D 171). Johnson’s intimate relationship with Levet almost certainly mandates that the two discussed many topics; with Johnson’s somewhat dilettantish interest in medicine, Levet’s experiences in France were likely among them. If Levet had been privy to the unenviable existence of prostitutes there, it seems well within reason to surmise that he passed such information onto Johnson.

Although Rambler No. 4 specifies Johnson’s criteria for fiction—if an author is not knowledgeable about what he writes then he should not be writing it—there is an important distinction that must be drawn. Johnson’s essay is an attempt to marshal social improvement, which differs from the intent of novels he believed were created to entertain or divert the young and idle. Thus Johnson’s essay is very much in concord with Rousseau’s maxim about lying versus fiction: “To lie without profit or prejudice to ourselves or another is not to lie: it is not a lie; it is a fiction” (Reveries 32). In other words, when deception is committed for the common good, it is fiction as opposed to lying.

From its genesis, Johnson’s literary career was entwined with deception, whether by choice or by necessity. The young and inexperienced writer circumvented the House of Commons’ 1738 edict that made it illegal to publish reports of Parliamentary debates. Playing off of Jonathan Swift’s 1726 satire Gulliver’s Travels, Johnson presented the debates as fiction under the heading, Debates in the Senate of Magna Lilliputia, which was published anonymously.
Bate notes that Johnson “had developed almost an obsession about anonymity in [journalism]” (328) and Boswell explains that Johnson refused to continue with the Debates in terms that are reminiscent of Rousseau’s aforementioned philosophy about lying: “Johnson told me that as soon as he found that the speeches were thought genuine, he determined that he would write no more of them; for ‘he would be accessory to the propagation of falsehood’ . . . a short time before his death he expressed a regret for his having been the author of fictions, which had passed for realities.” Later in the passage Boswell notes that Johnson, although contrite about disseminating fabrications, nonetheless believed that the Debates “were to be valued as orations upon questions of publick importance” (Life I, 152). Thus, writing anonymously provided Johnson an opportunity to air grievances he had with Parliamentary practices.

Johnson’s breakthrough work, coming shortly after the Debates, was his piercing satire London (1738)--another example of Johnson taking his native land to task. Ironically, this seminal poem was also published anonymously, although Alexander Pope believed a poet of such dexterity would soon be deterre (literally “dug out”). Why Johnson did not have the desire or confidence to put his name on the poem is a question that may best be answered by contemplating the circumstances of Johnson’s childhood and the inherent pressure placed on him to perform by his parents’ contrivances. London, by all accounts a powerful poem, was still not Johnsonian in the sense that its style is actually an imitation of Juvenal’s Third Satire. Perhaps Johnson was waiting to reveal himself as the writer of a work that was a more original production so that he would not be considered an authorial charlatan, or someone merely appropriating an ancient form. However, that day was more than a decade removed, and the work that would permanently put Johnson on the map was his 1749 poem, The Vanity of Human Wishes.
Also in 1749, on the continent, an aspiring writer named Jean-Jacques Rousseau was about to make his impact felt with a philosophical essay entitled *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*. In it, Rousseau argued that education and social interaction were detrimental to man, and that to return to a more natural way of life would actually be more progressive than the current system. The essay went on to win The Academy of Dijon’s first prize the following year, but Rousseau knew that many readers, particularly Enlightenment thinkers, might be hostile to his differing viewpoint. Therefore, in order to defend himself prior to any potential attacks, the epigraph of Rousseau’s essay is Ovid’s passage, *Barbarus hic ego sum qui non intelligor illis* (People consider me a barbarian because they do not understand me). The fear that audiences might perceive him as eccentric or dangerous, may, like Johnson, have also compelled him to initially submit the essay anonymously, for the original title page simply reads: *By a Citizen of Geneva*.  

Later in his *Confessions*, Rousseau admits that the composition of his *Discourse* is often lacking and actually not the best example of his work. To his perspective the somewhat heterogeneous style with which he constructed his treatise may be to blame for its shortcomings: “I devoted the night hours to it when I could not sleep. I meditated in bed with closed eyes and shaped and reshaped my sentences in my head with incredible labour. Then, when I was finally content with them, I committed them to my memory till such time as I could put them on paper” (328). If it seems difficult to fathom that Rousseau’s incredible entrée into the literary world came about in such a haphazard fashion, then one may be surprised to learn that Johnson’s most celebrated poem (and the first to bear his name) was supposedly composed in much the same manner. Boswell, clearly astounded, writes: “The fervid rapidity with which [*Vanity*] was produced, is scarcely credible. I have heard [Johnson] say, that he composed seventy lines of it
in one day, without putting one of them upon paper until they were finished” (Life I, 192). Rousseau and Johnson’s constant battles with physical ailments while composing works like *Vanity* and *Discourse* may be likened to the blind John Milton reciting lines of *Paradise Lost* from memory for his daughter to transcribe.

Whereas prior to 1749 Rousseau did very little writing, Johnson had actually been quite prolific for roughly a decade, though largely considered a Grub Street hack. Why, then, did Johnson choose to emerge from the shadows with *Vanity*? Perhaps again the answer lies in his childhood: Johnson had already felt the pangs of self-deception by accepting credit for a poem produced by his father, and to do so again would be to simply repeat the cycle. Clifford observes the differences between *Vanity* and *London*, and such disparities may well illuminate the reasons that Johnson felt confident enough to accept credit for *Vanity* as opposed to his reluctance some ten years earlier when writing *London*:

> The *Vanity of Human Wishes was not a mere imitation*. Even more than in *London*, Johnson allowed himself every liberty. He took what he wanted from Juvenal and infused it with his own personality . . . in many ways the resulting poem was just as much Johnson’s as if he had had no model . . . In one way the poem was a milestone; in another, an epitome . . . the important thing, he stresses over and over again, is to be realistic, never to fool oneself [my emphasis].

*(Young 319-22)*

Bate adds that Johnson “makes clear the inevitable self-deception by which human beings are led astray. We see objects through the fog of our own passions, and chase or fly distorted images that lack reality--“fancied ills” or “airy good”” (281).
By openly acknowledging the universal concept of self-deceit, Johnson seemingly uses the poem to “come clean.” Combining his own philosophy and social commentary with Juvenal’s *Tenth Satire* in *Vanity*, Johnson launches a preemptive strike which would eradicate potential criticism that his poem was merely a reconstituting of Juvenalian satire. In short, Johnson’s infusion of his own reality into the poem breaks the constraints of the ancient form that he so heavily yielded to a decade earlier. Thrale explains the degree to which the source of the poem is entirely Johnson’s, casually assuming: “I suppose every body knows as well as I do, that it is [Johnson’s mother] which he has drawn in the Poem upon the Vanity of human Wishes” (*Dr. Johnson* 5).

Rousseau, though a radical thinker in his time, was also not opposed to the idea of adapting preexisting stories to meet his own ends. In 1762 Rousseau wrote a poem entitled *The Levite of Ephraim*, based on chapter nineteen of the Book of *Judges*. In *The Confessions*, Rousseau elaborates upon the importance of the poem in regard to his entire body of work, and in the process also clearly draws parallels between the events of his own life and the Biblical parable upon which the poem is based. The irony of *Judges* is that even the most heroic figures are renegades living by their own rules rather than following the word of God. Although Rousseau would no doubt view himself as more pious than the major figures of *Judges*, he obviously considered himself a rebel: rather than blindly following the majority, Rousseau preferred to march to the beat of his own drummer.

In writing about his poem, Rousseau firmly avows: “If the *Levite of Ephraim* is not the best of my works it will always be my dearest . . . if all those great philosophers were to be brought together who, in their books, are so superior to the adversities they have never sustained; and if they were then put into a position like mine and . . . given just such a task to perform, we
should soon see what they would make of it” (Confessions 541-2). Patrick Riley describes the strategic purpose of Rousseau’s The Levite of Ephraim as largely self-serving, noting that the poem is “singularly important as an expression as Rousseau’s abiding concern with his portrayal of himself as a sacrificial victim,” and such rhetoric can be readily seen in the above passage from the Confessions.

Johnson and Rousseau, though, found their greatest successes with works containing more original thought, and Johnson’s emergence with London in 1749 suggests that he had seemingly already adopted the mindset he would espouse ten years later in Rasselas (1759)—“that no man was ever great by imitation”—his most famed creative endeavor. Although Rasselas is also often construed as a variation of the Scripture (the Book Ecclesiastes), the story and the philosophy contained within it is pure Johnson. The tale itself, as even the greatest of Johnson enthusiasts will admit, contains many weaknesses; in fact, Rasselas almost certainly would not have escaped Johnson’s own scrutiny, but he told Boswell he did not actually read it himself until some twenty years after he wrote it (Life I, 341).

One of the detriments applied to Rasselas by contemporaries involved Johnson’s apparent inability to individuate voices amongst his cast of characters—admittedly, the words of the lowly servant Pekuah do not differ greatly from those of her learned mistress, Nekayah. Johnson’s stance in Rambler 37, that no author worth his salt would make the words of base characters “sink to the level of the speakers . . . or [raise base speakers] to the height of the sentiments” (Rambler Vol. III, 201-2), is ironically solidified by the fact that the central characters in Rasselas are by and large virtuous and well-meaning. Thus, what the dialogue may lack in imagination is somewhat made up for with intent, and as far as Johnson is concerned, the moral factor is one that supersedes the imaginative element: if a character is a ne’er-do-well,
lofty language and sentimental notions should not be utilized in an attempt to make him appear better than he is.

Although Johnson likely would not be enthralled with a great deal of the content found in *The Confessions*, he might be surprisingly pleased with Rousseau’s fairly consistent moralizing and, quite possibly, the actual intent of Rousseau’s autobiography. Thrale believes that Rousseau’s position regarding the unending challenges of Christian piety is very close to Johnson’s, and that Rousseau’s maxim, “The true Christian always finds that his task is beyond him” is one that Johnson stated was beautifully put (*Dr. Johnson* 67). The Bible—a work that both writers studied intensely—must have been an unbearably tormenting read for each man. Simply imagine Rousseau comparing himself to the blemished heroes of the Book of Judges or Johnson pondering Solomon’s wisdom in *Ecclesiastes*. The Bible undoubtedly helped shape each man’s seemingly defeatist perspectives; but this frustration is more widely recognizable in *Rasselas*, since unlike Rousseau’s *Levite of Ephraim*, the former is considered one of the most well known works in Johnson’s entire corpus.

*Rasselas* is a puzzling component of Johnson’s library to examine in the context of this chapter about imagination. The work itself is a tribute to the idea that unchecked imagination is not beneficial, but rather divisive in that it fosters unachievable desires. Ultimately, though, the sane individual will come to understand that his desires are actually impossibilities, and this realization necessarily facilitates a state of depression or despair. But, Johnson’s lifelong fear of insanity particularly factors into chapter forty-four, entitled “The Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination,” where Imlac notes, “When we are alone we are not always busy . . . the ardour of enquiry will sometimes give way to idleness or satiety. He who has nothing external that can divert him, must find pleasure in his own thoughts, and must conceive himself what he is not; for
who is pleased with what he is?” (*Rasselas* 151-2). As all of his biographers observe, Johnson had great reservations about being left alone, for isolation might cause his thoughts to run amuck, and this fear played no small hand in why he felt the constant need to be around others. When reading *Rasselas* one cannot help but note that nearly every hermit-like/solitary character is deranged, or at the very least has some sort of mental defect.

Imlac’s—or Johnson’s, as the case may be—above commentary could likely have served as a template for Rousseau’s life. From roughly middle-age onward, Rousseau publicly declared his love of solitude, or perhaps more accurately his distaste with society, and this inculcated within him a persecution complex of sorts. Whether or not there really was a conspiracy against him, his later works nonetheless reveal a man whose mind--while clearly occupied with the potential actions of his enemies to defame him--was not only adroit, but oddly at peace with the “path” he had chosen to walk (Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques* 294). In the Fourth Promenade of his *Reveries*, Rousseau’s self-satisfaction with the candor of his writing and the catharsis it helped him achieve is evident: “I have carried good faith, veracity, and frankness as far, further even--at least I believe so--than any other man has ever done. Feeling that the good surpassed the evil, it was in my interest to say everything; and I said everything” (37).

*The Confessions* and *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, written during the last decade of Rousseau’s life are, as evidenced by their titles alone, his chronicling of the isolated life he led: he had to confess the particulars of his life in written form because he did not have any confidants with which to speak. He walked alone, cogitating upon various aspects of his own life because there was no one with whom he desired to amble. Damrosch notes that in eighteenth-century terms, the word reverie means “idle daydreaming at best and delusion at worst” (*Jean-Jacques* 481), and it was precisely the latter component of this definition that
Johnson so greatly feared (and to which Rousseau seemingly succumbed). Lyle Larsen remarks upon Johnson’s daily routine in similar terms: “[Johnson] commonly rose early in the afternoon . . . and often frittered away the rest of the afternoon lost in reverie, frequently tormenting himself with dismal thoughts of mortality and sin” (Larsen 41).

Although their perspectives of social interaction are simply incompatible, Johnson’s *Rambler No. 1* and Rousseau’s *Reveries* both rely upon an explanation, almost a justification to the public, as to why each man is writing—clearly, each man’s mind is enveloped in *some form* of reverie. Both Bate and Damrosch note that Johnson and Rousseau respectively struggled to maintain control of their own lives in the face of social expectations or requirements. However, the way in which each man explains his dilemma is reflective of how he attempted to exert control over the perception of readers. With Johnson, we see a man who, as he would later show in his *Preface* to the *Dictionary*, is frequently self-deprecating due to his own insecurity. He justifies this anxiety with an explanation about how established strictures for authors have created an unrealistic standard in *Rambler 1*: “Perhaps few authors have presented themselves before the public, without wishing that such ceremonial modes of entrance had been anciently established, as might have freed them from those dangers which the desire of pleasing is certain to produce” (*Rambler Vol. III*, 4).

Johnson appears to have resigned himself to the fact that the public is fickle, and they will ultimately gravitate toward writers who produce works with the sole intent of satisfying the majority. In the First Promenade of *Reveries*, Rousseau (like Johnson) makes certain to explain his philosophy of writing, but Rousseau claims to have relinquished control over attempting to persuade his audience to view him in a positive light; so, in this light he seems like a more jaded form of Johnson. With this attitude Rousseau has *carte blanche* to write precisely what he feels
without fear of public sanction: “I gave up forever the idea of winning the public back over to my side during my lifetime; and for that matter, now that this winning them back can no longer be reciprocal, it would henceforth be quite useless to me . . . I am a hundred times happier in my solitude than I could ever be living among them” (Reveries 5).

The Reveries of the Solitary Walker is divided into ten chapters, each entitled Promenades. The French term promeneur (one who takes promenades, or walks) might also be defined as wanderer, again drawing parallels to the title of Johnson’s series of essays, The Rambler. Indeed, in the final years of his life, Rousseau had little reason to view himself as anything other than a vagabond: he had been exiled from several different countries, and (in the accurate words of Johnson) “hunted out of society” largely due to the content of his writings (Life II, 11). Although the Reveries were actually inspired by Rousseau’s various walks around Paris, the title is not intended to refer to physical movement. Instead, the idea of being lost in reverie is epitomized by Rousseau’s reminiscences about his life and his contemplation of the trials and tribulations that have taken him to this point.

In Reveries, Rousseau addresses his Confessions and details the difficulties inherent in writing from memory. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as depicted from his birth in 1712, is subject to the judgment of Jean-Jacques Rousseau circa the late 1770’s. Therefore, Rousseau struggles to reconcile the differences in his perception as a sixty-four year old man with those of the younger Rousseau portrayed in his autobiography. Boswell almost certainly had a similar difficulty in composing Life of Johnson, which was published more than six years after Johnson’s death. According to Frank Brady, “virtually all biography before Boswell was ethical . . . aiming to instruct and judge.” Conversely, Boswell’s Life is largely a fictional construct of a dynamic character, even though the sketch is based upon reality. Likely the best example of this
dynamism comes in the closing pages of *Life*, when a dying Samuel Johnson peacefully submits with dignity to his fate, whereas Johnson’s anguish at the thought of death has been a constant theme throughout the entire biography.81

Rousseau’s oscillation between past and present, and the subsequent difficulties it creates between his perceptions of intent versus result, illustrates that he *is* the dynamic character he presents himself to be in *The Confessions*. In 1764, nearly two decades before Rousseau’s irreverent autobiography saw the light of day, he met a young Scot named James Boswell—the very man who would immortalize Samuel Johnson’s life in biographical form. The meetings between Rousseau and Boswell, as depicted in Boswell’s *Grand Tour of Germany and Switzerland* (1764), are eclectic to say the least: one minute the two get along famously and the next, Rousseau demands that Boswell leave his presence. Regardless, Boswell clearly sought the same type of relationship from Rousseau that he did from Johnson: that of a surrogate father. While Johnson somewhat reluctantly accepted such a role, Rousseau roundly rejects Boswell’s proposition to serve as his guide in no uncertain terms, warning his young follower:

> Do not be guided by men’s judgments, or you will find yourself tossed to and fro perpetually. Do not base your life on the judgments of others; first, because they are as likely to be mistaken as you are, and further, because you cannot know that they are telling you their true thoughts; they may be impelled by motives of interest or convention to talk to you in a way not corresponding to what they really think . . . I cannot [give you direction]. I can be responsible only for myself. *(Grand Tour I, 231)*
When considering Frank Brady’s commentary regarding pre-Boswellian biography being used to “instruct and judge,” one may wonder if Rousseau’s advice had a long-lasting impact upon Boswell’s practice in structuring the *Life of Johnson*. Within its pages, there is an admirable reluctance on Boswell’s part to cast his own judgment upon Johnson or the particulars of his life. 

Johnson’s advice to Boswell, though often very sensitive and personal, is at its most elemental very similar to Rousseau’s counsel. Johnson likewise tells his young friend in no uncertain terms in a 1769 letter, that imitation of others is seldom equivalent to the value of an original production based upon one’s own unique experiences: “There is . . . that difference which there will always be found between notions borrowed from without, and notions generated within . . . your Journal rose out of your own experience and observation” (*Life* II, 70). Johnson does seem to be doing more here than simply providing Boswell with composition tips--the underlying point appears to be empirical in nature, as if Johnson is positing that the most valuable knowledge one gains is not through books or lectures, but through firsthand experience. One needs look no further than chapter eighteen of *Rasselas* to see Johnson’s eschewal of a man living his life based exclusively upon the words or teachings of another.\(^82\)

While Rousseau for the most part refuses to indulge Boswell’s requests for fatherly guidance,\(^83\) his own internalized guilt--not his misanthropy--may be the motivation for his dismissal of Boswell’s request. For whatever reason (and the *Confessions* never overtly explains why), Rousseau abandoned all five of his children to foundling hospitals.\(^84\) Johnson never had any children, and although perhaps again playing the blowhard to perfection, purportedly told Hester Thrale, “I myself should not have had much fondness for a child of my own . . . I never wished to have a child” (*Life*, III, 29). Although Thrale was apparently flabbergasted by this comment and believed it to be at least somewhat disingenuous, the following dialogue lends
some credence to Johnson’s belief that Rousseau “knows he is talking nonsense, and laughs at the world for staring at him . . . a man who talks nonsense so well, must know that he is talking nonsense” (Life II, 74):

ROUSSEAU: I attach very little importance to books.

BOSWELL: Even to your own books?

ROUSSEAU: Oh, they are just rigmarole . . . when I put my trust in books, I was tossed about as you are. (Grand Tour I, 253)

Rousseau and Johnson alike reveled in their inconsistencies, particularly with the young and impressionable Boswell. One might surmise that both men were, in their own way, having fun with the Scot; however, it may also stand to reason that both were actually supplying him with a life’s lesson: one should be very leery to simply buy into what another person says, even if that person is a renowned author.

However much Rousseau claims to present the truth in his Confessions (and he does so frequently), he nonetheless makes it clear that he demands absolute honesty from his reader: “In truth I believe that it is impossible to act too honestly toward [me]. One must not chastise men for speaking sincerely about themselves. Moreover the honesty that I am demanding is not painful. If one never speaks to me about my book I shall be satisfied” (Portrait 38). It is not enough for his audience to pick up the autobiography, read it, and cast their judgment about whether or not Rousseau is a good person. He evokes religious sentiment in the opening pages of The Confessions in an anticipatory maneuver which actually invites readers to judge his character--only after they have judged their own--honestly, that is. In this way the story of Rousseau’s own life may actually be intended to serve as a mirror to our own existence, one which he hopes may compel readers to be less hasty with their judgments of others, and him: “I
have bared my secret soul as Thou thyself hast seen it, Eternal Being! So let the numberless legion of my fellow men . . . groan at my depravities, and blush for my misdeeds. But let each one of them reveal his heart at the foot of Thy throne with equal sincerity, and may any man who dares, say ‘I was a better man than he’” (17). At times, Johnson likewise wrote with a similar religious intent, though typically not for the promulgation of his own religious thought. He anonymously wrote at least twenty-eight sermons (which have survived) for others to preach, and although he once remarked that he did not particularly care about how the sermons he wrote were actually preached as long as he was paid for them, the religious rhetoric employed in his Fourth Sermon (published 1788) actually implies that he would laud an endeavor like Rousseau’s Confessions.

Johnson notes that those who are most susceptible to corruption are those who appear to stand most resolute in the face of temptation actually appear that way because they have come to accept the status-quo, precisely what a work like Rousseau’s aims to prevent. Johnson prophesizes:

So much are we influenced by example, and so diligently do we labour to deceive ourselves, that it is not uncommon to find the sentiments of benevolence almost extinguished, and all regard to the welfare of others overborne by a perpetual attention to immediate advantage and contracted views of present interest . . . Let him therefore observe, by what gradations men sink into perdition, by what insensible deviations they wander from the ways of virtue, till they are scarce able to return; and let him be warned by their example, to avoid the original causes of depravity, and repel the first attacks of unreasonable self-love.
One of Rousseau’s principle philosophical tenets is the damaging tendency of man to succumb to *amour-propre*, a prideful form of self-love. Johnson clearly believes that such behavior is learned from others rather than an inherent quality, and because Rousseau wrote his *Confessions* in solitude and espouses the benefits of such a life, he is also often of the mind that *amour-propre* is most greatly facilitated by a state of inequality. He writes, “Oh unhappy nation, where all ideas of the lovable and the good are reversed and where the arrogant amour-propre of worldly people transforms the virtues they trample underfoot into pride and vices!” (Judge 110).

In Rousseau’s mind he is one of the “good” people whose resolve is tested by what the “majority” consent to--and a work like *The Confessions*, by sometimes illustrating Rousseau’s depravity--provides an example to readers about how to avoid similar pitfalls in their own lives, something Johnson’s *Fourth Sermon* advocates.87

For Rousseau, perhaps even more than Johnson (who wrote his sermons for profit alone), the idea of authorial intent becomes paramount (Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques* 324).88 If a writer commits himself to presenting fallacy as truth *without* attempting to improve the reader in the process, then he is a liar as opposed to a mere fabricator of tales. Conversely, an author that writes something he knows to be untrue is not necessarily duplicitous if his ends are admirable.

In his *Reveries*, Rousseau writes about what he feels to be the somewhat precarious state of eighteenth century fiction: “There are other purely idle fictions such as the greater part of stories and novels which, containing no genuine instruction, have no purpose but amusement. Stripped of all moral usefulness, their worth can be assessed only in terms of the intention of the one who invents them; and when he forcefully sets them forth as real truths, we can scarcely deny that they are true lies” (32). This passage is eerily reminiscent of Johnson’s *Rambler No. 4*, written a generation earlier: “If the world be promiscuously described, I cannot see of what use it can be to
read the account; or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind, as upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination” (*Rambler* III, 22). Both writers advocate the Lockean practice of delivering messages in a seemingly clear and uniform fashion, particularly in regard to the naïve, because mixed messages will only serve to confuse impressionable readers.

Rousseau unabashedly details a circumstance of his youth in which he incorrectly came to associate two seemingly opposite emotions: sexual stimulation and physical punishment. At a young age Rousseau was sent to stay with and be educated by one M. Lambercier, and during this time, as many boys are apt to do, Rousseau “acted out” despite knowing that he would certainly be punished by Lambercier or his sister (*Confessions* 25). However, in Rousseau’s case, the “fear” of severity at the hands of Mlle. Lambercier was not a deterrent, but rather a motivator for him to break the rules of the household. Rousseau candidly explains how an abnormal sexual desire that remained with him for the rest of his life actually originated as a childhood punishment:

I had discovered in the shame and pain of the punishment an admixture of sensuality which had left me rather eager than otherwise for a repetition by the same hand . . . Who could have supposed that this childish punishment, received at the age of eight at the hands of a woman of thirty, would determine my tastes and desires, my passions, my very self for the rest of my life . . . I feasted feverish eyes on lovely women, recalling them ceaselessly to my imagination, but only to make use of them in my own fashion as so many Mlle Lamberciers. (25-6)

Masturbation is considered an act of self-love manifested in a physical form. Although admitting to doing so while thinking of Mlle Lambercier is a somewhat twisted form of mental
monogamy, Rousseau actually goes on to discourage masturbation, proclaiming: “that dangerous means of cheating Nature, which leads young men of my temperament to various kinds of excesses . . . eventually imperil[s] their health, their strength, and sometimes their lives” (*Confessions* 108-9). Again, Rousseau appears to proffer such a startling degree of self-disclosure in an attempt to be didactic, for he purports to tell the story of his physical abuse at the hands of his guardians in order to make adults reconsider taking such punitive measures against children because adults can never be certain the long lasting effects such treatment can have on the child himself. He warns, “How differently people would treat children if only they saw the eventual results of the indiscriminate, and often culpable, methods of punishment they employ!” (*Confessions* 25).

Several modern critics have speculated that Johnson battled the temptation to masturbate.⁹⁰ Greene notes that, like Rousseau’s prior admonition, Johnson’s attempts to abstain from masturbation were likely founded upon prevailing medical doctrine of the era (which suggested masturbating had a deleterious effect on health, and could possibly contribute to insanity, a circumstance Johnson feared immensely).⁹¹ Johnson was undeniably much more reserved than was Rousseau in admitting his own private thoughts, typically doing so in letter form, and in recent decades some of these inner tensions have come under more intense scrutiny than they likely would have during his lifetime.

Katherine Balderston’s “Johnson’s Vile Melancholy” (1949) outlines Johnson’s own sadomasochistic tendencies, although however existent they may actually be is far more debatable than in the case of Rousseau, who readily admits to them in his *Confessions*. While Rousseau’s perversion was fostered in his youth, and thus strikes readers as quite oedipal in nature, we do not know the origin of Johnson’s supposed fixation. We can ascertain that the
object of his supposed fantasies was Hester Thrale, a younger woman that he nonetheless viewed as a mother figure, for Thrale not only indulged Johnson’s infantilism but she physically resembled his mother, as well (Bate 415). Indeed, Johnson’s need for a caretaker may not have simply developed in old age as a result of his infirmities: in 1735 Johnson (twenty-five) married Elizabeth Porter (forty-six). Perhaps for Johnson romance and subordination had always been inextricably linked.

In 1728, at age fifteen, Rousseau met Mme. de Warens, who was twenty-eight years old. Nonetheless, the two engaged in a physical and emotional relationship, although it was often manipulative. In book three of *The Confessions*, Rousseau very matter-of-factually refers to some of the particulars--although seeming oddities--of their relationship:

‘Little one’ was my name, hers was ‘Mamma,’ and we always remained ‘Little one’ and ‘Mamma,’ even when the passage of the years had almost effaced the difference between our ages . . . To me she was the most tender of mothers, who never thought of her own pleasure but always of my good. And if there was a sensual side of my attachment to her . . . [that] only made it more enchanting.

(106)

Although it is up for conjecture whether or not Rousseau and Warens participated in any sort of sadomasochistic relationship, he almost certainly yearned for a surrogate mother because he was deprived of a consistent and loving mother-figure as a child. Even as a young man, it is apparent that Rousseau’s behavior borders on the infantile, for in another instance of his fetishism, he presents a bizarre if not altogether disgusting incident where Warens (upon Rousseau’s suggestion) spits out a piece of food, at which time he ravenously consumes it (108). This tale is
easily analogous to a mother bird regurgitating her food so that her nestling can eat, which also shows a relationship of subordination or dependence on Rousseau’s part.

One of the key sources for Balderston’s claim that Johnson and Hester Thrale engaged in some sort of dominant/submissive relationship is a letter written by Johnson to Thrale in 1773. Many Johnsonian scholars disagree with the entire premise of Balderston’s essay, but whether or not it is factually valid, she nonetheless fails to emphasize existing evidence, and this failure greatly detracts from the plausibility of her argument.\(^92\) For example, Johnson’s letter is written in French, and in correspondence during his trip to France in 1775 (two years after the letter to Thrale), Johnson wrote that he would attempt to speak “a little French,” and that if he “heard better, [he] should learn faster” (Life II, 385).\(^93\) Therefore, one may wonder why Johnson--an undisputed master of the English language with a healthy ego to boot--would compose a letter to an intimate acquaintance in a language with which he was not fluent. Among the most reasonable explanations, as opposed the more probing psychological ones to follow, is offered by James Gray. Sounding Freudian in his own right, Gray seems to believe that in the case of the mysterious letter, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar: “There were workmen about the house, and maidservants, at least one of whom might have been able to read a letter in English . . . Young Queeney [Thrale’s daughter], who would be 9 on September 17 of that year . . . could certainly have understood any note of Johnson’s in English, but French was as yet beyond her grasp.”\(^94\)

Balderston does acknowledge that there are several improper accents in Johnson’s letter (which could conceivably alter translation into English), but delves little further into the matter.\(^95\) Could his use of French, then, be a way to codify the letter? Peter Quennell writes: “Style may also be a method of defence or concealment; and Johnson, a life-long melancholic, believed that he had much to hide. [He created a] defensive system thrown up around his secret self--a self
that . . . he judged irremediably weak and worthless . . . [this style] frequently overflows into his private letters.”

If the letter were discovered by someone other than Thrale and deemed suspicious, could Johnson have excused its contents on his lack of proficiency in writing French? Howard Weinbrot writes of Johnson’s proclivity to maintain at least some distance between his public and private self: “Johnson often would write in Latin, a language that allowed him to hide sensitive thoughts from some others while exploring those thoughts himself.” Perhaps Johnson exercised a similar mindset by writing personal letters to Thrale in French.

Regardless, the letter obviously shows a side of Johnson that his published writings never dare, and its cryptic content will likely continue to be grist for the mill of critics like Balderston. Despite Johnson’s numerous errors, one portion of the letter (roughly translated) reads:

As long as I am at your house, I must spend several hours every day in deep solitude. Tell me whether you wish me to sail on my own or whether I should stay within proscribed limits . . . Please give me the knowledge of what is permitted to me and what is forbidden to me. And if it seems better to you that I remain in a certain place, I beg you to spare me the necessity of containing myself by taking away from me the power of leaving where you wish me to be.

(Balderston 6)

Johnson was sixty-three years old when he wrote the aforementioned letter to Mrs. Thrale, who was thirty-two. While the immense age difference would cause most observers to question the possibility of a romantic relationship between the two, readers may also examine Rousseau’s *Letters to Sara* (1762) to get a better understanding of the masculine ego in such a situation.

According to Christopher Kelly, Rousseau wrote *Letters to Sara* in response to a challenge: to write no less than four love letters to a woman thirty years his junior without
disgracing himself in the process. Much like Johnson’s letter, of which the true meaning may never be deciphered, Rousseau’s epistles contain much elevated language that can only potentially be construed as sadomasochistic. When considering Rousseau’s lifelong proclivity for such behavior, though, the content of the letters become more risqué and less figurative. Rousseau (age fifty) writes to the twenty-year-old object of his affection: “You can deceive me about everything aside from myself: you can persuade me of anything in the world, except that you can share my insane ardors. To see myself as you see me is the worst of my tortures; for me your deceiving caresses are only a further humiliation, and I love with the horrible certainty not being capable of being loved.”

Bate notes that the “secret” Johnson entrusted Mrs. Thrale with was his confession that he had actually been insane for quite some time (388), and Rousseau’s first Letter to Sara likewise reveals a degree of insanity that he realizes Sara cannot possibly comprehend. In short, whatever the ultimate goal of either man’s letters may have been, both relinquish possession of their innermost thoughts to a female reader, but clearly do so with great trepidation. After all, to be lampooned by the general public is one thing; to be rejected or dismissed by a female object of affection is quite another. Despite the somewhat limited scope of Balderston’s examination, some of the most compelling evidence to verify her argument may actually be unearthed in Hester Thrale’s Dr. Johnson, as opposed to merely probing Johnson’s mysterious epistle. In examining Thrale’s work, there are some telltale comments which may illustrate the degree to which Johnson’s imagination ballooned in regards to his physical, and emotional, relationship to Hester Thrale.

The first point of interest relates to Johnson’s personification of Mrs. Thrale. She recounts that Johnson “told me once that of all Animals he had found out that which I most
resembled . . . The Rattle Snake; for many have felt your Venom, few have escap’d your Attractions, and all the World knows you have the Rattle” (Dr. Johnson 19). Of course, to describe the snake as a sensual creature in our modern parlance would not be unheard of, but to have any hopes of making a connection between Johnson’s comment and his possible desire for Thrale, we must examine the passage in the Johnsonian realm. The word that quite likely requires the greatest inspection is rattle.

In Johnson’s Dictionary, two definitions of the verb to rattle potentially stand out regarding his reference to Thrale. Definition one reads: To make a quick sharp noise with frequent repetitions and collisions of bodies not very sonorous; definition two states: To scold; to rail at with clamour. The interpretation of definition one should be fairly self-explanatory: during the act of sexual intercourse there are obviously “frequent repetitions and collisions of bodies.” While it is certainly unreasonable to assert that Johnson surely had carnal knowledge of Thrale, it is not beyond the realm of imagination to infer that Johnson’s line is just that: a line--akin to something like, “If I said you had a beautiful body, would you hold it against me?” The second definition may imply that Thrale had been quite severe or harsh with Johnson--and indeed, such “venom” can be seen in the final letters she wrote to Johnson, which dissolved their friendship. The question to ask in this circumstance would be: did Johnson derive some sort of pleasure from being scolded or disciplined by his “mistress?”

Rousseau’s underlying fascination with physical discipline--even bondage--at the hands of a mistress did not begin with The Confessions. It actually began with a much more artistic endeavor: his popular romantic epistolary novel, Julie (1762). In fact, Rousseau told a friend that Julie was not his own story, but what he wished it had been (Damrosch, Jean-Jacques 319). Such an admission is vital when viewing just the second letter of the novel, written by Saint-
Preux, who, like Rousseau, is a tutor with hefty self-esteem issues regarding the opposite sex. Taking the letter at face value, it may simply appear to be sensational or at the very least, exceedingly sentimental; but, knowing Rousseau’s own self-professed sexual proclivities it becomes much easier to interpret the letter as an example of sadomasochism: “The fire that consumes me deserves punishment . . . Whatever you may dictate, I can but obey . . . A hundred times a day I am tempted to throw myself at your feet, to bathe them in my tears, there to find death or forgiveness . . . I drift in unbearable uncertainty between the hope of mercy and the fear of punishment . . . Punish me, as you must.”

While the Confessions exemplify Rousseau’s artistry in depicting his own life, Julie is a fictional account that converts much of Rousseau’s life’s experience into the illusory epistolary form. In The Confessions, when referring to Mme. de Warens, Rousseau similarly recalls: “I trembled at the first sound of her voice. I threw myself at her feet and in a transport of intense joy pressed my lips to her hand” (104).

Whether or not we choose to ascribe some degree of sexual abnormality to the connection between Johnson and Thrale, there is no denying the element of submission present in Johnson’s letter, which is certainly out of character. Johnson seems entirely to be asking Thrale’s permission to make advances in their relationship, and indeed, some observers believed Johnson and Thrale would marry after her husband’s death. Whether or not the “room” he refers to being trapped in is literal--as Balderston seems to think--and whether or not Johnson really did ask to be put in fetters or padlocks is also up for conjecture (Dr. Johnson 115); however, there does seem to be a clandestine element to Johnson’s requests:

This will cost you but the pain/difficulty of turning the key in the door twice a day.

You must act entirely as a mistress, such that your judgment and your vigilance come to the aid of my weakness . . . There is nothing very difficult for you; you
can create a practicable regime without any noise/fallout and an efficacious one without peril/other people’s knowledge. (Balderston 6)

The word *regime* almost certainly implies that whatever Johnson is asking of Thrale, he is more than willing to let her dictate the conditions under which their consolidation is finalized. Furthermore, it is apparent that the “arrangement” Johnson is attempting to strike up with Thrale is one that he feels no one else should--or *needs* to--know about. Clearly his concern is that this understanding, whatever its nature, will be an impediment to their friendship (or that what he requests may be deemed “inappropriate”), and Johnson could ill afford to offend Thrale at this precarious stage of his life.

Again, the analogy is easy enough for us to make in our own terminology: a man is friends with a woman but also attracted to her. If he hopes to make the relationship romantic in nature, he risks terminating the existent friendship in the process. We must remember that Johnson was thirty-one years older than Thrale, and the relationship he would have required from her at age sixty-four would likely have been far from a “love match” or “romantic” in nature. Moreover, Johnson’s letter may not be intended to woo Thrale or make any sort of sexual advances toward her. Instead, it may be Johnson’s desperate plea for Thrale to protect him from temptation the only way she could, as mistress of the house in which he was living. Greene posits that Johnson may have asked Thrale “to lock him in his room, or even to shackle his hands to prevent him from succumbing to the temptation of masturbation--largely out of fear that it may contribute to insanity.”

As Balderston’s article illustrates, and as I hope to have shown in my analysis of each man’s potential sadomasochistic tendencies, readers can and will use their imaginations to make mountains out of molehills, particularly when it concerns controversial subject matter. Johnson
and Rousseau must have realized this tendency of the public, and such a realization may have contributed to the high degree of anxiety both men felt when publishing their works. Of course, each writer not only feared censure from readers, but perhaps more disconcerting for them was the thought that they would be ignored or simply deemed irrelevant altogether.

For Johnson and Rousseau imagination was not merely an exhibition which presented itself in their writings, but something that haunted--and sometimes pleased--both men in their day-to-day existence. Rousseau’s status as a misanthropic and isolated individual clearly opposes that of Johnson as the social animal who routinely held court from the confines of his “throne of human felicity” (Life II, 452) and despite these evident demarcations, both men were innovators of literary genres which we today view as established categories: dictionaries and autobiographies. So, while neither man can be credited with creating the type of writing for which he achieved the greatest fame, it can be argued that each man’s imagination raised the bar as to what would be considered acceptable for future writers in each genre.

Both men were clearly conscious of the endeavors they were undertaking and even a casual reading of the Preface to the Dictionary or the opening of The Confessions will reveal that neither man was lacking in confidence regarding their abilities to surpass all writers that had preceded them. Yet, this self-assurance was always counterbalanced by their concerns that audiences would find little worth in their efforts. Finally, we should compare the concluding paragraph of Johnson’s final Idler (No. 103) to the closing passage of Rousseau’s Confessions. Each selection demonstrates that both men could not help but indulge themselves in speculation about what readers would think. Johnson writes:

Much of the pain and pleasure of mankind arises from the conjectures which every one makes of the thoughts of others; we all enjoy praise which we do not
hear, and resent contempt which we do not see. The Idler may therefore be forgiven, if he suffers his imagination to represent to him what his readers will say or think when they are informed that they have now his last paper in their hands.106

Rousseau concludes his Confessions: “I have told the truth. If anyone knows anything contrary to what I have here recorded, though he prove it a thousand times, his knowledge is a lie and an imposture; and if he refuses to investigate and inquire into it during my lifetime he is no lover of justice or of truth” (605-6).

Imagination, then, inspired both men to write, regardless of the “creativity” of their subject matter; likewise, their imaginations tormented them when imagining what type of response their readers may have had to that imagination.
CHAPTER 3

“I REFUTE IT THUS!” JOHNSON AND VOLTAIRE ON ENGLISH LITERATURE

“The poetic genius of the English is, up to now, like a bushy tree planted by Nature, throwing out a thousand branches and growing unsymmetrically with strength. It dies if you try to force its nature and to clip it like one of the trees in the Marly gardens.” –Voltaire, Discourse on Tragedy (1731)

“The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted . . . the composition of Shakespeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles.” –Johnson, Preface to Shakespeare (1765)

In a 1764 meeting with James Boswell, Voltaire reputedly dubbed Samuel Johnson a “superstitious dog” (Grand Tour I, 300) fully illustrating his belief in the hypocrisy of Johnson’s morality. Accordingly, Johnson believed Voltaire to be a heathen, noting that current social improvement was due in part to a decrease in the popularity of Voltaire and Rousseau’s writing, for “all infidel writers drop into oblivion, when . . . the floridness of novelty is gone” (Life IV, 288). In sum, then, Johnson and Voltaire were likely antagonistic of one another for several reasons, perhaps none more glaring than what Johnson perceived to be Voltaire’s blatantly polemical literary criticism. Johnson’s Preface to Shakespeare (1765) marginalizes Voltaire’s commentary in no uncertain terms, swiftly dismissing the Frenchman’s criticism of England’s famed playwright as “the petty cavils of petty minds” (66). Voltaire responded by implying that Johnson was a drunken jester with boorish tastes.

I contend that Johnson’s grievance with Voltaire was comprised of two elements, neither of which Johnson may have been at fault or wholly aware. One component is Johnson’s unique position as England’s literary patriarch during roughly the last thirty years of his life, which
thrust him into the unenviable position of defending his native land’s contributions to the written word. The second part of the recipe—undoubtedly more surprising—involves Johnson’s ignorance of Voltaire’s *actual* literary criticism in addition to his apparent inclination to blindly buy into a great deal of English slander about Voltaire.

In short, Johnson—so often likened to John Bull—may not have voluntarily adopted his supposed superiority complex regarding foreigners, but instead may have believed that lampooning outsiders who questioned or attacked English mores was an inherent responsibility that he was expected to fulfill unconditionally. Indeed, Johnson’s close friend Sir Joshua Reynolds observed that the “prejudices [Johnson] had to countries did not extend to individuals . . . [and] in respect to Frenchmen he rather laughed at himself.”\(^{109}\) Reynolds in fact presents Johnson as a man whose biases were general as opposed to specific; and apparently, in regard to the French, much of what Johnson evinced was hyperbole. If Reynolds’s statement reflects reality, then Johnson’s so-called hatred of the French should not necessarily mandate that he would dislike Voltaire; likewise, the so-called hatred would seemingly have been little more than Johnson playing to an audience.

Should we subscribe to Nicholas Hudson’s belief that Johnson’s “conservatism was originated in a segment of the middling orders who believed that their own interests were best protected by loyalty to some version of England’s social inheritance,”\(^{110}\) then we may understand that Johnson likely viewed an outsider like Voltaire as a threat, and ignoring a threat is not usually a sound policy in subduing it. Bernard Schilling suggests that “Voltaire was condemned [in England] because English conservatism was as it was in the eighteenth century”\(^{111}\) and this conservatism of Johnson’s, which was apparently rooted in nationalistic
devotion, quite possibly blinded him to much of what Voltaire’s criticism actually seeks to accomplish.

Voltaire’s 1734 *Philosophical Letters*, what they achieve, and how they achieve it, is aptly summed up by Charles Knight, although Johnson evidently overlooked it (or more likely, never read it in the first place): “The social and intellectual accomplishments of the English become, in *Letters Philosophiques*, criteria by which French limitations can be attacked, but French sophistication becomes the basis for judging the crudities of the English.” Pope’s famous adage that “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing” seems to apply well here: Johnson knew just enough about Voltaire to consider him a menacing infidel who was best left to his own devices across the English Channel; moreover, Johnson’s perception of the *philosophe* was thus one formed with extreme prejudice. However, if the Great Moralist would simply have read Voltaire as closely as he did so many English authors, he would likely have seen that much of Voltaire’s commentary unexpectedly parallels his own and that Voltaire’s criticism of England often comes at the expense of France.

Despite responding to claims made by Voltaire (the particular), Johnson did not make it a habit to attack the French (the general) in his writing because perhaps the most pivotal aspect of his criticism is the rhetoric of defense. While the bulk of Johnson’s criticism is concentrated upon English writers, arguably the greatest goal of his literary analysis is not to be an impartial critic, but rather to exalt England and its best literature. I posit that Johnson incorrectly viewed Voltaire’s commentaries about various English writers as an attack on England itself, so the mere act of producing works like *Notes on Shakespeare* (1765) and *Lives of the Poets* (1781) was more than Johnson attempting to evince an indisputable perspective about the works of Shakespeare or Milton--it instead became a matter of national honor. Johnson had to do little
more than read Voltaire’s writing about England to see that, while the Frenchman was no doubt an antagonistic and opinionated individual, Voltaire was also clearly confused when it came to the English and how he should respond to them.

Voltaire, though, was not debasing English writers as a means to venerate France as Johnson seems to have believed. In fact, Voltaire’s *Philosophical Letters* fail to address Shakespeare--positively or negatively--but instead pays homage to English comic playwrights such as Wycherley, Vanburgh, Congreve, Steele, and Cibber. While Voltaire apparently enjoyed many of the English comedies produced by the aforementioned dramatists, his largest qualm with Shakespeare seems to be at least partially influenced by a lack of familiarity with Shakespeare’s entire corpus of work. Although Shakespeare did compose several *Comedies*, Voltaire was evidently more familiar with his *Tragedies*; because Voltaire believed that comedy and drama were incongruous, many of the elements contained in Shakespeare’s *Tragedies* were simply too graphic or ridiculous for Voltaire to take seriously.

Johnson undoubtedly knew the essential tenets of Voltaire’s commentaries on Shakespeare, and some of these beliefs were necessarily influenced by the simple fact that Voltaire was French, and by virtue of being fifteen years older than Johnson, Voltaire’s criticism came first. Frances Reynolds recounts a 1775 conversation in which Johnson revealed what seems to have been a longstanding personality trait--resentment of being outdone or overmatched--for Johnson states, “There is no good in letting the French have a superiority over you every word you speak.” So, Johnson’s own personality again sheds light upon why he was compelled to respond to Voltaire: allowing Voltaire’s critiques of English Literature to go uncontested would imply that the *philosophper* was superior and correct, but there was also a clash of styles perpetuated by a geographical divide as well as a generation gap.
Voltaire was a moderately firm neoclassicist, and therefore tended to attach more significance to poesy and flowery language than appalling imagery. However, the neoclassical rules observed by French playwrights of the era were beginning to fall out of favor in England during Johnson’s lifetime, and Johnson helped usher in the belief that a blind adherence to such systems was simply unnecessary. Although Leo Damrosch considers Johnson fundamentally neoclassicist (*Criticism* 33), Johnson did not feel that the unities of time, place, and action were necessary factors in determining the greatness of a dramatic production; furthermore, he clearly did not think that a man from a country where “people eat frogs” (Thrale 50) had a leg to stand on in disparaging a writer of Shakespeare’s caliber.

Somewhere in the process of illustrating the differences between the French and English stage, Voltaire apparently offended Johnson, who obviously had a tendency to view himself as the defender of England and its literary accomplishments.116 It seems that if Johnson had actually read Voltaire’s *Discourse on Tragedy* (1731), he would have recognized that as often as not Voltaire’s so-called assault of the English stage, or its playwrights, functioned equally as an indictment of French drama and its shortcomings. For example, the following passage does feature Voltaire criticizing Shakespeare, but Voltaire’s evaluations are almost always phrased in such a way as to excuse so-called English “deficiencies” by drawing attention to the fact that French viewers would be appalled by the degree of action occurring on the English stage for the mere fact that they are unaccustomed to it:

> But if the *Greeks* and the *English* overleap the bounds of decorum; and particularly the latter, instead of representing objects of terror, exhibit such as are frightful and shocking; the *French* on the other side are as timid and scrupulous as the *English* have been rash: we are too calm, for fear of being too violent; and
sometimes come short of Tragedy, from our apprehensions of passing the bounds of it. Far be it from my thoughts to turn the stage into a field of blood, as Shakespeare has done, and his successors, who wanting his genius, have imitated his errors only.117

Even a casual reading of the prior excerpt exemplifies Voltaire’s ability to walk the fine line between his admiration of the English and his dismay or astonishment with many of their dramatic practices. Additionally, it is easy to overlook the final sentence of the passage, in which Voltaire implies that there is only one Shakespeare, and he believes that unworthy imitators are merely replicating the vulgar elements of Shakespeare’s work to achieve some sort of shock value. To Voltaire, the French were too delicate in presenting action, whereas the English—not just Shakespeare, but his inferior disciples as well—were too abrupt in their depiction of violent scenes that would strike unprepared viewers as “frightful and shocking.” If anything, such commentary may well evidence a practice of which the moralist Johnson would actually have applauded: that moderation in all things is essential.

Johnson, for all his English gusto, could hardly refute the statements made by Voltaire in this particular instance, as he also took umbrage with the sometimes brutal depictions of Shakespeare’s drama. For example, Johnson is appalled by the vicious manner in which Gloucester is deprived of his sight in King Lear, writing: “I am not able to apologise . . . for the extrusion of Gloucester’s eyes, which seems an act too horrid to be endured in dramatick exhibition, and such as must always compel the mind to relieve its distress by incredulity.”118 Johnson also believes that the excessive bloodshed in the crescendo of Hamlet actually detracts from the level of satisfaction the spectator would have if Shakespeare had simply ceased the carnage after the killing of Claudius, observing: “The gratification which would arise from the
destruction of an usurper and a murderer, is abated by the untimely death of Ophelia, the young, the beautiful, the harmless, and the pious” (1011).

Voltaire likewise believed parts of *Hamlet* were atrocious, for he “had made it quite clear that he regarded *Hamlet* . . . as a monstrosity, as monstrosity of genius to be sure, but still a monstrosity.” In his *Preface to Shakespeare*, Johnson ridicules Voltaire’s commentary about *Hamlet* even though at its root, the general premise of the latter’s criticism is congruent with Johnson’s: “Voltaire perhaps thinks decency violated when the Danish usurper is represented as a drunkard” (65). Again, the “misconceptions” Johnson charges Voltaire with having about Shakespeare are in this circumstance almost certainly related to the norms of each writer’s homeland: Voltaire does not believe that drunkenness or physical humor have any place on the dramatic stage because French drama was much more stark and dignified. Marvin Carlson writes that when Jeremy Collier’s 1698 *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage* was translated into French, it actually served to intensify preconceived distinctions between French and English theater that the latter’s “cultural products were far more civilized and refined than those of the barbarians across the channel.”

Voltaire, certainly no one’s whipping-boy, responded with equal vigor by defending himself against Johnson’s charges while levying some of his own, noting that Johnson “remarks that foreigners are obtuse when they are surprised to find a comic Roman senator or a drunken king on the stage in the plays of the great Shakespeare. I do not wish to hint that this Mr. Johnson is a sorry jester or too fond of his drink, but I do find it rather extraordinary that he includes slapstick and inebriety among the beauties of tragedy.” Voltaire goes on to matter-of-factly state: “The most singular point is that Shakespeare is really a genius” (*Satirical* 40). Clearly, Voltaire wishes to dispel any inaccuracies being promulgated about his literary critiques,
and even takes time to explain that viewers of Shakespeare who have not spent time in England universally view him as a buffoon because they do not fully appreciate his language. Was Johnson, then, vehemently agitated or roused by Voltaire’s criticism itself, or was he more incensed by the source of such criticism—a Frenchman who had little right to apply his own standards of propriety to the drama of a country he only entered when exiled from his own?

Indeed, Johnson’s concern with the inevitable corruption of his native land’s literature almost certainly had something to do with his harsh appraisal of Voltaire’s translations of Shakespeare. A lingering problem for Voltaire, with which Johnson would likely have taken issue, is the language barrier that forced the former to “misappropriate” Shakespeare’s words. Voltaire was not a native English speaker and although he learned the language well enough to be competent, more than one contemporary observer noted that he had difficulties speaking and writing the language and this likely hindered the accuracy of his translations.122 Voltaire justified the defects of his translations (which were actually adaptations)123 of Shakespeare, admitting that “it is easy to reproduce the defects of a poet [Shakespeare], but very difficult to translate his beautiful verse . . . remember always, when you see a translation, that you see only a poorly engraved print of a beautiful painting.”124 By his own recognition, then, Voltaire appreciates Shakespeare’s abilities even if in the act of translating he invariably became a subjective editor in addition to a stern critic.

For instance, Voltaire’s translation of Hamlet’s famous “To be, or not to be” soliloquy is so far from Shakespeare’s original that readers can only reach one of two conclusions: either Voltaire was nowhere close to proficient in reading English; or, he simply rewrote the speech in a blasé manner, paying little attention to rendering an accurate reproduction. Lines 65-69 taken from act three, scene one of Hamlet read as follows: “To be or not to be? That is the question /
Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune / Or to take arms against a sea of trouble.” Voltaire’s French translation is: “

Demeure, il faut choisir et passer à l'instant / De la vie, à la mort, ou de l'être au néant. / Dieux cruels, s'il en est, éclairez mon courage. / Faut-il vieillir courbé sous la main qui m'outrage.” Alex Gross provides what he admits to be a difficult English translation of Voltaire’s French: “Yet stay, we must now choose as in the moment caught, / From life to death we pass, from being into naught, / Cruel gods, if such there be, pray guide me past my daring, / Must aging’s hand bear down and crush me all despairing.” Gross then elaborates upon why such a disparity may exist between Voltaire’s interpretation and Shakespeare’s original:

[Voltaire] was dealing with what I call a "Public Presentation Language." For almost three centuries in France . . . this rhythm became the official form for poetry and the theatre. Even in their correspondence those professing culture would sometimes spontaneously break into this meter in order to make a point, as though they believed that writing in this form made their thoughts more official and credible. Voltaire truly admired Shakespeare's play . . . but he knew perfectly well that there was no way that a more literal translation could succeed in Paris.

(Major 2004)

If we attribute legitimacy to Gross’s theory, then Johnson was not entirely incorrect in his belief that Voltaire was taking great liberties in assailing and translating Shakespeare. However, Johnson’s interpretation of why Voltaire did so may be the most overwhelming evidence that he did not spend a great deal of time reading what Voltaire actually wrote, but instead relied upon the popular (mis)conception that Voltaire’s motivation for accosting Shakespeare was antagonistically-oriented. Voltaire’s rather unabashed errors in translation notwithstanding, the
cardinal difference between the two exists on the most fundamental of levels—Voltaire was writing about English literature from a French perspective. Therefore, he would always be relegated to the status of étranger (outsider): one who did not and could not understand English customs. ¹²⁶ For instance, Edward Gibbon (an acquaintance of Johnson’s who visited Voltaire in France) observes the phenomenon of Shakespeare’s power in England in terms which could never have applied to Voltaire: “the Gigantic Genius of Shakespeare . . . is inculcated from our infancy as the first duty of an Englishman.” ¹²⁷

Johnson undoubtedly believed his duty as an Englishman was to complete the Dictionary, not just for the sake of appeasing distraught booksellers, but for himself and his country as well. From many accounts, it was no mean feat for Johnson to drag himself out of bed by mid-afternoon on a typical day, so mustering up the persistence to work for nearly eight straight years on the project was surely harrowing for him. The Dictionary authoritatively recognizes Shakespeare as an important figure—arguably the single most important figure of the time—in the English language, and Johnson apparently did not find Shakespeare’s writing pejorative enough to exclude it from his Dictionary, as he purportedly did with Thomas Hobbes. ¹²⁸ In fact, Johnson cites Shakespeare an astounding 35,725 times in his Dictionary, comprising over fifteen percent of all illustrative quotations included within the work (Schreyer 66). Even though Johnson at times voices his disapproval of Shakespeare’s morality or hideous imagery, he nonetheless values Shakespeare’s contributions not only to drama, but to the English language itself:

In his Proposals for an Edition on Shakespeare (1756), Johnson appears to admire—and in fact, almost relate to—Shakespeare’s struggles with writing in a language that he realized, after
undertaking the *Dictionary* project, could never be “fixed” (or made static).\textsuperscript{129} Johnson notes that Shakespeare

wrote at a time when our poetical language was yet unformed, when the meaning of our phrases was yet in fluctuation, when words were adopted at pleasure from the neighbouring languages . . . if Shakespeare has difficulties above other writers, it is to be imputed to the nature of his work, which required the use of the common colloquial language . . . such as we speak and hear every hour without observing . . . and of which, being now familiar, we do not suspect that they can ever grow uncouth.\textsuperscript{130}

Indeed, this “use of the common colloquial language” for which Johnson *excuses* Shakespeare, is (ironically) the precise reason he claims to have included the latter in his *Dictionary*, for to Johnson Shakespeare was the master of “the diction of common life” (*Preface* 96). Again, Shakespeare’s language, which reflects the speech of the common reader, was something Voltaire did not believe belonged in serious dramatic productions. That opinion aside, Voltaire’s “nationalism” is at best inconsistent, for his perception of the French language is far from universally encomiastic.

Johnson’s apparent pleasure with confounding acquaintances or merely refusing to behave in a consistent manner (as I addressed in the previous chapter) is likely exceeded by Voltaire, an extremely vexing figure in his own right.\textsuperscript{131} In *Epic Poetry* (1727), Voltaire juxtaposes the French and English languages in such a way as to make the former appear inferior to the latter, which would likely elicit a rousing nod of agreement from Johnson: “[The French language] can hardly express things with felicity in our heroic poetry . . . The epic poem is harder to do in the French language because our rhymes, as well as the other parts of our
versification, are tied down to the most insupportable and insignificant rules, not because our language wants loftiness, but because it wants freedom” (Epic 83-4; 87-8). Alex Gross, whose translation of Voltaire’s imitation (and reasoning for its woeful inaccuracy) Shakespeare was presented earlier notes much the same deficiency about the French language: “Shakespeare's English is written in unrhymed iambic pentameter . . . while the French text is not only one foot longer in iambic hexameter but also in rhymed alexandrine couplet form . . . the so-called masculine ending or masculine couplet, but that this couplet must be followed by a feminine couplet, containing one extra unstressed syllable at the end” (Major 2004).

Voltaire, then, readily disparages the ability of the French (and presumably, himself) to produce epic poetry—not because they are inferior writers or intellects—but because the French language is so heavily infused with rhyme that to write an epic in French would cause it to sound ridiculous (particularly with regard to the required feminine couplet). Paradise Lost (which was, to Voltaire, the greatest epic poem ever) is written in blank verse; Homer’s Odyssey, likely considered the prototype of all epics, is composed in unrhymed dactylic hexameter. Voltaire recognized the greatness of these works not only based upon what they achieve on their own, but the complete absence of any French epic poetry made such works all the more appealing to him. Indeed, it seems rather apparent that Voltaire was a victim of “culture shock” when reading Milton or Shakespeare, simply because the capacity of the English language to portray masculinity and power was such a vast departure from the more airy French style with which he was intimately familiar. Further, there may have also been some jealousy infused with Voltaire’s criticism: perhaps he believed that, were he a master of the English language, he could compose a timeless epic poem as well; however, because he wrote in French, it simply was not possible to do so.
Not surprisingly, Johnson agrees with Voltaire’s assessment of the limitations of the French language relative to *Paradise Lost*. Furthermore, in Boswell’s *Life*, Johnson lectures the former about the pretentiousness of unnecessarily using large words, explaining: “The practice of using words of disproportionate magnitude, is, no doubt, too frequent every where; but I think, most remarkable among the French” (I, 471). Perhaps more interesting, though, is a direct reference to Voltaire made by Johnson in his *Plan of a Dictionary* (1747). Johnson, addressing Lord Chesterfield (a personal friend and patron to Voltaire), actually regards Voltaire as an example of an epic poet despite Voltaire’s belief that, as a French writer, it is not possible for him to be one: “[The effect of patronage] has been to make me anxious lest it should fix the attention of the public too much upon me, and as it once happened to an epic poet of France [Voltaire], by raising the reputation of the attempt, obstruct the reception of the work.” In the *Life of Milton*, Johnson notes that “by the general consent of critics, the first praise of genius is due to the writer of an epic poem” (208). Johnson, then, thought highly of epic poets; thus, labeling Voltaire one almost certainly implies that Johnson had a healthy regard for Voltaire’s ability as a poet. Who better to critique an epic poem than an epic poet? And many of Voltaire’s impressions of *Paradise Lost* are reiterated in Johnson’s *Life of Milton*.

Voltaire’s sentiments about Milton, which predate the *Life of Milton* by over fifty years in print, actually anticipate Johnson’s commentary concerning the completeness of Milton’s epic. Voltaire declares, “*Paradise Lost* is the only poem wherein are to be found in a perfect degree of uniformity which satisfies the mind and that variety which pleases the imagination, all its episodes being necessary lines which aim at the centre of a circle” (*Epic* 72). Surprisingly, Johnson praises the totality of *Paradise Lost* in terms that echo Voltaire’s: “To the completeness or *integrity* of the design nothing can be objected; it has distinctly and clearly what Aristotle
requires, a beginning, a middle, and an end . . . the short digressions at the beginning of the third, seventh, and ninth books might doubtless be spared; but superfluities so beautiful who would take away?” (213). Although Johnson did not agree with many of Milton’s principles or actions, he does not detest the digressions found in Paradise Lost, noting, “Who does not wish that the author of the Iliad had gratified succeeding ages with a little knowledge of himself? Perhaps no passages are more frequently or attentively read than those extrinsic paragraphs; and, since the end of poetry is pleasure, that cannot be unpoetical with which all are pleased” (213).

Milton’s digressions often serve a confessional or testimonial function, as the narrative takes on his voice as opposed to that of the characters in the poem. For instance, at the beginning of Book Three, Milton alludes to his own blindness and how it has impacted the composition the poem: “So much the rather thou, Celestial Light . . . Irradiate; there plant eyes; all mist from thence / Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight.” Voltaire likewise believes there is an endearing quality regarding Milton’s interruption of the epic with his own narrative: “An author is generally guilty of self-love when he lays aside his subject to descant in his own person; but that human frailty is to be forgiven in Milton--nay, I am pleased with it. When I admire the author, I desire to know something of the man; and he whom all readers would be glad to know is allowed to speak of himself” (Epic 76). While Johnson admittedly finds fault with Milton the man, it nonetheless fascinates him to learn more about the author of what he considers to be the greatest poem ever written “with respect to design” (Life of Milton 208). One does wonder, however, if Johnson would have treated Milton with the same degree of reverence were he not a fellow Englishman.

Voltaire and Johnson alike obviously held another English author--Joseph Addison (1672-1719)--in high regard, and clearly had him in mind as they formulated their “own”
theories about *Paradise Lost*. Addison, best known for his contributions to *The Tatler* (1709-11) and *The Spectator* (1711-14), wrote a series of groundbreaking essays in early 1712 about Milton’s epic. While Addison is a more stanch neoclassicist than Voltaire (and of course, Johnson) both later writers seemingly treat Addison’s essays as a schematic for what entails accurate or thoughtful commentary about *Paradise Lost*. Voltaire compliments the insightfulness of Addison’s criticism and observes that he is “the best critic [and] wit of his age” (*Epic* 74). Further, Carlson notes that Voltaire had a personal reason to regard highly Addison’s productions:

> Addison consciously and almost uniquely . . . [sought] to create a tragedy according to neoclassic and specifically French models . . . Addison had championed these French practices in . . . *The Spectator*. Voltaire knew this periodical in French translation, which was one of his favorite sources for learning English . . . and which left many traces in his writing and thinking at this time. (*Theater* 26-7)

Indeed, Voltaire believed Addison’s *Cato* to be the finest example of English drama, and Addison’s promulgation of the French mode (in England) may have led Voltaire to believe that many English critics occupied Addison’s position, when in reality, they did not. Johnson likewise lauds Addison, mentioning him by name no fewer than three times in *Life of Milton*, largely deferring to the latter’s expertise on the subject; additionally, according to Hawkins, Johnson--like Voltaire--“thought *Cato* the best model of tragedy [the English] had.”

> Although both writers refer to Addison, the extent of his influence upon each only truly reveals itself when examining his series of essays from *The Spectator*. Addison’s unbridled neoclassicism becomes apparent when addressing the aforementioned idea of Milton
interspersing his own voice throughout the poem. Although his perspective antedates Johnson’s by nearly seventy years, in this situation it is clear that Addison espouses the same beliefs, only he adheres much more strictly to the established rules of epic poetry:

In the Structure of his Poem [Milton] has likewise admitted of too many Digressions. It is finely observed by Aristotle, that the Author of an Heroick Poem should seldom speak himself, but throw as much of his Work as he can into the Mouths of those who are his principal Actors. Aristotle has given no Reason for this Precept; but I presume it is because the Mind of the Reader is more awed and elevated when he hears Aeneas or Achilles speak, than when Virgil or Homer talk in their own Persons . . . From what has been here observed it appears, that Digressions are by no means to be allowed of in an Epic poem. 137

Johnson’s tendency to oscillate between an “essentially neoclassical” stance and a less-rigidly defined position may be in no small part due to his reluctance to judge the value of literary productions by measuring them against established models (Damrosch, Criticism 33). In other words, Johnson does not dwell upon Paradise Lost’s shortcomings by comparing them to the virtues of works like the Iliad or the Odyssey, as Addison does; instead, Johnson actually believes that Paradise Lost takes a backseat to other epics only because it was not the first. Voltaire similarly takes issue with English readers adopting Addison’s opinion simply because it is en vogue to do so, observing that “Addison[‘s] judgment seems either to guide, or to justify, the opinion of his countrymen . . . [but] the very things they admire would not be tolerated by French critics” (Epic 79-80). Here Voltaire does not appear to be implying that delicate French sensibility is a trait that all countries should strive for, but he is defending his homeland, and providing a justification for why English literature has not been widely accepted there. Viewed
in this light, might Voltaire’s so-called sallies against Shakespeare not be interpreted in a similarly nationalistic light as Johnson’s defense of the great dramatist?

In addition to Addison, Voltaire names another English literary critic in *Epic Poetry*, only much less favorably. Oddly, the typically neoclassicist Frenchman lambastes John Dryden, who judged *Paradise Lost* with an extremely heavy neoclassical gavel, which is somewhat odd in that Voltaire’s tastes so routinely border on neoclassical. However, it is evident that Voltaire does not use his nationality to buttress his commentary, but instead does so as a means to admit that perhaps it is a contributor to his ignorance in the matter: “Dryden . . . ranks Milton . . . [amongst] the most impertinent Poets who ever scribbled. How he could extol him so much in his Verses, and debase him so low in his Prose, is a Riddle, which being a foreigner, I cannot understand” (*Epic* 73-4). Indeed, Voltaire should be commended for having the fortitude to admit that his inability to comprehend Dryden’s criticism of Milton may be owing to his status as an outsider to English customs and modes of thought.

Conversely Johnson, no stranger to English ways, likewise castigates Dryden’s commentary, writing: “Dryden, petulantly and indecently, denies the heroism of Adam because he was overcome; but there is no reason why the hero should not be unfortunate except established practice, since success and virtue do not necessarily go together” (*Life of Milton* 214). Greene notes that the preceding passage is a prototypical Johnsonian rejection of a hackneyed (or in literature, a type of neoclassical) claim.\(^{138}\) Undeniably, Voltaire *does* at times question certain tendencies in English literature, and at times, he *does* fit quite neatly into a neoclassical mold. I submit that the very same charges can be levied against Johnson--the only mitigating circumstance is that his legendary “Britishness”\(^{139}\) makes his indictments of English writers appear more intrinsically motivated. In other words, when castigating English authors, Johnson
does so with the aim of improving his homeland as opposed to foreign critics like Voltaire, whom Johnson believes simply seek to undercut England’s literary superiority.

Despite coming to the defense of English writers, Johnson at times seems to believe that Milton’s judgment in composing *Paradise Lost* is not always so convincing, and that Milton’s apparent vanity is the cause: “Milton’s allegory of Sin and Death is undoubtedly faulty . . . This unskilful allegory appears to me one of the greatest faults of the poem; and to this there was no temptation but the author’s opinion of its beauty” (223). Ironically, Johnson relates an anecdote in his *Life of Young* about how Voltaire allegedly referred to the same flawed allegory in conversation: “When [Voltaire] was in England, [he] ridiculed, in the company of the jealous English poet [Young], Milton’s allegory of Sin and Death: ‘You are so witty, profligate, and thin / At once we think thee Milton, Death, and Sin.’” 140 Both Johnson and Voltaire perceived Milton’s allegory in this circumstance as deficient, but Johnson seemingly draws attention to Voltaire’s remark for no other reason than to illustrate the French versus English dynamic, as it infuriated Young, an English poet.

Some fifty years earlier, Voltaire’s commentary regarding the exact same Miltonic allegory was left in print, and Johnson would simply have had to peruse *Epic Poetry* in order to find out that if the story he recounts in *Life of Young* contains any truth, it is a half-truth. Voltaire, in the following passage, fully elaborates upon his qualms with Milton’s allegory as opposed to simply rattling off a derisive rhyme at Milton’s expense:

> Death, sin, chaos, are intolerable when they are allegorical: for fiction is nothing but Truth in disguise. It must be granted too, that an allegory must be short, decent, and noble. For an allegory carried too far or too low, is like a beautiful woman who wears always a mask. An allegory is a long metaphor; and to speak
too long in metaphors must be tiresome, because unnatural. This being premis’d,
I must say, that in general those fictions, those imaginary Beings, are more
agreeable to the Nature of Milton’s Poem, that to any other. (Epic 78)

The idea that both Voltaire and Johnson eschewed the practice of being consistent for
consistency’s sake must be again emphasized, and one may conjecture that it was Voltaire whose
opinion had actually changed from the time he left England in 1726 to when he wrote Epic
Poetry in 1727, for Carlson notes that “in certain . . . controversial subjects, Voltaire at different
times in his long career took distinctly different positions” (Theater 50).

To his credit, though, Johnson casts no aspersions as to one of the cardinal reasons his
literary analysis is sometimes less systematic than formal critics may desire. In Life of Milton
Johnson, perhaps inadvertently, implies that his English sensibilities may contribute to his
concentrating more on plot analysis and literary devices than dissecting the weaker verses of
Paradise Lost:

The defects and faults of Paradise Lost, for faults and defects every work of man
must have, it is the business of impartial criticism to discover. As in displaying
the excellence of Milton I have not made long quotations, because of selecting
beauties there had been no end, I shall in the same general manner mention that
which seems to deserve censure; for what English man can take delight in
transcribing passages which, if they lessen the reputation of Milton, diminish in
some degree the honour of our country? (219)

Johnson’s versatility as a critic aside, there appears here to be at least some grounds upon which
to question his objectivity. Again, although Johnson does devote attention to both Milton’s
strengths and weaknesses, he does not appear to do so in the most unbiased manner. If it is the
business of impartial criticism to reveal the highs and lows of a literary work (particularly when we consider how much of a “stylist” Johnson himself was) it seems incomplete--or at least shortsighted--of him to simply mention that some of the long passages in *Paradise Lost* are worthy of attention without specifically providing any examples. Johnson had a similarly nationalistic agenda in producing his own edition of Shakespeare’s works, which he felt was necessary in order to rescue the great playwright from the misinterpretations of various literary scholars, both English and foreign. The *Lives of the Poets* was to fill a similar void in the English literary realm by providing readers with biographical information about England’s most important poets in hopes of shedding light upon the actual meaning of their works. However, in reporting certain incidents or events Johnson occasionally, albeit unintentionally, ends up supplying biographical information about acquaintances of those famed English authors--one of whom is Voltaire.

In the *Lives of the Poets*, Johnson mentions Voltaire’s interaction with Pope twice. The first example regards the Frenchman’s seeming lack of interest in ingratiating himself with a man who seemingly cared more about his social reputation than his literary one, for Johnson relates an anecdote that Pope “disgusted [Voltaire] by the despicable foppery of desiring to be considered not as an author but a gentleman; to which the Frenchman replied, ‘that, if he had been only a gentleman, he should not have come to visit him.’” The second reference to Voltaire is even more insidious, if not altogether provocative: “Pope discovered, by a trick, that [Voltaire] was a spy for the court, and never considered him as a man worthy of confidence.” Archibald Ballantyne seems to believe this scenario is underscored by Voltaire’s indifference to happenings in England, for “English party politics were nothing to Voltaire; he went indifferently wherever he thought it was worth his while to go” (Ballantyne 81). Indeed,
stranger in a strange land must sometimes yield to the desires and opinions of his counterparts even if he does not fully understand them.

Voltaire and Pope were obviously familiar with one another, although the nature and extent of their relationship is up for conjecture. In a 1756 letter, Voltaire appears already to be thinking along the same lines he would three years later in writing *Candide*, a stern censure of Leibniz’s philosophy of optimism: things are the way they are for the best possible reason. In the letter, Voltaire derides such optimism by lamenting Pope’s physical deformities in a manner more befitting a close friend than merely an acquaintance: “And when people tell me that things could not be otherwise, they are committing an outrage to reason and to my grief . . . But my poor Pope, my poor hunchback whom I knew, whom I loved, who told you that God could not shape you without a hunchback” (*Letters* 182-3). Johnson’s writing, as shown, obviously reflects a distinctly opposing viewpoint about the character of the association between Pope and Voltaire.

Since Johnson never met Pope in person, anything written in *Life of Pope* emanates from research or hearsay. Of course, that is not to say that Voltaire’s personal relationship with Pope necessarily resulted in Voltaire acquiring any firsthand knowledge of English literature. In fact, in at least one pivotal circumstance relative to the focus of this chapter, Voltaire’s connection to Pope may have indirectly been one reason that Johnson was so quick to reject the *philosophe’s* commentary about Shakespeare. Thomas Lounsbury implies that Voltaire’s credulity and inability to judge worthy literary criticism may actually have caused him to make occasionally specious comments:

[Voltaire] was in the habit of sneering at Dennis, of whom he knew little but what Pope and his friends told him. He was well acquainted, however, with the attack
upon Shakespeare which had been made by Dennis’s contemporary, Rymer . . .
more than once [Voltaire] referred with ill-concealed glee to the passage in which
that writer had declared that there was not a monkey but understood nature better
than Shakespeare. (38-9)

More importantly, such uninformed comments may be the source of Johnson’s belief that
Voltaire was petty minded.

While Voltaire’s interactions with Pope may have potentially influenced his opinion of
the writings of someone like John Dennis, not everything Voltaire wrote about English authors
was based upon any intimate personal knowledge or persuasion. In his Twenty-First
Philosophical Letter, Voltaire examines Edmund Waller, who died nearly a decade before
Voltaire was born. Therefore, anything the Frenchman writes about him is (like Johnson’s Lives)
based either on word of mouth, extensive study, or as is often the case, personal preference.
Voltaire writes that Waller’s “courtly works are full of grace, but carelessness weakens and
misjudgments often disfigure them” (Letters 86). Johnson, referring also to Waller’s courtly
poems, notes a similar discrepancy: “His images are not always distinct . . . showing the world
under a false appearance, and, so far as they obtain credit from the young and unexperienced, as
misleading expectation, and misleading practice.” Negative commentaries aside, both
Voltaire and Johnson commend Waller’s eulogies (as Voltaire called them), or what Johnson
refers to as panegyrics.

In his Letter, Voltaire relates an anecdote about Waller’s second eulogy, dedicated to
King Charles II upon his restoration to the throne. Waller’s initial eulogy was written for Oliver
Cromwell, and according to Voltaire’s tale, Charles II believed the first poem was superior to the
second: “The king, to whom Waller had just presented a piece larded with praise--as poets do for
kings--reproached Waller for having written a better one for Cromwell. Waller replied, ‘Sire, we poets are more successful authors of fiction than of truth’” (Letters 87). In Life of Waller, Johnson relates an almost identical story in almost identical terms: “Poets, indeed, profess fiction . . . The Congratulation was considered as inferior to the Panegyric; and it is reported that when the King told Waller of the disparity, he answered, ‘Poets, Sir, succeed better in fiction than in truth” (104). Voltaire’s difficulty with the language may here be best illustrated through use of contrasts: Johnson, a stylist with an affinity for using a copious amount of words, unexpectedly tells this story in a much more succinct manner than his French counterpart. The result of Voltaire’s ineptitude with the English language is, in this instance, a dialogue which sounds artificial and contrived.

While thus far the similarity of each writer’s own criticism has been illuminated, another potential avenue of exploration lies in examining the way their works were viewed by the same individuals. For example, Voltaire was very close friends with, and received patronage from Lord Chesterfield: the man who incurred Johnson’s wrath after falsely claiming to be the patron of Johnson’s Dictionary despite only providing him £10 for the seven years Johnson devoted to the project. Although focusing upon the differences between both men is not the intent of this study, it nonetheless helps shed some light on the similarities between the two, and in particular, characters they apparently reviled equally. No individual seems to fit this criterion better than Horace Walpole (1717-97), author, art historian, antiquarian and Member of Parliament from 1741-68.

Boswell humorously notes in Life of Johnson that Walpole may have had a legitimate reason to hold Johnson in contempt, for when writing Debates in the Senate of Magna Lilliputia, Johnson admitted that “he always took care to put Sir Robert Walpole [Horace’s father] in the
Stephen Clarke writes that the assaults were not at all one-sided, for years later Horace Walpole “attacked Johnson’s loaded style, his use of hard words, his inability to write with humor, his muscular toughness and his tripled repetition of illustrations,” which contributed to Walpole’s belief that any *Rambler* essay could be divided “into three differently worded ones of the same meaning.” Indeed, it does not appear that Johnson and either Walpole were even remotely acquainted, if they ever actually met at all. On the contrary, Voltaire was at one time on cordial terms with Sir Robert Walpole, and actually met a young Horace during his time in England.

Voltaire’s involvement with the Walpoles, though, involves more than merely trading insults with them *a la* Johnson. Voltaire’s English associates, Pope and Bolingbroke, disliked Robert Walpole’s Whig regime, and expressed this displeasure like Johnson would in his *Debates* some ten years later. In 1727, anonymous letters signed *The Occasional Writer* began appearing, blasting Walpole with satirical and ironical invective. Voltaire purportedly attempted to ascertain the identity of the letter-writer from Pope, who suspected Voltaire was a spy for the French government; therefore, Pope provided Voltaire false information. From there, Voltaire purportedly gave the false information to Walpole, revealing himself as a traitor to Pope and Bolingbroke in the process (Ballantyne 82-3). The degree of validity to be extracted from that particular story is best left to readers, but in his older age Voltaire was also a victim of Horace Walpole’s bombasts. Here Walpole suggests that, in addition to Voltaire’s supposed prejudice against the English, his judgment as a historian is distorted:

> Mr. Voltaire, if he is the author of the history of 1741, seems a good deal shocked at our manner of executing Rebels in *England*, by hanging, drawing and quartering; the two latter circumstances he is pleased to call Remains of our
Ancient Ferocity . . . [This] though who from the whole tenor of his writings, [is] a lover of mankind, yet one, who . . . has not so much as dropped in any one of his works a single mark of detestation of the Racks and Tortures in his own country by Law established.\textsuperscript{147}

I believe it can be asserted that Walpole, who accused Johnson of bigotry and bias, is guilty of the same infractions. To judge Voltaire and his writing by France’s tradition legalizing torture compels one to ask: did Walpole somehow manage to read all of Voltaire’s works except for \textit{Candide}? Considering that no small component of the satire contained within \textit{Candide} is intended to ridicule France--and in just this novel alone there is “rape, pillage, murder, massacre, butchery, religious intolerance and abuse, torture, hanging, storm, shipwreck, earthquake, disease, cannibalism, prostitution, political oppression and instability . . . with the licence of satire”\textsuperscript{148}--it seems that Walpole had not done any extensive reading of Voltaire whatsoever before making such accusations.

Walpole likewise assailed Johnson’s inability to write without bias or obfuscation, stating that any value to be taken from the latter’s writing would have to be extracted from a larger body of dubious content, charging: “Dr. Johnson’s works are as easily distinguished as those of the most affected writer . . . there is meaning in almost everything Johnson says . . . when prejudice, bigotry, and arrogance do not cloud or debase his logic.”\textsuperscript{149} Again, Walpole’s claims would strike many readers of Johnson (and Boswell’s \textit{Life}) as paradoxical: does Johnson ever claim to be an objective writer or speaker? According to Hawkins, Walpole did read the \textit{Life of Johnson},\textsuperscript{150} but Stephen Clarke believes that Boswell’s biography “and other posthumous productions only stimulated the frequency and virulence of Walpole’s abuse [of Johnson]” \textit{(Prejudice} 242).
It should be noted that Johnson never attacked Walpole in a published document (LL.D 241) and apparently Voltaire did not feel it was necessary, either. Nevertheless, Voltaire did write a lengthy letter to Walpole in 1768, and the tone of the epistle makes evident that Voltaire is incensed by the liberties he believes Walpole has taken in defaming him to the English public. If one believes that a writer’s true feelings are more aptly revealed in personal correspondence than in published works, then it is truly a great shame that Johnson did not have access to Voltaire’s backlash against Walpole. Surely the hearty Englishman would have applauded the acidity of the diminutive Frenchman’s retort:

You have deluded your country into believing that I hold Shakespeare in contempt. I was the first to acquaint the French with Shakespeare; I translated passages from his works forty years ago as well from Milton, Waller, Rochester, Dryden and Pope. I can assure you that almost no one in France before me was acquainted with English poetry; they had scarcely even heard of Locke. I was persecuted for thirty years by a host of fanatics for saying that Locke is the Hercules of metaphysics who set the bounds of the human mind . . . I have been your apostle and your martyr. In truth, it is unjust for the English to complain of me. I said a very long time ago that if Shakespeare had come along in the age of Addison, he would have added to his genius the elegance and purity that make Addison estimable. I said ‘that his genius was his own and that his faults were those of his age.’ (Letters 271-2)

Quite possibly, then, in Voltaire’s mind he had already done for English literature in France what Johnson did for English literature in England by publishing the Dictionary: enlighten the masses about the best possible examples of the English language. Moreover, much of the battle
between Johnson and Voltaire was surely posturing, for there is no record of Voltaire or Johnson attacking each other with the vigor and intensity found in Voltaire’s epistle to Walpole (in letter form or in a published response), as both men seemed to enjoy the subtle art of jabbing at one another more than issuing a direct onslaught.

In the Twenty-Second of his *Philosophical Letters*, however, Voltaire addresses an English work he seemingly considers to be an unworthy poem, in large part because he is unable to understand its innuendo and humor: Samuel Butler’s 1662 mock-epic poem, *Hudibras*. Voltaire, failing to understand Butler’s satirizing of Puritans after the reign of Oliver Cromwell, is seemingly unable to comprehend how a poet (in this case, an *English* poet) can find humor in something as repugnant as war, telling French readers:

> But, above all, the English poem called *Hudibras* is what puzzles me most to make you at all acquainted with. It is a piece wholly in the comic or burlesque style, though the subject is of no less consequence than the civil wars of Cromwell. This cruel war, which has been the occasion of so many tears, and which has caused such an ocean of blood to be shed, has notwithstanding, given birth to a poem, which I defy the gravest reader to peruse without laughing.

Voltaire clearly has mixed feelings about the work, because he acknowledges the wealth of humor present in *Hudibras*, but he seems to feel that it is inappropriate. Later on in the letter, Voltaire’s neoclassical tendencies again come to the fore, as his reverie for the ancient writers leaves him even more vexed as to how Butler can be so lighthearted in depicting the English Civil War, contending that, “The Romans would certainly never have thought of writing a burlesque poem on the civil wars of Cæsar and Pompey, or on the proscriptions of Antony and Augustus” (*Letters*).
Finally, Voltaire concludes that his failure to fully comprehend and appreciate the material in the poem is not only due to the fact that he is not English and Butler’s humor is not universal, but it is also owing in part to a language barrier; but as we shall later see, Johnson, despite being English, clearly shared many of Voltaire’s qualms. Of particular note, the philosophe stresses that Hudibras “is a combination of Don Quixote and our Menippean Satire; it is, of all the books I have read, the wittiest, but also the most untranslatable . . . The largest part of the ridicule is directed at theologians whom few members of worldly society understand. At every turn one would need a commentary, and a joke explained is a joke that has failed” (Letters 89). Johnson would echo these sentiments nearly fifty years later in his Life of Butler (1779).

Because Hudibras is anti-Puritanical, we can assume that given Johnson’s high church leanings he would be in agreement with its general premise. Furthermore, the plot of Hudibras is derived heavily from that of Don Quixote, one of Johnson’s three favorite books. As such, Johnson’s commentary on Hudibras is a mixture of praise tempered with his recognition of the poem’s unlikelihood to withstand the test of time:152

Of Hudibras the manners, being founded on opinions, are temporary and local, and therefore become every day less intelligible and less striking . . . much therefore of that humour which transported the last century with merriment is lost to us, who do not know the sour solemnity, the sullen superstition, the gloomy moroseness, and the stubborn scruples of the ancient Puritans.153

Despite the derogatory implications of the adjectives used to describe Puritans in the final sentence of the above passage, Johnson is aware that the datedness of such subject matter in Hudibras makes it extremely difficult for contemporary readers, unacquainted with the people
and situations presented in the poem, to fully understand or appreciate those depictions. When Voltaire refers to Butler’s work being “the most untranslatable,” it is apparent that he is referring to the context of the work itself in addition to the language. In much the same manner that twenty-first century Americans have no concept of what it is like to witness the overthrow of a king, Voltaire probably did not possess an intimate knowledge about the workings of 1640’s England. However, this does not mean that Voltaire did not have at least a modicum of difficulty in translating the poem semantically, as well.

In the twenty-second letter, Voltaire provides what English readers would likely believe to be a fairly crude translation of Butler’s poem, and in fact, Voltaire almost says as much, noting that, “In order to understand the spirit of this poem . . . there will be a necessity of retrenching, at least three-fourths of the passages we want to translate . . . I have therefore reduced to about fourscore verses, the first four hundred in his work, to avoid a disgusting prolixity” (Letters ). If we examine Butler’s original poem, beginning with the first line of the third stanza (line 190) and going to line 201, it reads as follows:

For his Religion, it was fit
To match his learning and his wit;
’Twas Presbyterian true blue;
For he was of that stubborn crew
Of errant saints, whom all men grant
To be the true Church Militant;
Such as do build their faith upon
The holy text of pike and gun;
Decide all controversies by
Infallible artillery;
And prove their doctrine orthodox
By apostolic blows and knocks.

Voltaire’s translation of the corresponding lines (although he does admit to “retrenching” them), and clearly, for the sake of brevity he has greatly condensed the entire poem. These things aside,
Voltaire’s version of these lines (48-59) are provided in their original French and accompanied by the present-day English translation:

D’Hudibras la Religion
Était tout comme sa raison,
Vide de sens & fort profonde.
Le Puritanisme divin,
La meilleure secte du monde,
Et qui certes n’a rien d’humain;
La vraie Église militante,
Qui prêche un pistolet en main,
Pour mieux convertir son prochain,
À grands coups de sabre argumente,
Qui promet les célestes biens
Par le gibet & par la corde
Et damne sans miséricorde.

Of Hudibras’ Religion
Was very as his reason,
Space of sense and very much deep.
Divine Puritanism
The best sect of the world,
And which certainly has nothing human;
The true militant Church,
Which preaches a gun in hand,
To convert his fellow better,
In big blows of sword argue,
Who promises property celestial
By the gallows and by the rope,
And damn without mercy.

Although it is fairly obvious that Voltaire understands the basics of *Hudibras*, it is also readily apparent that (at least in a modern translation) his translation, perhaps by virtue of being parsed, lacks continuity. This relative absence of cohesion is likely most apparent in Voltaire’s lines 51 and 52, where he writes “*Le Puritanisme divin / La meilleure secte du monde*” (Divine Puritanism / The best sect of the world,” which to me indicates that Voltaire may not have fully grasped the satire present in Butler’s poem. However, such an assertion is difficult to prove, particularly when examining lines 54 to 59, where Voltaire *seems* to fully understand that the Puritan (Presbyterian) Church is depicted by Butler as a group which resorts to violence as a means to an end, presumably in part referencing their role in the beheading of Charles I in 1649.

Of course, the appropriate question in this case would seem to be whether or not Voltaire fully realized the humor contained in *Hudibras* as opposed to simply being aware of the historical connotation of the piece, for the poem is intended to make Puritans look foolish and outmoded as opposed to depicting them as merely a footnote in English history.
Johnson also had qualms with the style in which *Hudibras* was written, and some of his grievances are evinced in *Life of Butler*. Johnson defers once more to Joseph Addison’s literary criticism\(^{154}\) from *Spectator 249* (1711), which deals with the topic of laughter, and in it Addison observes: “It is a dispute among the critics whether burlesque poetry runs best in heroic verse . . . or in doggerel, like that of *Hudibras* . . . If Hudibras had been set out with as much wit and humour in heroic verse as he is in doggerel, he would have made a much more agreeable figure than he does.”\(^{155}\) By conceding to Addison’s criticism in this instance, Johnson is essentially agreeing with Voltaire--in some way, the indistinctness of Butler’s language has created a rift between what he means to project and what is actually being projected--and, as I theorize, this lack of reconciliation between intent and result is evidenced by Voltaire’s somewhat piecemeal translation. Indeed, if Johnson, the great English wordsmith, found the plotline of *Hudibras* routinely tedious and the language often “mean, despicable [and] worthless,”\(^{156}\) then it is certainly easy to understand how a non-native English speaker like Voltaire would have dismissed the work as confusing, ultimately referring to it as “one English poem that I would despair of making known to you” (*Letters* 89).

Many contemporaries argued that Johnson’s unmitigated bias and his reluctance to stray from it greatly impeded his credibility as a *writer*; but a rare admission by Johnson, the *speaker* in Boswell’s *Life*, exemplifies the overarching point of this chapter. Johnson, talking with Boswell and Allen Ramsay in April 1778, declares: “In England, any man who wears a sword and a powdered wig is ashamed to be illiterate. *I believe* it is not so in France. Yet there is, *probably*, a great deal of learning in France . . . *I do not know this, but I take it upon the common principles of chance*. Where there are many shooters, some will hit” [my emphasis] (*Life* III, 254). In this instance, Johnson patently admits that he is not certain about the statements he is
making, but rather appears to be relying upon the philosophy he espoused three years earlier in *Taxation no Tyranny*, where Johnson maintains that “to love their country has been considered as virtue in men, whose love could not be otherwise than blind, because their preference was made without a comparison; but it has never been my fortune to find, either in ancient or modern writers, any honourable mention of those, who have, with equal blindness, hated their country” (*Taxation* 412).

In Johnson’s *Dictionary*, this love of his own country unfortunately occurs at the expense of other nations (most notably France and Scotland), and this scenario is quite likely epitomized by the word *Frenchify*: *To infect with the manner of France; to make a Coxcomb*. Such a definition may well prove that Johnson’s greatest problem with Voltaire’s translations of Shakespeare was Johnson’s fear of being made into a dandy if *his own* writings were ever translated into French. To Johnson’s way of thinking, if French (in this case, Voltaire’s) attempts to take ownership of various English writings were to continue unabated, it would only be a matter of time before the English writers Johnson so greatly admired were portrayed as fops. By virtue of Voltaire’s nationality alone, his translations of Shakespeare were inevitably *Frenchified*, and perhaps this concern above all others served as the wellspring of motivation for Johnson to undertake his *Notes on Shakespeare* and *Lives of the Poets*. Johnson felt an innate responsibility to hold down the English literary fort in the face of French infidels.

What Johnson likely did not know was that Voltaire would have wholeheartedly commended *Lives of the Poets*, for in *Epic Poetry* Voltaire envisions a work like Johnson’s as a necessity: “Whosoever had the honour and the happiness to be acquainted with any [of the great English writers], and will do me the favour to let me know some notable passages of their lives, will confer an obligation, not only upon me, but upon the public” (*Epic* vi-vii). Johnson, indeed,
conferred such an “obligation upon the public” in 1779 (when he completed *Lives of the Poets*). Unfortunately, one of its most interested readers--the caustic French *philosophe* Voltaire--died one year earlier, and never got the chance to commend, or condemn (as the case may be) the work of his adversarial English counterpart. Ironically Johnson, who so many critics continue to incorrectly deem as antipathetic to French literature, apparently shared Voltaire’s desire to learn about his literary counterparts across the Channel. According to Hawkins, Johnson was so “fond of reading the lives of great and learned persons [that] two or three years before he died, he applied to a friend of his to give him a list of those in the French language that were well written and genuine” (*Reflections* 8). It would seem that both Voltaire and Johnson’s desires in this circumstance went unrequited.

In the next chapter I shall examine the two works of fiction for which Voltaire and Johnson are most widely known, *Candide* and *Rasselas*, and in doing so we will see their literary criticism morph--not so dramatically--into critiques of the world as they knew it. While Damrosch observes that Johnson’s criticism “is strong in large part because it resists the temptations of formal system” (*Criticism* 35), Roger Pearson similarly notes that *Candide* mocks “the systems by which men seek to explain and govern their lives” (*Fables* 113). The refusal of both writers to consistently and rigidly subscribe to one school of thought in their scholarly analyses readily lends itself to the philosophies espoused in *Candide* and *Rasselas*: that buying wholeheartedly into the tenets of one particular ideology (in this case empiricism) will ultimately yield few conclusive results.
CHAPTER 4

CANDIDE AND RASSELAS: TWO (NOT SO GOOD) EXAMPLES OF LOCKEAN EDUCATION

“Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where can find information upon it.” –Johnson

“Is there anyone so wise as to learn by the experience of others?” -Voltaire

No study involving Johnson’s estimation of the French would be complete without an examination of his and Voltaire’s respective 1759 philosophical tales, Rasselas and Candide. Both works feature pupils of varying ages submitting themselves to the will of their tutors in hopes that they too will ultimately become sagacious and contented individuals. The tenor of the two stories is certainly disparate, but there is more overlap than might be expected upon first glance. In fact, English dramatist Richard Cumberland (1732-1811) actually believed that Rasselas was written in response to Candide, theorizing that Johnson “was likely enough to have written at Voltaire, and brought the question to the test, if infidelity is any aid to wit.” Further, Boswell observed that even Johnson could not deny the similarities between Voltaire’s tale and his own, for Johnson purportedly stated that “it would have been in vain to deny that the scheme of that which came latest was taken from the other” had the two works not been published in such rapid succession (Life I, 342).

Of course, that is not to say the two works are mirror images of one another. Candide is an example of Menippean satire, which is typically biting and sarcastic, while Rasselas is satire
manqué: “satire blunted by compassion and then turned into something else” (Bate 339). There is also no doubt that both works employ comedic elements, but the manner in which each author evokes laughter differs: Voltaire is bawdy and macabre in his portrayal of many extreme situations while Johnson is faint and foreboding, preferring to concentrate more upon man himself than the situations in which he is thrust. Johnson composed *Rasselas* over the span of a week in January 1759 to defray the costs of his mother’s funeral expenses; Voltaire, on the other hand, did not write *Candide* out of financial necessity, for he was already very wealthy.\(^{158}\)

Perhaps these circumstances contribute to the style of humor contained within each tale: Johnson, depressed and downtrodden, relies heavily upon the tragic comedy that so often accompanies failure (we need look no further than the dark humor used to describe the aspiring aviator plummeting to his near death in chapter six). Meanwhile, Voltaire’s comedy is--in the tradition of his satirical role-model Swift--often scatological and borderline profane in its content. In short, when things are going well it is easy to be an absurdist; but when the world is collapsing around us, we sometimes look for humor wherever we can find it, even in our own peccadilloes.

While early twentieth-century critic Henry Jackson believes that neither Voltaire’s nor Johnson’s respective situation had little to do with the content of *Candide* or *Rasselas*, it is certainly hard to believe that Johnson’s penury or his mother’s impending death had no influence whatsoever upon his work. Jackson concludes that “it was not the facts, but the personal attitude, that made all the difference between Johnson and Voltaire.”\(^{159}\) Whatever is meant by the somewhat vague phrase “personal attitude,” critics during Johnson’s life up to the present have tended to focus upon the multitude of personal differences between Voltaire and Johnson in labeling distinctions between the two works. Accordingly much modern criticism simply echoes the thoughts of those eighteenth-century commentators.
In the *Life of Johnson* Boswell writes that, “Voltaire, I am afraid, meant only by wanton profaneness to obtain a sportive victory over religion and to discredit the belief of a superintending Providence: Johnson meant by shewing the unsatisfactory of things temporal, to direct the hopes of man to things eternal” (*Life* I, 342). One year later, Johnson’s close friend Arthur Murphy presents a similar view in his *Essay on the Life and Genius of Samuel Johnson*: “*Candide* is the work of a lively imagination, and *Rasselas* with all its splendour of eloquence, exhibits a gloomy picture. It should, however, be remembered, that the world has known the WEEPING as well as the LAUGHING philosopher.”\(^{160}\) Finally, Hester Thrale compares both works: “*Rasselas* and *Candide* should have come into the world together, inculcating precisely the same particular opinions of human life—‘Life with all its circles vain’—one in the gross terms of coarse buffoonery & bitter ridicule,—one with elaborate elegance of diction & sublimity scarcely surpass’d by Oriental language.”\(^{161}\) Clearly, a distinction has been drawn between the pious Johnson and the pseudo-agnostic Voltaire, one which can also be related to the humor contained within each tale: Johnson is deemed grave and serious while Voltaire appears to be considered flippant to the point of boisterousness by Johnson’s British contemporaries.

It must be emphasized that the above commentaries are those of Britons (of Scottish, Irish, and English extraction); moreover, they are the thoughts of Johnson’s close friends, which adds intimacy and perhaps even personal bias to their accounts. Although several of Johnson’s English contemporaries were quick to compare *Rasselas* and *Candide*, many modern commentators have noted the puzzling reluctance of eighteenth-century French critics to include *Rasselas* in their conversation at all. Howard Weinbrot observes that, even today, “Samuel Johnson as perceived in eighteenth-century France and Fracophone culture remains terra incognita” (*Before* 270). Additionally, Mark Temmer notes that only a handful of viable French
critics during the 1700’s even mention Rasselas, but none more important than Élie Fréron (1719-76). In 1760 Fréron, to whom Johnson stated (in Latin no less) that Voltaire was “a man of very acute intellect and little literature” (Life II, 406), wrote the following about Rasselas, which actually seems to anticipate the thoughts of Johnson’s British counterparts:

[Rasselas] is a less disgusting mirror than Candide; we see ourselves there, however, with all our foibles and all our misfortunes. Candide makes us laugh first in the mind, and leads then to despair in the heart; Rasselas softens us up, makes us on the miseries of our nature wail; Candide, in a word, returns us in terror that we are the same, and Rasselas makes us the objects of our own commiseration.\textsuperscript{162}

Temmer succinctly concludes that French disregard of Johnson had less to do with a dislike of Johnson’s “philosophy” or an aversion to his work, but was rather the byproduct of blatant indifference, for the majority of French readers simply had not read Johnson (Infidels 79).

Alvin Whitely’s “The Comedy of Rasselas” (1956) seemingly piggybacks off of Arthur Murphy’s aforementioned quotation which refers to the laughing philosopher (Voltaire) and the weeping philosopher (Johnson). Whitely contends that Rasselas “is not merely another reminder of the vanity of all human endeavor or a religious memento mori or a weeping version of Voltaire’s advice in Candide” [my emphasis].\textsuperscript{163} Writing from an essentially political standpoint, Peter Gay remarks that “the philosophies of Johnson and Voltaire were not alike. Indeed, Voltaire had employed his keenest intellectual resources in his attempt to refute Pascal’s tragic view of man,” and goes to contrast the two men in the most conventional of fashions, writing that Johnson was “the embodiment of the Enlightenment” while Voltaire was “the embodiment of eighteenth-century Christian pessimism.”\textsuperscript{164} More recently, during the 1970’s (when there was a noticeable spike in the number of biographies on Johnson, and an increasing tendency to
treat Johnson as a psychological case study), critics were still attempting to create a tension between Johnson as a moralist and Voltaire as a heathen; as Richard Schwartz argues, “The essential difference between *Rasselas* and *Candide* lies in Johnson’s psychological orientation with regard to the problem of evil.”

One of the progenitors of psychoanalyzing Johnson, W. Jackson Bate, forwards in his 1970 essay “Johnson and Satire Manque” the idea that Johnson’s use of satire differs from more conventional examples (like *Candide*) which attempt to utilize mockery as a form of edification, for *Rasselas* is the “presentation of the ridiculous for the sake of correcting it.” Casey McIntosh’s *The Choice of Life: Samuel Johnson and the World of Fiction* (1973) adds detail to Bate’s assessment of Johnson’s use of satire by suggesting that the difference between the two works does not lie solely in terms of religiosity, but also in the sense that each writer conveys his message in a manner befitting his unique persona—Voltaire, the frivolous Frenchman, and Johnson, the exacting Englishman:

Candide, a true comic hero, bounces from one catastrophe to the next, indestructible as a hard rubber ball. Johnson’s characters may be grotesque, pseudo-comic, but they are far from invulnerable . . . The attack on optimism in *Rasselas* reinforces, eventually, our reliance on Providence, in *Candide* it undermines our belief in a providential ordering of the universe: Johnson is wise and compassionate; Voltaire’s snowballs have rocks in them.

In the face of much existing criticism, I hope to show that neither work is any more heinous than the other; more importantly, both writers drive home many of the same messages in surprisingly similar ways.
These are just a few examples of criticism ranging from the eighteenth-century to the present, but the heartfelt responses these various readers had to both works can be used to further the discussion that, although Johnson and Voltaire were fundamentally rationalists, *Candide* and *Rasselas* are actually both examples of sentimental literature. In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) Mary Louise Pratt states that sentimental writing “explicitly anchors what is being expressed in the sensory experience, judgment, agency, or desires of the human subjects. Authority lies in the authenticity of somebody’s felt experience.”¹⁶⁹ Although addressing travel literature exclusively, it seems that several of the aspects Pratt mentions can be carried over to *Candide* and *Voltaire*, even if we do not consider them to be examples of travel literature in the most technical sense.¹⁷⁰

The key word used by Pratt, however, is experience and as readers we cannot help but share the protagonists’ “felt experiences” and I would argue that ultimately we find ourselves sympathizing with them. Despite observing the frequently poor “judgments” and sometimes warped “desires of the human subjects,” we come to understand that each work—in its own way—does, in the words of Fréron, function as a mirror. And just as in real life, we do not always like the reflection that we see staring back at us. We relate to the mistakes and confusion of the protagonists and realize that the exotic, almost fairy-tale-esque appeal of both *Candide* and *Rasselas* underscores the idea that neither Voltaire nor Johnson recommends imitating the actions of their characters. Instead, both writers hope to illustrate, through the numerous pitfalls of the central figures, that the only real lessons a person learns are those which he undertakes of his own volition without the interference of a guide, tutor, mentor, or adviser. Because the conclusions of each work are so indefinite, it is clear that neither writer advocates the
experiential practices demonstrated in his tale, an odd premise being that both Johnson and Voltaire were “disciples” of English empiricist philosopher John Locke (1632-1704).

Locke’s influence on eighteenth-century ideas can hardly be overstated. Perhaps most well-known for his theory of *tabula rasa*--the belief that we enter this world as blank slates whose experiences leave indelible impressions upon us--Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) was considered a philosophical tour-de-force. A surprising amount of material found within its pages undoubtedly seeped into both *Candide* and *Rasselas*, not only *tabula rasa*, but by extension the notion that whatever traits (not ideas) we are imbued with only come fruition when we garner the ability to reason, and this ability can not be generated solely by outside prodding or advice; it must be realized by the individual *for himself*. Additionally, although Locke railed against the idea of pedantry, pointing out that the “the floating of other men’s opinions in our brains, makes us not one jot the more knowing” (*Essay* 105), just three years later in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, he writes “that parents should engage [their children] in Conversation with Men of Parts and Breeding, as soon as they are capable of it.”

Voltaire and Johnson, I posit, recognized Locke’s distinction between *emulating* quality individuals and *associating* with them, and this is no small part of their qualm with Locke’s premises: how can a typically suggestible and ignorant youth determine the propriety or efficacy of behaviors or ideas to which he has not been previously exposed? Furthermore, how can we expect a youth to suitably judge a figure worthy of admiration or esteem? *Candide* and *Rasselas* each have a Pangloss and Imlac to “guide” them on their journeys, but are the two young men really any better for it in the end? I believe that Voltaire and Johnson would aver that it is incongruous for young people to separate their high regard for an elder from blindly accepting his advice as the gospel, and that is the perpetual caveat of both *Candide* and *Rasselas*. 
Ultimately, both tales function as a defense of, though not necessarily a justification for, the temerity of youth.

Despite the fact that Johnson and Voltaire never fathered children of their own, it would be an oversight to surmise that they were merely posturing opinions on a topic about which they knew very little: educating young people. As a young man Johnson tried his hand at teaching, and in late 1735 Johnson opened a small school named Edial Hall in his hometown of Lichfield (ironically, Johnson begins teaching at twenty-six while Rasselas begins searching for answers at twenty-six). Johnson’s penury while attending Oxford prevented him from obtaining a degree there, thus the parents of many prospective students were skeptical of his credentials as an instructor; moreover, his shoddy appearance likely did not help him win over those parents who were sitting on the fence in regard to their children attending his school. In much the same manner that Rasselas was a production of necessity, Johnson’s attempt at teaching was an endeavor facilitated by his routinely meager existence, and similarly to Rasselas’s quest for wisdom, Johnson’s tenure as a schoolmaster was essentially a failure (the lone bright spot likely being his tutelage of future famed stage actor David Garrick). Hawkins itemizes Johnson’s lack of success in the venture, noting that although at no time did the number of pupils under Johnson’s care exceed eight, but Hawkins goes on to buttress his commentary by deducing that Johnson used the time at Edial Hall to his own advantage: “It must be imagined, the instruction of so small a number of scholars as were under his care, left him at leisure to pursue his private studies and amusements” (LL.D 20; 22).

Therefore, although his experience in the realm of education cannot be considered a success, perhaps Johnson learned more by failing at the endeavor, since apparently the time he had originally set aside to be used for instruction actually ended up affording him the opportunity
to bone up on his own scholarship. Nevertheless, *Rasselas* illustrates flawed and sometimes unconvincing teaching practices by tutors to show that educating a student is not necessarily any easier when the instructor is forty-nine--Johnson’s age when writing *Rasselas*--or twenty-six, when he ran Edial Hall. Johnson’s influence upon the young is most likely epitomized by his relationship with, and subsequent attempts to guide, James Boswell; and while Boswell’s encounters with Voltaire are much less significant than his more frequent, in-depth interaction with Johnson, Boswell clearly believed that his meetings with the French *philosophe* were a significant contribution to his “worldly” education.

At age seventy Voltaire met a twenty-four-year-old James Boswell (very much a Rasselas in his own right): a young aristocrat who sought knowledge and advice from some of the most esteemed minds of his era. Discoursing with Voltaire was an event which Boswell believed left a permanent impression upon him: by leaving his home in order to pursue enlightenment Boswell, like Rasselas, discovered things about himself that he believed would otherwise have lain dormant. In a letter to William Temple, written shortly after fraternizing with Voltaire, Boswell declares:

> Before I left Britain, I was idle, dissipated, ridiculous, and regardless of reputation . . . Now I am a very different man. I have got a character which I am proud of. Speak, thou who hast known me from my earliest years! Couldst thou have imagined eight years ago that thy companion in the studies of Antiquity, who was *debased by an unhappy education* in the smoke of Edinburgh, couldst thou have imagined him to turn out the man he now is? [My emphasis]. (*Grand Tour* I, 294-5)

Boswell’s unconditional faith in the idea that his various encounters with learned individuals--Voltaire, Johnson, and Rousseau among them--contributed to his self-improvement may actually
demonstrate that a man would be foolish to employ a single tutor, as doing so means that the student receives a universally one-sided perspective on all things. When a teacher or parent exerts ultimate authority over a child or student, rebellion is often the result.

Indeed, the degree to which both young protagonists actually learn by disproving their instructors is well summed up by Roger Pearson, who believes that “Candide’s education consists essentially in the repeated discovery of the discrepancy between Pangloss’s system and the facts of life” (Study 116). Indeed, disproving Pangloss’s philosophies is something in which Voltaire the author had a personal stake, since Pangloss is the personification of Leibnizian optimism; likewise, Rasselas also affronts many of Imlac’s teachings and opts to go his own way rather than obediently regard his teacher’s sagacity. Boswell, analogously to Candide and Rasselas, challenged both Johnson and Voltaire’s expertise on various subjects—and like Rasselas, Boswell routinely found himself on the losing end.

Voltaire’s foremost agenda in Candide is much more apparent than Johnson’s in Rasselas. The word Candide means “optimism” in French and the point of the tale is to debunk Gottfried Leibniz’s philosophical notion of optimism. Because Voltaire is satirizing that particular philosophy, it can be asserted that he is actually promoting a highly skeptical view of human nature and life in general. Several circumstances of the novel: venereal disease, rape, torture, and murder, among others, are all presented as a part of God’s larger plan. Because “optimists” feel that God’s plan is always for the best, by extension Voltaire is jesting that because these horrible incidents occur in a world created by God, then it must be for the best.

Rasselas does not necessarily mock or make sport of any existing philosophies, but it is clearly Johnson’s platform to express his dismay with many social problems of the time. While Voltaire’s perspective at its most extreme can be construed as pessimistic due to his
denunciation of the alternative (optimism), *Rasselas* in reality presents no alternative, for Johnson’s tale almost explicitly operates under the same premise that his entire life did: attempting to find happiness or contentment through an exhaustive search will yield no more fruit than not looking in the first place. Such a view is an almost textbook definition of skepticism, a trait for which Johnson was well-known. Both writers’ more than occasional dismay with the world that surrounded them leads Robert Etheridge Moore to conclusively state that *Candide* and *Rasselas* are examples of “profound pessimism.” I would, however, argue that the proactive position occupied by both Voltaire and Johnson in drawing attention to the kaleidoscopic nature of human existence give each work a realistic perspective as opposed to a pessimistic one; after all, *Rasselas* is a somber work that ends on a rather optimistic (albeit ambivalent) note. Conversely, *Candide* is a more humorous work that features a rather mundane ending, and it is shortsighted for readers to think that *Candide*’s mockery of fanatical optimism makes it, by default, an endorsement of pessimism. Further adding to the realism of the works is Voltaire and Johnson’s commitment to making a social commentary, despite their disparate geographical situations at this time (Voltaire in France and Johnson in England) both men dealt with many of the same world issues, and many of them were bleak, if not altogether destructive.

In both *Rasselas* and *Candide*, the Seven Years War (1756-63) looms heavily in the background, and neither man appears overly enamored by his respective country’s involvement. To a lesser degree in *Rasselas* than *Candide*, the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 is also part of the scenery. Voltaire uses the earthquake, which killed an estimated 90,000 in Lisbon alone, as yet another way to prove the farcicality of the idea that “all is for the best” while Johnson’s rationalistic thought (i.e. skepticism) is evidenced by chapter forty-two of *Rasselas*, where Imlac questions the astronomer’s self-delusional omnipotence: “Might not some other cause
produce this concurrence? The Nile does not always rise on the same day” (147). Both writers were looking for reasons to explain these events that many at the time may have considered demoralizing, or at the very least, unusual. Johnson, ever the cynic, urges readers to refrain from placing blind faith in the words of others, a theme for Rasselas as a whole; meanwhile, Voltaire likewise assaults the idea of blind faith, but for him such faith becomes problematic when the hand of God becomes the reason (or scapegoat) for all of life’s occurrences.

The fundamental plot premises of Candide and Rasselas are not only quite similar, but each reflects the unique circumstances Voltaire and Johnson endured upon leaving their homes for new locales. Candide, after being publicly beaten by the Baron and “expelled from paradise on earth, walked on for a long time, not knowing where he was going,”177 is much like Voltaire: exiled from France and exceedingly distraught by his new surroundings. Voltaire was “at heart depressed and melancholy. He had been twice publicly beaten; sneering cynics, when they wished to find a conveniently short synonym for the more cumbrous phrases that expressed ‘to give a man a thrashing,’ used a new verb, Voltairiser” (Ballantyne 35).

Rasselas likewise has numerous similarities to Johnson’s life: the novel contains forty-nine chapters, and Johnson was forty-nine when he wrote it. Rasselas is roughly twenty-eight years old when he undertakes his pilgrimage from the Happy Valley, and Johnson would turn twenty-eight a few months after he left Lichfield for London. Both writer and character alike, disenchanted with his current condition, seek greater things. Rasselas, who like Candide lives in a blissful paradise, believes that in order to truly understand desire he must “see the miseries of the world, since the sight of them is necessary to my happiness” (16). Johnson more than likely believed he had already experienced much of the misery in the world, but was optimistic that London held greater things for him, even if finding his niche in the large city would prove to be
an arduous task. Bate notes that, “Alone, [Johnson] could, if necessary, live from hand to mouth . . . he was setting off for the unknown world of London in complete ignorance of it, with almost no money” (163). Even in a large city that afforded him much more opportunity than the restrictive confines of Lichfield, Johnson was never prosperous; and according to his closest acquaintances, he was never very happy there, either.

*Rasselas* begins with the sort of pastoral imagery that a Romantic such as Rousseau would likely equate with paradise, but Rasselas (and we suspect Johnson’s outlook on the rural landscape of Lichfield is not much different) is not content in The Happy Valley—an ironic name in and of itself, since a valley is literally a *depression* between two higher points. Depression is an ailment with which Rasselas (and by all accounts Johnson himself) is afflicted in the early stages of the novel, for his isolation within the prosperous realm has inculcated in him a desire to see the sordid and nasty elements of the world. He in fact believes that the only way to truly appreciate the comforts he currently takes for granted is to witness the squalor and cruelty of the world as a whole.

Chapter two evidences the young man’s blatant naiveté about anything outside of his minuscule realm of experience. Indeed, there is a hint of the melancholy Johnson in Rasselas’s thoughts about his own perpetual anxiety: “I can discover within me no power of perception which is not glutted with its proper pleasure, yet I do not feel myself delighted. Man has surely some latent sense for which this place affords no gratification, or he has some desires distinct from sense which must be satisfied before he can be happy” (13). Rasselas appears to be “coming of age,” or at the very least, beginning to realize that there is a world outside of the Happy Valley and is hopeful that it holds more for him than his current habitation. If Rasselas were to subscribe to the idea of optimism as satirized by Voltaire, he would never yearn for a
change of scenery because everything, as it stands, is as it should be. It is this distinction that we must bear in mind when comparing both works: Rasselas chooses to leave the Happy Valley; Candide is banished from Westphalia. Although Candide is understandably distraught, he believes that everything will work out in the end because Pangloss has instilled in him a somewhat deterministic way of thinking--every link in life’s chain of events is incontrovertibly connected.

It makes sense then for Voltaire, who is even more vocal than Johnson in expressing his admiration of the logician Locke, to satirize Leibniz’s philosophy of optimism in Candide. The Frenchman assails the idea that “things cannot be other than they are,” for if this is true then developing the use of reason would be an exercise in futility because whatever innate traits we do possess, theoretically, would remain undeveloped or never change--for better or worse. Voltaire dismisses this belief from the outset, and in chapter one he describes Candide’s soul as “written upon his countenance. He was quite sound in his judgment, and he had the most straightforward of minds” (1). Although Candide’s specific age is never divulged (early teens would likely be a good guess), the irony of Voltaire’s above description should not be lost on readers: as the novel commences we realize that Candide does not possess good judgment, largely due to the fact that young people seldom have the life’s experience to acquire it. What Voltaire really means is that Candide, like most people, is endowed with the capacity for good judgment, but at present it is an innate trait that has not yet been cultivated. Further, Candide’s lack of prudence is due to the fact that his reasoning faculties have never been developed or honed by his tutor.

Quite likely the greatest outside contributor to Candide’s lack of reason is that his mentor, Pangloss, is little more than a pedant preaching the benefits of a philosophy that he does not
practice himself. Or perhaps Pangloss—a transparent example of buffoonery—and Rasselas’s sage Imlac are intended to be poseurs who are as deserving of ridicule as they are reverence. In his potent essay “The Reader, the General, and the Particular” (1971), Howard Weinbrot adds pointedly humorous commentary regarding Imlac’s diatribe (or dissertation) upon poetry in chapter ten: “Poor Rasselas is virtually frightened away from Imlac, who is so earnest in his desire to have the poet know everything that one of his students is likely to die before he can communicate anything.” Chapter ten will be addressed in further detail later in the chapter, but for now one particular question begs to be asked: if part of an empirical education is learning from our elders, then we are forced to consider whose advice should be followed. Such an inquiry seems unbelievably daunting and unfair for any young person to have to answer, and each author presents the answer to this query in an equally disheartening, albeit individualistic, fashion.

Prior to enlisting the help of a sagacious elder named Imlac to liberate him from the Happy Valley, Rasselas allies himself with a local inventor in hopes of attaining knowledge which will hasten his impending escape. When Rasselas learns that the creator plans to construct a device made for flying, the prince’s desires to leave the Valley are rejuvenated, and he is certain that the man makes perfect sense when he proclaims, “Fishes have the water, in which yet beasts can swim by nature, and men by art. He that can swim needs not despair to fly . . . we are only to proportion our power of resistance to the different density of the matter through which we are to pass” (24-5). The inventor, then, believes that all creatures have their designated realm, and through the use of reason (in the form of “art”), man can transcend the boundaries to which he has been confined by nature.
After caballing with the ambitious projector and witnessing the man’s subsequent failure, Rasselas realizes that his liberation from the Valley will have to be facilitated by a different intermediary. At this point, the young prince turns his not-so-full attention to Imlac, but it almost seems as if Rasselas joins Imlac out of desperation, clinging to any person he feels may be able to assist him in leaving the Happy Valley. Like Pangloss, who has neglected to serve as a sufficient guide to Candide, Imlac (even his name seems to imply that he is “lacking” something) does not always seem to be greatly invested, or even interested, in serving Rasselas’s best interest. The most obvious evidence of this neglect are the numerous chapters Johnson satirically dedicates to Imlac telling his own life’s story, which illustrates that overindulgence in self-aggrandizing monologues is potentially Imlac’s Achilles’ Heel.

In chapter ten, not surprisingly entitled “Imlac’s History Continued,” Imlac tells the young prince that “no man was ever great by imitation” (41), but it is clear that he relates the minute particulars of his story either because he is a sophist and greatly enjoys hearing himself talk, or because he believes his life is worthy of emulation. Weinbrot maintains that the words spoken by Rasselas’s initial object of admiration—the bumbling projector—ultimately differ very little from those uttered by the sometimes self-absorbed Imlac, for “like the scientist who delivers a “dissertation on the art of flying” . . . Imlac is unreliable in his perceptions and judgments. Imlac’s grandiose “dissertation upon poetry” . . . parallels and echoes the dotty scientist on flying” (Reader 183). It seems, then, that by replacing the failed inventor with Imlac, Rasselas is simply substituting one unreliable influence for another. Johnson might consider such a practice “the triumph of hope over experience,” a trait he believes young people have in spades (Life II, 128).
Similarly Pangloss speaks to a young and captive audience, like the scientist in Rasselas, about how everything has its proper place, hypothesizing, “It is demonstrably true, that things cannot be other than they are. For, everything having been made for a purpose, everything is necessarily for the best purpose” (Candide 2). Pangloss is a teacher of “meatphysico-theologico-cosmo-codology,” which readers could likely construe as a combination of metaphysician, theologian, cosmologist, and codologist. If this presumption is accurate then Pangloss is supposedly an expert in metaphysics, religion, astronomy, and codology (which is not a branch of science, but rather an Irish term meaning “to pull one’s leg”). As more of Pangloss’s character is revealed, though, it becomes evident that his lengthy title is not reflective of reality, but is instead hyperbole; Pangloss is essentially a jack-of-all-trades, yet master of none. Moreover, he is a pedant. The central tenet of Pangloss’s core belief indeed seems to be little more than a philosophy of convenience: for if everything is as it should be, then there is no need to question why things are the way they are. Therefore, his job as a tutor is essentially meaningless, and his students will remain mired in ignorance as long as they are under his supervision. Unfortunately, when they part ways with Pangloss, his so-called instruction has already been impressed upon his pupils’ undeveloped minds.

Candide’s inadvertent imitation of Pangloss’s teachings is evidence that adolescents are not always judicious enough to recognize that their elders (or mentors) are also fallible individuals--and the entire plot of Candide is predicated upon this failure. The young man’s journey into the world outside his native land of Westphalia is facilitated by an act that his love-interest, Cunégonde, discovers Pangloss committing. Because her education has up to now been based upon Pangloss’s wishy-washy theories, she does not understand the gravity of the act she witnesses. Cunégonde “caught a glimpse through the bushes of Dr Pangloss giving a lesson in
applied physiology to her mother’s maid, a very pretty and very receptive little brunette . . . she saw clearly the doctor’s sufficient reason . . . and returned home all agitated” (3). “Agitated” in this sense almost certainly references some sort of sexual frustration, and Voltaire’s rather obsequious and sneeringly technical term “applied physiology” is a euphemism for Pangloss having sexual intercourse with Paquette, the royal maid.

Cunégonde’s observation of the philosopher’s indiscretion verifies the Lockean doctrine of improperly formulated ideas, for Locke theorizes that “the defect in naturals seems to proceed from want of quickness, activity, and motion, in the intellectual faculties, whereby they are deprived of reason.”¹¹² When Cunégonde witnesses this wanton act, she does not understand what is happening, but because Pangloss has always presented himself as the perspicacious teacher, she intuits that it is permissible to follow his example by aping the intimate act; she truly is an innocent bystander in every sense of the term. In presenting scenes of a sexual nature, Voltaire often uses snappy phrasing and/or lewd imagery to elicit a laugh from the reader, in this instance noting that Cunégonde was “filled with desire to be a scientist, musing that she might well be able to be young Candide’s sufficient reason, just as he could well be hers” (3). Her belief that Pangloss is practicing “applied physiology” compels Cunégonde to “desire” being a scientist, which again is a seeming allusion to sexual desire rather than intellectual curiosity.

Johnson relies upon a more visceral means of humor in the opening of chapter eleven of Rasselas. Rasselas, subject to Imlac’s often redundant diatribes (as opposed to actions like Pangloss’s), suddenly loses any sense of decorum or even respect for his aged tutor. After Imlac’s lengthy dissertation upon poetry, Rasselas comically erupts, “Enough! Thou hast convinced me, that no human being can ever be a poet” (46). One can almost visualize the frustrated young man reaching his boiling point after hearing the learned Imlac profess the gifts

112
and talents of the poet while simultaneously (and repetitively) emphasizing that one can only
\textit{dream} of becoming one. In this circumstance Rasselas seems to believe that Imlac’s fondness
for poetry is little more than self-praise, for the latter’s superfluous commentary upon the subject
appears to be done more for bragging rights than to persuade Rasselas to undertake such a career.
Weinbrot argues that Imlac’s lecture is not only an example of him stroking his own ego, but that
it also serves a cathartic function of sorts, for when Imlac addresses poetry he succumbs to
reverie, and he “has temporarily withdrawn into his own world” (\textit{Reader} 183). Indeed, the entire
point of Rasselas’s journey into the \textit{outside} world seems like little more to Imlac than a way to
prove his cynical belief that “human life is every where a state in which much is to be endured,
and little to be enjoyed” (50). Candide finds such a philosophy to be all too true when he is
exiled from Westphalia, which like Voltaire’s exile from France is accompanied by scorn and a
public beating.\textsuperscript{183}

After witnessing Pangloss’s indiscretion, Cunégonde is understandably curious to imitate
what she has seen. She ends up coercing Candide into engaging in some sort of romantic tryst
(though probably not a full-blown sexual encounter), described by Voltaire as a typically
awkward first experience for both, for “their mouths met, their eyes shone, their knees trembled,
their hands strayed.” Cunégonde’s father stumbles upon the two young lovers and,
understandably furious, “chased Candide out of the castle with a number of hefty kicks up the
backside” (3). Thus, Pangloss’s failure to serve as a moral exemplar to his students is the driving
force behind Candide’s expulsion from Westphalia, and ultimately the cause of numerous
torments he must endure in the outside world. As so many books (and in modern culture,
television shows) have humorously illustrated, fathers--or other male role models like Pangloss--
almost universally have a very difficult time broaching the topic of sex with young people.
No doubt one of the reasons for this communication breakdown has to do with the generation gap between old and young: parents forget what it is like to be a child, and children lack the “knowledge” adults have gained through life’s experience. Rasselas’s sister Nekayah expounds upon the gulf between old and young: “The old man pays regard to riches, and the youth reverences virtue. The old man deifies prudence; the youth commits himself to magnanimity and chance” (96-7). Although the prior quotation is spoken by a fictional character, Johnson was not overly charmed by the corrupting affects of age, purportedly stating, “I am always on the young people’s side, when there is a dispute between them and the old ones: for you have at least a chance for virtue till age has withered its very root.” Indeed, in Rasselas Johnson espouses the belief that a change in attitude on the part of the adult is what is necessary to improve relations between the old and the young, particularly when a mentor occupies a position of social inferiority to his pupil.

George Justice contends that Rasselas’s elevated social standing is prototypical of the way tutor/tutee relationships are depicted in eighteenth-century literature. By presenting such a stereotype Johnson makes “the true challenge [of Rasselas] . . . not to devise a new curriculum but rather to reshape educational institutions” (Pedagogy 14; 25). Justice’s argument is certainly apropos, for despite Imlac’s frequently longwinded monologues, it must be observed that he does not attempt to lecture Rasselas as if they were in a classroom setting. In other words, although one can certainly observe multiple flaws in Imlac’s instructional pogrom, the majority of his homilies are not “book lessons” per se; instead, they seem empirical in their objective, but the result cannot truly be empirical. Because a great deal of Rasselas’s experiences are facilitated by Imlac’s coercion or suggestions, many of Rasselas’s gains are not actually his own, but a modified or updated form of Imlac’s preexisting knowledge, beliefs, and preferences.
A great example of this style of “teaching” can be found at the conclusion of chapter thirty-two, where Imlac “coaches” his students to appreciate ancient Egyptian architecture by discreetly mocking their innate materialism: “Whoever thou art, that, not content with a moderate condition, imaginest happiness in royal magnificence, and dreamest that command or riches can feed the appetite of novelty with perpetual gratifications, survey the pyramids, and confess they folly!” (119). Patently, this harangue is directed at Rasselas and his sister--who are *not* content with their present condition--and (as illustrated in the conclusion of the novel) they continue to associate riches and novelty with happiness; so, one wonders if Imlac’s instruction ultimately serves any purpose at all in “correcting” the “misconceptions” that Rasselas and Nekayah have about the outside world. There is little doubt that the lessons instilled in Candide by Pangloss are of little to no value outside of Westphalia, for Candide *or* for himself.

In the process of explaining why everything is as it is in the first chapter, Pangloss uses several very dubious claims to bolster his argument. Among his justifications is the belief that human beings have noses so that they can wear spectacles; inversely, because eyeglasses have a nosepiece, humans are equipped with noses. Such logic seems harmless enough, but in chapter four, Candide is reunited with his tutor whose “eyes were glazed, the end of his nose was eaten away,” and in the process of seeking a cure for his disease, Pangloss “lost one eye and one ear” (9; 11). These corollaries of his illness (syphilis) are wholly ironic: since Pangloss’s septum is now deformed, and because he has lost an eye and an ear, then obviously the tutor’s theory regarding spectacles being made “for the best purpose” (2) is entirely groundless. After all, how, and why would a person with *one* ear, *one* eye, and *no* nose wear glasses? Because to Voltaire, optimism is an ideology people subscribe to when things are going well, and its tenets are much more difficult to adhere to wholeheartedly when things go awry.
Likewise, in chapter eighteen of *Rasselas*, the protagonist meets a stoic who greatly impresses him, largely because of the tranquil façade he presents as reality. The great sage, following the trend of so many other so-called astute elders, regurgitates various rules for how men can live a more righteous existence, for he “communicated the various precepts given from time to time for the conquest of passion . . . he exhorted his hearers to lay aside their prejudices, and arm themselves against the shafts of malice or misfortune, by invulnerable patience; concluding, that this state only was happiness, and that this happiness was in every one’s power” (72-3). Rasselas declares his admiration of the stoic but Imlac quickly rebukes his young companion for buying into another man’s words in so capricious a manner: “Be not too hasty to trust, or to admire, the teachers of morality: they discourse like angels, but they live like men” (74).

Pangloss certainly *speaks* like a man of high merit, but he *acts* like a man who is unable to restrain himself from personal pleasure—and his justifications of such behavior are clearly intended to *excuse* his actions rather than *explain* them. Voltaire, though obviously taking liberties with Leibniz’s philosophy of optimism in order to make a point, equates optimism with shirking responsibility for one’s actions, for Pangloss’s reasoning about his disease is nothing short of ludicrous: “Paquette inherited [syphilis] in a direct line from one of Christopher Columbus’s shipmates . . . it was an indispensable part of the best of all worlds, a necessary ingredient. For if Columbus . . . had not caught this disease which poisons the spring of procreation, which often even prevents procreation, we would have neither chocolate nor cochineal” (10). A man suffering with a disease as deleterious as syphilis is obviously in severe denial when he tries to convince himself, and others, that the genesis of such a malady is an “indispensable part of the best of all worlds.”
While Pangloss spends a great deal of time concocting bizarre rationalizations for why various things have happened to him, Imlac spends very little time justifying his attitude or behavior. He does, however, wax hypocritical at times, particularly in his vow to allow Rasselas the opportunity to determine the proper “choice of life” for himself; but Imlac cannot restrain himself from intervening, presumably once again to exhibit his savior faire about any and all things worldly. Or perhaps Imlac’s vanity compels him to rain on Rasselas’s parade, for if the young prince finds contentment with another role model, it may indicate that Rasselas believes Imlac’s philosophies to be deficient—quite the ego blow for an aged scholar. When Rasselas returns to his newest philosophical guru, who had earlier so impressed the young man by demonstrating “the happiness of those who had obtained the important victory” over passion, fear, hope, envy, anger, tenderness, and grief, he finds the man greatly distraught over his daughter’s death (72). Rasselas, who is by no means a fool, quickly realizes the disparity between the philosopher’s teaching and his practice, and reproaches him (in a vein that could be considered morbidly humorous) by regurgitating the man’s previously-declared axiom: “mortality is an event by which a wise man can never be surprised: we know that death is always near, and it should therefore always be expected” (75).

It may be surmised that in this circumstance, Rasselas is simply echoing what the aged philosopher had earlier preached to him: to restrain emotion regardless of the circumstances. Yet, it becomes apparent that (like Pangloss’s attempts to convince himself that syphilis is somehow an honorable disease) the stoic philosopher is, in his own right, a metaphysical optimist—someone who espouses a particular discipline when things are going well—but when a monkey wrench is thrown into the equation, his tune suddenly changes. Of course, Rasselas has even more at stake than simply realizing that his newfound mentor is a fraud, as he knows that his
own gullibility and inexperience is precisely the cause of his tumult. Technically speaking, Imlac has allowed Rasselas to discover for himself that things are not always as they appear, but he has given the young man a stern warning that placing blind faith in a person’s façade quite often leads to disappointment. The young prince must then return to Imlac with his proverbial tail tucked between his legs, thereby tacitly acknowledging his own naivety. Thus, the question must again be asked: does Rasselas benefit from this so-called experience, or does it simply afford Imlac the luxury of being able to say, “I told you so”? Regardless, it is a very demoralizing lesson for the young man.

Likewise, in chapters fifteen and sixteen of Candide, the protagonist’s longstanding immature notions are revealed when Candide tells Cunégonde’s brother (the Baron) that he wishes to marry Cunégonde, but the Baron disapproves and challenges Candide to a duel. After being slashed across the face by the Baron’s sword, “Candide, quick as a flash, drew his own [sword] and lunged it up to the hilt into the Jesuit Baron’s gut” (38-9). Candide in fact never displays any behavior of the sort while living in Westphalia, for in the opening sentence of the story, Voltaire writes that nature had “endowed [Candide] with the gentlest of dispositions” (1). If everything is as it is for the best possible reasons, then logic would seemingly dictate that Candide would humbly accept the insult and beating at the hands of the Baron because nature has supposedly designated Candide as a docile creature. After all, Candide does not retaliate when the Baron’s father literally “kicks his backside” out of Westphalia in the first chapter of the novel, so why would he fight back now?

Again, we are left with the idea of nature versus nurture: just because a person is supposed to be innately kind, it is foolish to think that he is restricted to such behavior, or incapable of being any other way. Candide’s quest for worldly knowledge is precisely what puts
him in the position to have to resort to violence, and the need for self-preservation only rears its head when he is physically threatened. After eviscerating Cunégonde’s brother, it is apparent that Candide’s inherently “gentle disposition” has degenerated into one of raging indifference, for he scoffs, “I’ve killed my former master, my friend, my brother-in-law. I am the best fellow in the world, and already that makes three men I’ve killed, and two of them priests” (39). Subsequent to being torn from his peaceful life in Westphalia and receiving a rather harsh education during his time in the military, it is apparent that Candide has developed a mercenary attitude in his dealings with others: when physically threatened, he behaves like a soldier at war, subscribing to the age-old maxim that might equals right. While Johnson’s weary travelers are not participants in combat, he nonetheless promulgates a similar displeasure with militaristic practices as he believed them to be during the zenith of the Seven Years’ War (when Rasselas was written).

In chapter twenty-one of Rasselas, Imlac and company meet a hermit, and as the latter relates the story of his life, the link between military conscription, violent conduct, worldliness, and the covetousness it cultivates is once more highlighted. The ascetic pontificates:

In my youth I professed arms, and was raised by degrees to the highest military rank. I have traversed wide countries at the head of my troops, and seen many battles and sieges. At last, being disgusted by the preferment of a younger officer, and feeling that my vigour was beginning to decay, I resolved to close my life in peace, having found the world full of snares, discord, and misery. I had once escaped from the pursuit of the enemy by the shelter of this cavern, and therefore chose it for my final residence. (81-2)
Johnson and Voltaire alike present the world as sordid and although both men claimed to despise Rousseau and his ideology regarding social involvement, both stories espouse roughly the same belief: interaction with others creates competition, erodes virtue, and encourages conquest, and the military inculcates and condones such traits. Locke on the contrary believes that “a gentleman in any age ought to be so bred, as to be fitted to bear Arms, and be a Soldier” (Education 19).

Nowhere is Candide’s militant (actually ruthless) behavior more apparent than in chapter sixteen, and it is not only the result of external influences, but also a reflection upon Pangloss’s failure to instill good judgment and rationale into his pupil. Rather than observing an uncertain situation fully and acting accordingly, Candide submits to his own preconceived notions of propriety by panicking and acting rashly. The young man’s value system is thoroughly tested when he hears the cries of “two completely naked girls . . . pursued by two monkeys who were nibbling at their bottoms” (40). He cannot determine if the shouts he hears are the result of pleasure or pain, but without any further observation or deliberation, Candide “raised his Spanish double-barreled gun, fired, and killed the two monkeys” (40). After his abrupt act Candide realizes that the women and monkeys are actually lovers, and although he sees that the women are grief-stricken over the death of their paramours, his initial response is not that of pity or remorse, traits that Candide has supposedly possessed since birth.

In fact, Candide’s initial thoughts revolve around his redemption and potential financial gain: “If it was a sin to kill an Inquisitor and a Jesuit, I’ve certainly atoned for it by saving the lives of these two girls. Perhaps the two young ladies are well-to-do and this chance episode will prove to be of great advantage to us heareabouts” (41). Cacambo, Candide’s manservant—who (like the supposedly erudite Pangloss) is labeled a Renaissance Man, for “he had been a choir
boy, sexton, sailor, monk, commercial agent, soldier, and lackey” (34)--explains to Candide that in some areas of the world, conduct like that of the girls they have “rescued” is not unusual. Cacambo then craftily uses a double entendre which makes it appear as if he is questioning the hedonistic education of the girls, although in reality he is subtly mocking Candide’s knowledge, or lack thereof: “You see how people behave when they haven’t had a bit of education” (41). Ironically it is Candide’s servant who implies that when ignorance prevails wisdom is nonexistent, and the ultimate exhibition of such ignorance is not necessarily found in the execution of the reckless act itself, but the failure to recognize its impropriety after the fact, a la Candide.

One may conclude that many, if not all, of these acts are predicated upon Candide’s exposure to the outside world via the military, and it is readily apparent that Voltaire was no fan of war, for he sarcastically writes in his Philosophical Dictionary (1764), “It is doubtless a very fine art that desolates the countryside, destroys habitations, and in a common year causes the death of from forty thousand men out of one hundred thousand” (228). In Candide Voltaire systematically destroys illusions of camaraderie in the armed service and revoltingly depicts the horrors of military conflict. In chapter two, Candide “enlists” in the Bulgar army by unwittingly drinking to the health of the Bulgar King, at which time “his feet were promptly clapped in irons and he was taken off to the regiment.” Voltaire here implies that enlisting in the service differs only marginally from being abducted, and in this circumstance physically menacing grunts put Candide through his paces by giving him “thirty strokes of the birch” (5). When Candide finally becomes a serviceable combatant, the number of lashes he receives is generously reduced to ten, which is another instance of Voltaire’s suggestion that life in the reserves is cruel for the mere
sake of cruelty, and that the rewards one receives are nothing more than reduced forms of punishment.

Around the time Johnson was composing *Rasselas*, Englishman John Harrison was perfecting the maritime chronometer (which he finally patented in 1761 after three decades of work). While the chronometer’s fundamental use is to help navigators and astronomers determine longitude, Johnson almost certainly believed that such inventions would only be used to supplement England’s mercantile and imperialist desires. Improving the accuracy of navigation almost certainly meant a greater investment on England’s part in colonial advancement, which in turn led to a heightened need to protect sailing vessels with more/better guns and cannons. Johnson clearly viewed such “improvements” negatively—-not because technology is evil in and of itself--but because the motivation for more efficient and devastating weaponry is greed, and the final result will be increased bloodshed.

Further, as we can see in his political essays *Observations on the Present State of Affairs* (1756) and *Taxation no Tyranny* (1775), Johnson believed that imperialism and commercialism were in part to blame for the propagation of these deadly inventions. Johnson’s Sermon 24 aptly and succinctly sums up his view of imperial speculation: “Property, if not virtuously enjoyed, can only corrupt the possessor and give him the power to injure others. Trade may make us rich; but riches, without goodness, cannot make us happy” (*Sermons* 254). Nicholas Hudson adds that Johnson “believed commerce was ruining the nation and making it more effeminate,” concluding that “*Rasselas* addresses such concerns about ‘luxury.’” In chapter six of *Rasselas*, Johnson, invoking perhaps his most palpable use of satire, pokes fun at new developments in military technology and wholly displays his qualms with men using their ingenuity for malicious ends as opposed to helping improve general wellbeing.
As previously mentioned, Rasselas meets an inventor whom he believes has created a device which will enable men to fly, but the reason this man works so diligently on the project is threefold, and none of the reasons are virtuous in the least. 1) The inventor wants to be able to defend himself from potential enemies; 2) He does not plan to market the apparatus because he does not want others to possess the same advantages he does; and 3) The aviator is clearly motivated by the potential fame and wealth his inventions may yield him, for he passes countless days “imagining that the time would come when all his acquisitions should be of use to him in the open world” (23). The entire scenario parallels the Third Voyage of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), when the monarch of Laputa explains to Gulliver the advantages of ruling an island that can move through the skies. By virtue of this maneuverability, Laputa can defeat its enemies in two equally horrifying ways: hovering over hostile lands thus depriving people there rain and sunlight; and, by literally lowering the island onto other territories, thereby crushing inhabitants there. In other words, such inventions, even if initially intended to serve an admirable purpose—such as escaping a deadly conflict—will almost certainly be subject to corruption. The idea of countries actively attempting to dominate enemies (as opposed to merely defending one’s homeland against a potential invasion) is clearly at the root of Swift’s satire, and the ramifications of the aggressive conquests described by the Laputian monarch are described in even gorier detail by Voltaire.

In chapter nineteen of *Candide* Voltaire’s commentary regarding colonial expansion becomes much more subversive than satirical. While in Surinam, Candide is horrified when he sees a black man missing an arm and a leg struggling on the ground. The man tells Candide that he has been enslaved by a Dutch trader and his limbs have been hacked off by his master as a form of punishment. Not coincidentally, his master’s hypocrisy in converting his slaves to
Christianity is concordant with Pangloss’s attempts to indoctrinate Candide with the tenets of optimism: “The Dutch fetishes who converted me tell me every Sunday that we are all the sons of Adam, whites and blacks alike. I’m no genealogist, but if these preachers are right, we are all cousins born of first-cousins. Well, you will grant me that you can’t treat a relative much worse than this” (54). Fundamentally, the Dutch slave owner’s espousal of the interconnectedness of all human beings differs only marginally from Pangloss’s optimistic notion that every episode in a person’s life is somehow predicated upon a previous one; and this similarity is evidently not lost on Candide. Upon finally realizing that this tutor’s philosophical system is nonsensical, Candide states, “O Pangloss . . . I shall finally have to renounce your Optimism” (54). Also of interest in chapter nineteen is that, when Candide finally loses faith in Pangloss’s teachings, he meets his “substitute mentor” Martin, whom Candide hopes will “keep him amused on the voyage” (57; my emphasis). Similarly to Rasselas exchanging the failed inventor for Imlac, Candide latches on to whomever he can as a means to an end. His end, though, seems to differ from Rasselas’s, for Johnson’s protagonist yearns to escape from the Happy Valley while Candide is apparently willing to settle for “amusement.”

Four chapters later, Voltaire’s assault against the tactics of France and England becomes even more of an affront. Candide asks whether or not the English are as crazy as the French to which Martin “amusingly” replies: “It’s a different kind of madness. As you know, [France and England] are at war over a few acres of snow across in Canada, and they’re spending more on this war than the whole of Canada is worth” (72). Here we see that no country—not even his own—is safe from Voltaire’s satirical onslaught, and his belief in the absurdity of the entire premise of the French-Indian War becomes deliberately obvious. Voltaire furthers this commentary with stinging irony, as Martin explains to Candide why an English admiral is being
executed: “He gave battle to a French admiral, and it has been found that he wasn’t close
enough,” to which Candide logically replies, “But the French admiral was just as far away from
the English admiral as he was from him!” Martin sums up the arbitrariness of military discipline,
concluding: “In this country is considered a good thing to kill an admiral from time to time so as
to encourage the others” (73).

Surprisingly, despite his renowned nationalism, Johnson takes a similar tack in Rasselas
by clearly dismissing England’s fanaticism with warfare. Thomas M. Curley notes that Johnson,
similarly to Voltaire, presented his homeland’s involvement in the Seven Years War as no better-
-and indeed, possibly worse--than its arch nemesis, France.\textsuperscript{190} Observations on the Present State
of Affairs (1756) antedates Rasselas and Candide by three years, but within its pages, Johnson
sounds much like precursor to Voltaire’s philosopher Martin, reducing England and France’s
involvement in the Seven Years’ War to nothing more than “the quarrel of two robbers for the
spoils of a passenger . . . and do injustice to each other, while both are injuring the Indians”
(Observations 188). Further, in Taxation no Tyranny (1775) Johnson utilizes a metaphor which
parallels Voltaire’s depiction of the black slave’s severed extremities:

\begin{quote}
A colony is to the mother-country as a member to the body, deriving its action
and its strength from the general principle of vitality; receiving from the body,
and communicating to it, all the benefits and evils of health and disease; liable in
dangerous maladies to sharp applications, of which the body however must
partake the pain; and exposed, if incurably tainted, to amputation, by which the
body likewise will be mutilated. (Taxation 425)
\end{quote}

Steven Scherwatzky sums up the underlying aim of Rasselas in succinct terms, averring that the
story “exposes the futility of schemes of dominion.”\textsuperscript{191} Possibly the best example regarding the
futility described by Scherwatzky comes with the conclusion of *Rasselas*, where Rasselas fantasizes about ruling an empire, but we are left to wonder if it is just youthful ambition or something the young man will genuinely see through to the end. Rasselas’s father is a monarch and no doubt the young man lived a charmed life because of his father’s prestige, but we should not automatically infer that Rasselas would be a megalomaniac if placed in a position of authority (although Johnson does imply that Rasselas’s kingdom will perpetually grow in size and subjects). In fact, Candide’s relatively modest existence may actually serve to make him *more* susceptible to the vices that come with wealth and power.

Despite his supposedly genial inherent traits, Candide should not be perceived as a do-gooder by any means—sympathetic perhaps, but not altruistic—for he has his own seemingly duplicitous contrivances to be a powerful man. In chapter eighteen Candide and Cacambo find themselves in a predicament very similar to Rasselas, for they wish to leave the wealthy country of Eldorado but are literally trapped there. The streets are lined with gold, but the natives there think nothing of it, and Candide believes if he can filch enough gold and return to Europe, he will become “richer than all the kings put together” (51). So, yet again Candide’s virtue is put to the test and clearly he comes up short, since it is evident that his desire to return to Europe is motivated not by the thought of reuniting with Cunégonde or because he misses Westphalia, but by delusions of grandeur.

When Candide informs the King of Eldorado that he wishes to return to Europe, the latter tells Candide that exit is next to impossible, much like Imlac informs Rasselas that escape from the Happy Valley is an arduous, if not altogether improbable, task:

> All men are free. Leave when you wish, though getting out is difficult. It is impossible to return up the rapids which, by a miracle, you managed to come down:
the river runs under vault after vault of rock. The mountains which surround my kingdom are ten thousand feet high and as sheer as a city wall. Each one is about ten leagues thick, and the only way down either side is one long cliff-face. (51)

The irony (and therefore, some of the humor) in the above passage can only be fully appreciated when one understands Voltaire’s opinion of liberty. In his *Philosophical Dictionary* he declares, “Your will is not free, but your actions are. You are free to act when you have the power of acting” (275). In the above scene from *Candide*, Voltaire is mocking the hypocrisy of a monarch telling anyone that he is free to do as he wishes, and it is evident that Candide is not free, for he does not have the “power to act.” The king’s painstaking outline of the various obstacles Candide must surmount in order to achieve freedom is proof of the fact that freedom is only achieved when it is given by someone with the power to grant it. Johnson’s view of liberty as regards young men is oddly similar: “All boys love liberty, till experience convinces them they are not so fit to govern themselves as they imagined” (*Life* III, 383). Both writers’ perspectives on liberty are adequately illustrated by their enduring works of fiction: young people naturally love freedom, but they do not know what to do with the freedom they possess.

Ultimately, Candide is assisted--rather than impeded--by the sovereign, who “immediately ordered his engineers to make a machine to windlass [Candide and Cacambo] out of his kingdom” (51). In describing “flying machines,” both Johnson and Voltaire prove themselves to be astute prognosticators about future inventions, for in late 1783 the first hot air balloon flight occurred in Paris (Voltaire died five years earlier, but Johnson was alive for the event). So, although Candide loads down the flying machine with all the gold he has stolen in hopes of being able to purchase his own kingdom when he returns to Europe, it is fairly evident that, at this stage in his life, he (like Rasselas) is not capable of effectively governing a
Both protagonists are exceedingly naïve in their perceptions of others, as neither is able to deduce that men often contrive machinations that hurt others if it results in personal gain; further, they are seemingly unable to realize when they are committing such acts themselves. Rasselas’s consistent failure to recognize the contrivances of his fellow man is a consistent theme of Johnson’s tale—perhaps in this circumstance Johnson is hinting that ignorance is bliss when accepting the truth is painful.

Rasselas, as per usual playing the novice, questions the inventor’s secrecy regarding his invention: “Why should you envy others so great an advantage? All skill ought to be exerted for universal good; every man has owed much to others, and ought to repay the kindness that he has received” (27). The creator answers that, because not all men are virtuous, it would be foolish to entrust them with such an immense responsibility, but he is hardly honorable himself. Johnson, the moralist, has a point to prove in depicting the dismal failure of the dissembling aviator, and does so with a tragicomic description of the pilot’s first flight: “He waved his pinions a while to gather air, then leaped from his stand, and in an instant dropped into the lake. His wings, which were of no use in the air, sustained him in the water, and the price drew him to land, half dead with terror and vexation” (28). Johnson not only illustrates the inventor’s mistakes, but simultaneously demonstrates the errors of youth, as Rasselas puts his faith in the designer and wastes a full year of his life waiting for the project to be finished, finally deducing that the inventor is no more than a charlatan. By the time Candide’s arduous voyage concludes and he settles into his newfound quotidian existence, he has learned much the same lesson about Pangloss.

Prior to his departure from Westphalia, Candide wholeheartedly buys into Pangloss’s various lectures despite their obvious lack of substance. At the close, however, Candide
dismisses his tutor’s irrational explanation that the somewhat catastrophic results of the journey have occurred for the best possible reasons. Candide brushes off Pangloss’s words as “well put,” but is clearly focused upon more pressing matters: in one of the most famed lines of western literature, Candide assertively insists that first and foremost, “we must cultivate our garden” (100). So, as Voltaire’s novel reaches its denouement, we see a once optimistic (albeit eclectic) band of courtiers who appear to have been reduced to little more than subsistence farmers.

Perhaps what real world experience actually teaches, then, is that humans erroneously think that they will derive pleasure from unanimously accepted favorable ideas or items, such as beauty or money. Bate believes that in *Rasselas* Johnson proffers that it is a “radical mistake we make when we self-centeredly equate ‘happiness’ with any particular object or condition” (338). The same can be said for *Candide*.

As such, Voltaire appears to proffer the reverse of the old saying, “If we focus too greatly on the destination, we miss out on the journey itself.” Candide is reticent to listen to Pangloss’s rationalizations as to why his voyage must end in the manner that it has; so rather than ruminate on those prior experiences, Candide instead focuses on the task at hand--cultivating his garden. Because Candide “was swindled so many times by the Jews that all he had left in the end was his little farm” (96), his desires to be a wealthy and powerful man have been squelched, and he must attempt to find happiness in a humble state of life. Voltaire’s protagonist has apparently learned nothing on his expedition that can serve him in his present state, and perhaps this is Voltaire’s final satirical jest upon empirical education: the outside world is so sordid that the only thing learned from exposure to it is that it is to be avoided at all costs. Greene believes that Voltaire and Johnson alike take issue with the idea of philosophical optimism because they are “appalled by what seems to be justification for cruelty and a recommendation to view it with
complacency.” Pangloss’s final speech, which I address later, is proof positive of such complacency.

During their journey, Rasselas and Nekayah display an elevated learning curve in comparison to Candide, for the siblings realize during their voyage as opposed to after it that in order to learn for themselves, they are going to have to venture into the world as individuals—without outside interference or input from others, including Imlac. Johnson takes this moment in the novel to illustrate not only the complex relationship between siblings, but also to show the differences between the sexes: by nature (or nurture) men and women view power and domesticity in different lights. Johnson, through Nekayah, obliterates prevailing stereotypes that women should be/will be happy as housewives, mothers, or simply subordinates. Here, both Rasselas and Nekayah represent a new school of thought, one which many readers may overlook and one that many readers post-Life of Johnson would probably have been surprised by, considering its frequent depictions of Johnson as misogynist. James Basker believes that there is a corrective element to Johnson’s work, positing that, “Most often Johnson’s intended readership was male and the moral objective is reform of a male dominated society and thought.”

Brother and sister collectively conclude that elevated status is accompanied by treachery, deceit, and paranoia (an essentially Machiavellian perspective) while the middling and lower stations have base desires and little hope of rising from their somewhat meager position in the world. More intriguing than the outcome of their symposium, though, is the fact that they come to this very realization in the absence of their sagacious advisor, for as Weinbrot notes: “When Imlac again disappears, new voices control and report the narrative and divide into gender-specific roles,” and during a subsequent dispute Rasselas believes that Nekayah is “no more than
Nekayah’s solo voyage teaches her an exceedingly important lesson: following the dictates of Imlac, or any individual for that matter, is a foolish endeavor when one yearns to discover the truth for oneself. Speaking specifically about marriage, Nekayah hypothesizes, “What reason can not collect, and what experiment has not yet taught, can be known only from the reports of others” (Rasselas 108). Candide, however, has little to report or say about his marriage, but his failure to refer to it may prove the old adage that saying nothing at all sometimes speaks volumes.

Candide and Cunégonde’s marriage appears unfulfilling, or at the very least, it is undertaken for all the wrong reasons. Candide seems to feel as if he is compelled by obligation, or perhaps even out of spite to the Baron, to keep his promise about marrying Cunégonde. The once beautiful maiden has been ravaged by age and the ills of the world, for she is now “all brown, with her eyes bloodshot, her bosom shriveled, her cheeks wrinkled, and her arms red and peeling” (94). Indeed, the rather grotesque description of Cunégonde parallels that of a syphilitic Pangloss some twenty-five chapters earlier, but Cunégonde does not realize (or is unwilling to accept) that she has lost her natural beauty. After all, since leaving Westphalia she has not only been demoted to performing quotidian tasks like laundry and cooking, she is also enslaved, raped, murdered, and resurrected. Mark J. Temmer sums up the fundamental premise of excursion in Rasselas in a manner that is also applicable to Candide: “Time stands still--in respect not to days and weeks spent traveling but to the wounds it inflicts on the body and soul” (Infidels 100).

Despite the “wounds” that the characters in Candide endure, they all end up as worthwhile contributors to their small society. Cunégonde, a once beautiful and highly regarded woman in her own kingdom, is now homely and substantially less majestic; but, she is marriageable because she is a good pastry cook and maintains a clean home. Paquette, the
servant who passes on a venereal disease to Pangloss, is a valuable member of Candide’s faction because she is good with needle and thread. Voltaire echoes the conclusion of *Gulliver’s Travels* (Gulliver spends his leisure time working in his garden and fraternizing with horses because he is disgusted by his family) with the finale of *Candide*, for at the finish, all Candide has is “his little farm” and “his wife, who grew uglier with every day that passed, became shrewish and impossible to live with” (96). There is no real analysis of matrimony and its joys or sorrows, simply an off-color jibe which depicts marriage as an unenviable estate in which the prototypical male’s superficiality will cause him to be unhappy. Temmer forcefully claims that “there is no love in *Rasselas*, and little in *Candide*,” a logical sentiment, for romance does not appear to be on the mind of any character in *Rasselas* (*Infidels* 98).

Although Johnson had more reason than Voltaire (a lifelong bachelor) to depict the hardships of marriage, *Rasselas* features a much more in-depth and insightful commentary about wedded couples, their trials, and their tribulations than does *Candide*. Johnson’s seemingly negative attitudes about matrimony are best personified by a female character, Nekayah, who is disgruntled by her visits to the homes of various families. Domestic disputes, which she believes to be insignificant squabbles, consist largely of “childish levity and prattle which had no meaning,” and she believes that by and large the daughters she encounters “thoughts [are] narrow, their wishes low, and their merriment often artificial . . . They were always jealous of each other; of a quality to which solicitude can add nothing, and from which detraction can take nothing away” (92). Girls in traditional households are simply not educated to a sufficient degree, thus they are not intelligent enough for Nekayah, who implies that young women living in patriarchal domiciles are not given the proper time and attention necessary to ever achieve any sort of prestigious career. Donald Greene believes that, in the final equation, the traits of the
individual characters in each work are the greatest contributor to their respective final prognoses of marriage:

When Rasselas attempts to defend the institution of marriage with the time-worn argument “The world must be peopled by marriage, or without it,” [Nekayah] replies with one of the wittiest pieces of repartee that Johnson ever composed, “How the world is to be peopled is not my care, nor need it be yours. I see no danger that the present generation should omit to leave successors behind them.”

Nekayah surely has an I.Q. many points above that of Cunégonde, whereas that of Rasselas is not that much higher than Candide’s. Indeed, Rasselas and Candide collectively have very little to say about marriage, which makes them appear ignorant or indifferent about the subject, whereas Nekayah’s commentary is far more astute than anything Cunégonde utters throughout Voltaire’s entire novel, for she is a much more stereotypical female than any in Rasselas.

As the conclusion of Candide satirically demonstrates, women undoubtedly belong in an auxiliary position because everything is as it is for the best possible purpose: “Cunégonde was in truth very ugly, but she became an excellent pastry cook. Paquette embroidered . . . [and] everyone made himself useful” (99). It stands to reason that in Panglossian philosophy, had Cunégonde’s beauty not deteriorated so drastically, she would never be the wizard with pastries that she now is, because a beautiful woman would never have to acquire such a skill. In Rasselas, Pekuah (the princess’s favorite servant) is ultimately portrayed as a sensible character, but her intellect is not recognized or appreciated until she is kidnapped by a band of Arab warriors. In fact, she occupies at best a bit-role prior to her abduction, and it is implied that her lack of contribution to the overall plot of the story is due to the fact that she presumably lacks the
prerequisite ambition or means/social standing to pursue any knowledge outside of her designated position of servitude. The same philosophy regarding the necessity of Cunégonde’s learning to cook can be applied to Pekuah’s increased worth in the eyes of her contingent after her kidnapping: it is only when Pekuah is not present to perform her usual chores that she becomes a valued commodity; what she is unable to do is more valuable than what she does. Weinbrot goes a step further, asserting that Pekuah is little more than a tagalong on Rasselas’s expedition, for she is “an ignorant secondary character subjected to the direction of the dominant restless male seeking his own happiness” (Arts 138).

Weinbrot’s observation notwithstanding, in Rasselas, the surprisingly progressive Johnson affords at least some degree of hope for the future of his female characters, for they come to the realization that whether they choose to remain in a domestic capacity (Pekuah opts to remain Nekayah’s servant) or seek more grandiose achievements, staying single is seemingly the only way to retain some degree of autonomy. Jaclyn Geller notes that two major themes which permeate Johnson’s writing are the dangers of excessive imagination and the impractical attitudes associated with marriage, for Johnson was deeply skeptical of the sacred institution. In fact, Johnson purportedly stated that it was not natural for men and women to marry and cohabitate (Life II, 165), and his marriage to Tetty may be the best evidence to illustrate the vociferousness of his position on the matter. The ersatz concept of marriage, in Johnson’s mind, may emanate from the universal belief that when two people are betrothed, their interests should become intertwined--and his experience with Tetty was exactly the opposite. Bate believes that “while the fatigued and unhappy Tetty wished to be left alone, Johnson, who felt no diminution in his own fondness, was starved for affection” (263). Perhaps this is why Johnson’s writing is often so sympathetic to women: evidently he was the deprived party in his marriage, and seems
to have been in a unique position to relate to women (many of whom shared the same affliction in their marriages).

Almost certainly some of Johnson’s frustration with the idea of matrimony can be seen in chapters twenty-three to twenty-nine of the tale, where based upon her own observations, Nekayah comes to believe that every family is its own small principality with the father as king and all other members of the household his subjects.\(^{199}\) The princess pessimistically concludes that to be unhappily married is “a state more gloomy than solitude: it is not retreat but exclusion from mankind,” and finally surmises that “marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures” (98-9). Of course, because every “family” Nekayah observes is flawed in several aspects, we can logically infer that to her, being married necessarily mandates that one is _unhappily_ married. Johnson, unlike Voltaire, leaves Rasselas’s marriage options wide open, for although Rasselas desires a life of power, he never shows any desire to marry or even to propagate. Perhaps witnessing his sister’s strong will has compelled the young man to believe that taking on a wife will result in a consolidation of his power, and it is obvious that he desires ruling something more substantial than a small polity such as Candide’s.

Rasselas concludes that it is in the cards for him to run his own proper kingdom, but envisions its borders stretching to the point that he can never limit the number of subjects under his dominion. It is apparent that his various observations of the lives of those in power have failed to leave any longstanding impression on the young man, for although he witnesses firsthand that absolute power corrupts absolutely, its allure is still enough for him to be enticed to aspire to such a position.\(^{200}\) Ironically, as the son of an emperor, had Rasselas never left the Happy Valley in the first place, he would almost certainly have become a monarch there at some point in his life (and may still become one).
Although lacking a title such as ruler, emperor, or king as Rasselas wishes, the conclusion of Candide presents the young man as the patriarch of his domain. While some readers may argue that the elder philosophers Martin or Pangloss should occupy top position, Candide’s interaction with Pangloss in the final chapter of the story demonstrates Candide’s position of authority. Voltaire is obviously utilizing ironic humor by means of overstatement in his conclusion, for Pangloss hypothesizes:

All events form a chain in the best of all possible worlds. For in the end, if you had not been given a good kick up the backside and chased out of a beautiful castle for loving Miss Cunégonde, and if you hadn’t been subjected to the Inquisition, and if you hadn’t wandered about America on foot, and if you hadn’t dealt the Baron a good blow with your sword, and if you hadn’t lost all your sheep from that fine country of Eldorado, you wouldn’t be here now eating candied citron and pistachio nuts. (99-100)

To this, Candide offers his rather dismissive famous final reply (“now we must cultivate our garden”), in the process revealing that his travels have apparently instilled in him the ability to think and act for himself and his own best-interest rather than blindly adhere to the tenets of his blowhard of a mentor. The most ambiguous feature of Voltaire’s conclusion may actually involve the idea of kingship or authority: although Candide appears to be the final word in his community (as evidenced by his imperative concluding line), it is difficult to imagine that Pangloss will be prepared, or even able to, relinquish his former status as a revered oracle. Clearly Candide’s experiences have served at least one function--they have obliterated Pangloss’s once elevated position.
Candide, then, appears to have gleaned something from his travails, although as long as Pangloss stays true to his prior form, Candide’s lesson will likely not keep Pangloss from preaching his convoluted philosophies. It could be asserted that by concluding on such a note Voltaire is suggesting that all of Candide’s experiences are circumnavigatory or of no real value, but Pangloss’s final diatribe is actually very telling, despite its perverseness. The outside world has been nothing short of unfulfilling and brutish, and it is much safer for Candide to retire to a simple rustic retreat where he is surrounded by individuals who all excel at various trades. Candide’s home is, in effect, its own insular kingdom characterized by a specialization of labor. Intriguingly, though perhaps not inadvertently, we are essentially privy to only Candide’s perception of the final equation, for it seems to be the only perspective which actually matters—all the more proof that his edicts are the be-all and end-all of his enclave. Cunégonde and Paquette’s input about their domestic situation is never acknowledged, other than the narrator’s brief mention that “Paquette still pursued [prostitution], and no longer made any money at it” (97), which creates the impression that she is now an undesirable woman who either provides sexual services without charging money or that she can no longer attract any customers at all. Rasselas, though similar in its ambiguous ending to Candide, does at least give the reader at least some sense of what the future may hold for the female members of the ensemble, assuming that they are able to make their dreams reality.

Indeed, the final mindset of Rasselas’s cast of characters is in actuality no different than those of Candide, as their return to the Abyssinia (not the Happy Valley) is characterized by plans/dreams for the future as opposed to cogitating upon the experiences of the journey, which actually seem to have had little impact on their potential endeavors. By examining their various career plans, we can see that in a manner of speaking, they all (like Candide) aim to operate their
own respective sovereignties, but the cumulative advice of their tutors seems to have had little impact upon the way that the characters in any of the works hope to live. Indeed, Voltaire and Johnson alike illustrate that in situations where a tutor is inclined to provide lessons based on his own life’s experience, pedantry and hypocrisy are looming threats.

Nekayah wants to create an academy of science for young women, optimistically planning to divide her time between learning from the aged for her own benefit, and passing on this knowledge to the younger generation. It is seemingly a foolish prospect for her to embrace, since her own pursuit of obtaining wisdom from various elders has proven to be such a confounding practice. Pekuah believes that the best way to be useful is not to marry, but to supervise a convent where virtue is valued above all other traits. Oddly, her adventures with the royal family clearly provide her with very little firsthand evidence that a virtuous existence is more beneficial than a scurrilous one. Eithne Henson rightfully argues that education rather than gender determines ability in Rasselas; however, her belief that “it is significant that in the end of the tale both women’s dreams are concerned with running autonomous female communities” is overemphasized. We must remember that Johnson does not explicitly state, or even imply, that either woman occupies (or will ever occupy) the position she desires--both are fantasizing about ideal professions as opposed to describing their actual jobs--as does the central male character, Rasselas.

Both Candide and Rasselas, however humorous they may be, cannot be considered “comedies” in the truest sense of the word, since technically neither story “ends” with a wedding. While Candide and Cunégonde are betrothed, Voltaire’s final emphasis seems to be placed most heavily upon the idea of a cooperative community in which husband, wife, philosopher, et al. must work together collectively to live together in harmony--indeed, the manner in which each
individual is expected to contribute to the good of the whole is essentially Marxism in action. Conversely, *Rasselas* does not feature a man and woman exchanging vows; in fact, the closest thing to it, in amusingly romantic language no less, involves Imlac and the astronomer, who “were contented to be driven along the stream of life without directing their course to any particular port” (176). The ending of *Rasselas* does parallel that of *Candide*, not only in its ambivalence, but in the sense of community that bonds the characters together: the now somewhat motley crew returns to Abyssinia to pursue their own individual wishes, but we are given the impression that sans Imlac and the astronomer, the remaining members of the faction plan to stay in close contact with one another.

By presenting the quest for knowledge in such uncertain and frustrating terms, Voltaire and Johnson ensure that, whether we like Rasselas or Candide as people, when all is said and done, we do feel for the central characters and their respective plights. Earlier I referenced Fréron’s belief that both *Candide* and *Rasselas* serve as mirrors, and one wonders if he did not have 1 Corinthians 13:11-12 in mind: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

If becoming an adult truly is the recognition that one does what he has to as opposed to what he wants to, then *Candide*—despite all its supernatural content—clearly ends on a more realistic note as Candide has literally “sown his oats” and resigns himself to the quiet and contemplative agrarian life. *Rasselas* ironically ends on a much more optimistic note than *Candide* simply because the ending leaves so much in the air regarding the fate of the characters.

Hester Thrale, whose own edition of *Rasselas* was published in 1819, provides a bold appraisal that seems an appropriate manner with which to conclude the commentary on
Johnson’s novel in this chapter. Thrale writes that *Rasselas* “is perhaps the only work of which the end is the natural result of the beginning; and the concluding sentence such as we might expect from the opening paragraph.”²⁰⁴ Her seeming condemnation of the *Rasselas*’s circular plot is nowhere near as harsh as her 1784 assessment of *Candide*, for Thrale confesses to having chastised a young lady she discovered reading the collected works of Voltaire, exclaiming: “How does one’s abhorrence increase of these traitors to human kind! Who rob youth of its innocence; and age of its only consolation: who spurn at offered salvation themselves, and turn others from the gate that leads to eternal life.”²⁰⁵ Thrale obviously believed that both works present an alpha and omega of sorts: in *Rasselas*, the alpha and the omega are one and the same; *Candide* is not only capable of corrupting the inexperienced child (the alpha), but it also serves to unnerve the seasoned adult (the omega).

As an avid reader and astute literary commentator, Thrale clearly took issue with the central theme of both works, and although she obviously had a much more passionate response to *Candide* than *Rasselas*, it would be premature to assert that her dissolved friendship with Johnson or the fact that she was English tainted her critical evaluations of either work. Thrale, in the tradition of many eighteenth-century women, enjoyed the writings of the “French” Romantic Rousseau and frequently compliments him in her book of anecdotes, *Dr. Johnson*. In that work, Thrale makes a handful of comparisons likening Johnson to Rousseau, perhaps none more appropriate for the focus of this study than her contention of “how very similar [Johnson and Rousseau’s] minds must originally have been made; & how much both were altered from the first resemblance by education, prejudices, habits, and aims” (*Dr. Johnson* 22). In the next chapter, I will examine some of the political writings and beliefs of Johnson and Rousseau in an attempt to show that, however ridiculous Johnson may have deemed Rousseau’s ideas about the
inevitable corruption accompanying social immersion, he was actually more in agreement with Rousseau than he ever realized--and certainly more than he ever would have admitted.
CHAPTER 5

JOHNSON AND ROUSSEAU: DISCIPLES OF DISCIPLINE

“Though I should not complete the conquest, I shall at least discover the coast, civilize part of the inhabitants and take it easier for some other adventurer to proceed farther, to reduce them wholly to subjection, and settle them under laws.” –Johnson, Plan of an English Dictionary (1747)

“Wise men often made the mistake of using their own language rather than that of the common people; thus the people never understood them. There are a thousand kinds of ideas that have only one language and are impossible to translate for the people.” –Rousseau, The Social Contract (1761)

Much has been hypothesized, theorized, and even summarily concluded about Samuel Johnson’s political affiliation and beliefs. Thrale believed that Johnson was “a Tory in what he calls the truest sense of the Word” (Dr. Johnson 51) while Boswell upheld the myth of Johnson as “the infant Hercules of toryism” (Life I, 38). Hawkins contrarily avers that Johnson’s 1770 pamphlet The False Alarm mocks the presupposed reputation of Tories as loyal to a monarch whom Johnson believes does not validate or even acknowledge their existence (LL.D 208). Modern commentators, though, have been less inclined to assign Johnson membership to any specific party, particularly in that the concept of “party politics” as we understand it today was essentially nonexistent in eighteenth-century England. J.C.D. Clark posits that Johnson “was a partisan, not a detached political skeptic” (Cultural 51); and, of course, Donald Greene finds equal difficulty in strictly interpreting Johnson’s political leanings, noting that “it comes as rather a surprise to discover that he did not often talk about his Toryism or use the word “Tory” to describe himself.”206
Johnson’s belief in the need for a centralized figure of power (and subsequently, obedience to it)\textsuperscript{207} is perhaps no small part of why many of Johnson’s contemporaries--and even some current critics--have been quick to label him a Tory. If there is any basis in fact for this assertion, it is likely due to the fact that Tories were typically viewed as property-owning country gentlemen with high regard for monarchy. Although Johnson never owned land himself and his reverence for monarchy was “to say the least, unenthusiastic” (Greene, \textit{Politics} 3), he \textit{was} a disciple of John Locke and believed that property was as essential to a successful government as any other factor.\textsuperscript{208} His supposed overzealous Englishness notwithstanding, Johnson sees very little difference between English “democracy” and the more authoritarian French regime in regard to property:

\begin{quote}
There are some, perhaps, who would imagine that every Englishman fights better than the subjects of absolute governments, because he has more to defend. But what has the English more than the French soldier? Property they are both commonly without . . . The English soldier seldom has his head very full of the constitution; nor has there been, for more than a century, any war that put the property or liberty of a single Englishman in danger.\textsuperscript{209}
\end{quote}

Rousseau, though having many reservations about property and its pernicious effect on individual and society alike in creating inequities, nonetheless subscribes to Locke’s maxim, for when communities of \textit{individuals} become readily identifiable by their demarcations, Rousseau contends that “men begin to consider different objects, and to make comparisons; they imperceptibly acquire ideas of merit and beauty, and these soon give rise to feelings of preference . . . from these first distinctions there arose on one side vanity and contempt, on the
other envy and shame . . . according to the axiom of the wise Locke, *Where there is no property, there is no injury.*”\(^{210}\)

Rousseau’s political ideology is no less vexing than Johnson’s, largely because so much of his rhetoric involves the somewhat fanciful notion that man—specifically *natural man*—is better off in a state of relative isolation, an unrealistic proposition at best. Although Johnson noted that Rousseau excelled in paradoxical thinking (*Life* I, 441), the latter insinuated that the burly Englishman was not averse to similar contradictions, telling Boswell that Johnson “ought not to have accepted a pension” given to him by King George III, and that Johnson’s refusal to pledge allegiance to George was inappropriate because he “should not employ the substance given [him] by this wine in attacking King George” (*Grand Tour* I, 262). Many Englanders actually agreed with Rousseau in this circumstance, as they believed Johnson had performed an about-face by accepting a pension after dismissively writing in his *Dictionary* that “in England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country.”\(^{211}\)

Meanwhile, Johnson’s belief about the seeming disingenuousness of Rousseau’s ideology was also one that seems to have been widely accepted by eighteenth-century commentators. Voltaire, a one-time friend (and subsequent enemy) of Rousseau, attacked Rousseau’s seeming hypocrisy in surmising that improvements in intellect necessarily facilitated or hastened a decline in virtue or goodness. After receiving a copy of Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* in 1755, Voltaire challenged the validity of Rousseau’s essay which, at least to some degree, castigates the act of writing itself, declaring: “Literature nourishes the soul, rectifies it, consoles it, and is even responsible for your glory as you write in opposition to it” (*Letters* 181). Boswell recalls a conversation he had with an acquaintance of Rousseau’s who contended that Rousseau hypocritically “advocates laws for the citizens of a state, but he regards himself as a
being apart” (Grand Tour I, 268). It is at the very least puzzling that a man who claimed to loathe books, improvements in education, and fellowship with others was himself a prolific author, a fertile intellect, and a man who, from his own accounts in The Confessions, was actually desirous of social intercourse, but simply felt ill-equipped to excel in public situations. Recent analysts have not had much more success in isolating Rousseau’s political ideology, due in large part to the fact that so much of his personal practice is antithetical to the philosophies espoused in his writing.

Although each man viewed the other as being hypocritical to some degree, both actually “promoted” many of the same ideas about government and the individual’s responsibility under it. The legitimacy of their respective accusations notwithstanding, both Johnson and Rousseau had a profound commitment to politics that can be found in nearly everything they wrote; perhaps most surprising, though, is that each relied upon similar tactics and justifications in making his arguments. John Vance’s assertion that Johnson “has been perceived as someone who must always speak literally, because to think otherwise might diminish his importance” (Laughing 220) likewise embodies Rousseau’s desire to stir the pot in making sometimes outlandish statements regarding what he believed to be the perfect state of life. Indeed, the comments of both men should not be universally taken strictly to the letter, which is evidenced by Rousseau’s rather flippant comment that his own books were “just rigmarole” (Grand Tour I, 253).

While much of what Johnson wrote throughout his lengthy career undoubtedly contains political overtones, the bulk of his “exclusively political” writings came in the last fifteen years of his life. Perhaps the most notable exception is Johnson’s satirical tour-de-force, London (1738), which also reveals one of Johnson’s more infamous anomalies. The twenty-eight year
old and no doubt more idealistic Johnson writes, “Here let those reign, whom pensions can incite
/ To vote a patriot black, a courtier white.”  

Johnson would later go on to label patriotism as “the last refuge of a scoundrel” (Life II, 348) and as already noted, in 1762 Johnson accepted a pension from the government. Therefore, despite his apparent animosity for those who blackball patriots while receiving pensions (as depicted in London), Johnson’s thought process clearly changed as he grew older. This change made more than one person believe, like Rousseau, that Johnson was a hypocrite—even if, by chance, it was Johnson’s particular definitions of those words which had changed rather than his mindset.

Nicholas Hudson, though, identifies the mid-to-late 1750’s (a time period which would encompass both the publication of the Dictionary in 1755 and Rasselas in 1759) as a watershed period in Johnson’s perception of his own country, for “the young Johnson virtually enlisted in the Patriot movement and echoed many of its central themes . . . a position that he strongly reiterated at the outset of the Seven Years’ War.”  

Although London, which arguably represents the young Johnson, and Rasselas, which represents the Johnson of which Hudson speaks, were not written in the last fifteen years of Johnson’s life they nonetheless contain a great deal of political fervor; but his most overt political works were still to come, and true to form they show yet another transformation in his political stance--one that I would argue actually reverts to that of the young Johnson. Boswell’s London Journal 1762-63 may foreshadow one of the reasons Johnson’s ideology in the 1770’s was essentially a 360-degree movement which returned to his beliefs of the late 1730’s. Johnson tells Boswell, “I don’t like to think myself turning old . . . I knew almost as much at eighteen as I do now. My judgment, to be sure, was not so good, but I had all the facts” (London Journal 319). Johnson surely would have estimated that his judgment had improved in the twenty-five years between his writing of London and the
aforementioned conversation with Boswell; however, rather than writing merely out of youthful vigor as we may infer he did with London, the Johnson of the 1770’s was able to add years of sagacious insight to his vigorously opinionated nature.

Rousseau, on the other hand, did begin his literary foray with philosophical treatises which if not directly addressing political matters, tackle the pivotal issue of power relations. Although Johnson and Rousseau have quite different opinions of social interaction, Rousseau does acknowledge that such contact is a necessary evil, one whose detriments can be drastically reduced by “an equal subordination, on the plane of right, to the general will that restores individuals to the same footing they enjoyed in the natural condition” (Cullen 81). Johnson, meanwhile, understood that “the world was necessarily tending in the direction of ever more complex social and economic organization, where the need of “subordinating” the individual’s self-regarding desires to the happiness of the whole was becoming more and more apparent” (Greene, Politics 178), and in his 1756 Observations on a Letter from a French Refugee in America Johnson pithily describes the necessity of self-sacrifice: “Such is the state of society, that part must be sometimes incommoded for the advantage of the whole.”

The common good must therefore be placed above personal desire, and even if the “general will” is not necessarily concomitant with that of the individual, it is imperative that the he submit to the consensus. By placing the interest of the collective above his own, the once separate and autonomous individual becomes part of a unified body whose capabilities and potential supersede those of solitary (or natural) man, whose first and foremost concern is self-preservation as opposed to the improvement of those around him. Rousseau opines that “man’s first sentiment was that of his existence, his first care that of his preservation” (Second Discourse 43), and this observation leads directly into the central quandary of Marxist/socialist theory,
because “members of the working class who ascribe to bourgeois ideas and values exhibit “false consciousness,” since such values ignore the socioeconomic realities of their own working-class lives.”

When it is mutually agreed upon that men are concerned solely with their own well-being, they do not need to present themselves to others as being anything but self-serving; when such an attitude is deemed inappropriate, men are forced to obscure their true natures and desires. Moreover, Rousseau theorizes that when individuals commingle, their natural tendency is to desire the approval of others, positing that “as soon as men had begun to appreciate one another, and the idea of consideration was formed in their minds, each one claimed a right to it, and it was no longer possible to be disrespectful toward anyone with impunity” *(Second Discourse* 47-8). Johnson, though not nearly as likely to be lumped into a conversation about Marx or socialism as Rousseau, nonetheless shared Rousseau’s commitment to emphasizing the importance of subordination.

The concluding paragraph of Johnson’s 1760 essay *On the Bravery of the English Common Soldiers* not only accords with Rousseau’s belief about self-preservation, but it attributes such mercenary attitudes to a lack of subordination and man’s desire to impress his fellow man, which is in so small part contributed to by self-aggrandizing financial motives:

> While every man is fed by his own hands, he has no need of any servile arts: he may always have wages for his labour; and is no less necessary to his employer, than his employer is to him. While he looks for no protection from others, he is naturally roused to be his own protector; and having nothing to abate his self esteem of himself, he consequently aspires to the esteem of others . . . from this
neglect of subordination I do not deny that some inconveniences may from to
time proceed.\textsuperscript{219}

If Johnson’s phrasing here does not appear to be Marxist in and of itself, Greene emphasizes that
Johnson’s qualm is “the result of a system of economic individualism” (\textit{Politics} 177). The
events of the late 1750’s--specifically the Seven Years’ War--ushered in a new era of Johnson’s
ideology, and it is readily apparent in the above passage. Johnson’s once fiercely independent
patriotism and inflated visions of England’s prestigious past seemed to wane in the face of his
own government’s desire for colonial expansion, which reached a peak never before seen during
Johnson’s lifetime. The greed accompanying imperial venture inevitably led to England’s
government abusing some of its subjects at home and abroad, and such a situation not only
incensed Johnson but deeply concerned him as well, as his pamphlets from the 1770’s illustrate.
In \textit{Taxation no Tyranny} Johnson, sounding like an economist giving a bottom-line lecture on the
law of supply and demand notes that dealing with Americans is a no-win situation: “What [the
Americans] can have most cheaply from Britain, they will still buy, what they can sell to us at
the highest price they will still sell” (450). Although in this instance Johnson is referring to
commodities as opposed to land, the emphasis is still clear: property dictates relations between
individuals \textit{and} governments.

Johnson’s ability/tendency to oscillate between an essentially conservative (hostile to
change) position and one that lobbies for more “shock and awe” likely contributes to the
perception of Johnson’s later political writings as radical.\textsuperscript{220} Such a label notwithstanding,
Rousseau almost certainly fits the moniker even more accurately. Oddly, Rousseau’s
“progressivism” might well be viewed as somewhat of a backward looking and knee-jerk
response to the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, a movement routinely distinguished by an
increase in the dissemination of information, was in part facilitated by what historian Jürgen Habermas coined “the public sphere,” which he hypothesizes originated in England at the turn of the eighteenth century (Structural 57). One of the problems of the public sphere is that, particularly in social arenas such as the coffee house, anyone could engage anyone else in conversation because social signifiers like wealth and education had become largely inconsequential in such an environment.221

While Johnson no doubt believed in the equal distribution of laws (because without such balance rebellion would ensue), and served as a patron to more than one destitute or downtrodden soul, it should not be assumed that Johnson believed all men were entitled to the same luxuries in the democratic/social system. Like others, Johnson felt that “there are limits of ignorance below which the privilege of participating in the government of a country should not be extended” (Greene, Politics 209). Rousseau seems to have been of a like opinion, because his belief in the perfidiousness of literature was not a castigation of writing as a whole (doing so would be self-anathematic), but instead a belief centered upon the idea that, in learning to read, savage man--ignorant, innocent, naïve, and above all, content--became exposed to new and foreign ideas that made him aggressive and rapacious.

Rousseau’s well-known abhorrence of social interaction almost certainly contributed to his belief that the Enlightenment (as we now call it)--a “progressive” eighteenth-century movement placing an increased emphasis upon arts and sciences--was actually a corrupting influence. The distinction between solitary and communal behavior to which Rousseau would wholly subscribe, particularly when considering the function of his Confessions, is well put by Richard Sennett: “The impulses governing the private were those of restraint and the effacement of artifice. The public was a human creation; the private was the human condition” (98). Indeed,
as illustrated in his *Second Discourse*, Rousseau theorizes that the concept of modern community, symbolized by property ownership, forced man to become an actor: “For one’s own advantage it was necessary to appear to be other than what one in fact was. To be and to seem to be became two altogether different things . . . [man] . . . subjected so to speak to all of Nature and especially to his fellows, whose slave he becomes in a sense even in becoming their master” (51-2).

If we lend credence to Habermas’s dating of the genesis of the public sphere in England, then we can see Rousseau’s fears in action, for the Industrial Revolution occurred only a few decades after this massive increase in socialization. Because Rousseau seemingly perceives modern society as an unfavorable solution to a multiple-step equation, examining his thought process in a sequential manner may in fact be the most accurate way with which to assess his political agenda. Rousseau views interpersonal contact as just the first in a series of cataclysmic events involving man, for he “expresses regret for each stage in man’s development--the growth of intellect, the division of labor, the enclosure of land, the rivalry over goods, the establishment of civil society.” Further, Rousseau treats property ownership (a direct result of social interaction) as the alpha, and the destruction of man’s once simple existence as the omega, and in the *Second Discourse* decidedly states as much: “The first person who, having fenced of a plot of ground, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society” (43).

When an intelligent--or seemingly to Rousseau’s thought, devious--man encloses land because he realizes that he can profit from it, he must hire laborers to improve his property, and almost certainly those workers come to resent their comparatively meager position. From there, these drones will either exist in utter squalor or rebel against their master if they are treated unfairly; either way, the end result is pernicious. In our current lexicon, we might go so far as to
label Rousseau a technophobe, for he clearly prefers a subsistence-oriented lifestyle to one of excess based upon innovation through collaborative efforts. Perhaps it would be more accurate, though, to treat Rousseau as a proponent of the agrarian societies that were deteriorating throughout much of eighteenth-century Europe. He believed that increasing socialization and focus on intellectual endeavor only fueled man’s material desires, thereby serving as the fulcrum in the degradation of his morality, and his Discourse on the Sciences and Arts bolsters such a belief.

For Johnson, “one of the problems of the growing public sphere was the tendency for people to eavesdrop on coffee house conversation in an attempt to treat its dissemination of information as a suitable substitute for book learning” (Hudson, Discourse 46). Upon first consideration, it may appear that such social intercourse would favor the poor—or more uncivilized, as Rousseau might put it—because they are afforded a rare opportunity to mingle with their “social betters” on a more level playing field. But, as the old maxim states, “A little knowledge is a dangerous thing,” and one may question the wisdom in exposing the impoverished and undereducated to ideas whose ramifications they may have been unable to fully comprehend. In a similar fashion, Johnson and Rousseau both take issue with historians and the manner with which “facts” are ultimately presented to readers, for they are commonly biased and written by men who seek to further their own agenda rather than convey truth.

Johnson deplores writers who lionize important historical figures for personal gain, as seen in Marmor Norfolciense (1739): “Our monarchs are surrounded with refined spirits, so penetrating that they frequently discover in their masters great qualities invisible to vulgar eyes, and which, did not they publish them to mankind, would be unobserved forever.”223 The blatant sarcasm in the passage not only evidences Johnson’s dismay with the transparent flattery
contained in accounts of monarchs, but he also despised such literature for false representations that so often serve to deceive the student of history. Johnson, who greatly enjoyed reading biographical histories and considered himself at least somewhat proficient in writing them (after all, Lives of the Poets is arguably first and foremost a history of England’s greatest writers), evidently did not believe that it was necessary for even first-rate historians to possess a multitude of literary talents. Johnson contends that

Great abilities are not requisite for an Historian; for in historical composition, all the greatest powers of the human mind are quiescent. He has facts ready to his hand; so there is no exercise of invention. Imagination is not required in any high degree; only about as much as is used in the lower kinds of poetry. Some penetration, accuracy, and colouring will fit a man for the task, if he can give the application which is necessary. (Life I, 424-5)

Johnson’s opinion that the work of the historian does not require as much creative energy as other works may be one reason he did not bother composing Lives of the Poets until he was nearly seventy years old; by his own logic, he did not need enthusiasm or vigor to compose a viable work of history. He simply needed to accrue the materials necessary to write the biographies and could refrain from cleverly manipulating the details in such a way as to provoke intrigue because, in principle, doing so would be a grievous error. At times, however, Johnson literally seems incapable of not lapsing into the role of judge and jury when examining certain elements of many poets’ lives.

When broaching the topic of history with Boswell, Johnson uncharacteristically compliments the originality of one of his French “rivals”—at the expense of the Scots, of course—declaring, “Hume would never have written History, had not Voltaire written it before him. He
is an echo of Voltaire” (Life II, 53). Writing specifically of Johnson’s symptomatic skepticism, Martine Watson Brownley argues that it is “more similar to French historical thought of the period than to English.” Such an idea also lends credence to the belief that Johnson “could, and often did, think in French” (Gray, Arras 83). Rousseau displays this “French” frustration with modern scholarship, and appears to be of the mind that many writers and thinkers of his era were simply making noise to hear themselves talk, for he derisively comments: “I have read that the Indians in America, having seen the amazing results of firearms, would gather musket balls from the ground; they would throw them by hand, making a loud noise with the mouth. They were quite surprised that they did not kill anyone. Our orators, our musicians, and our scholars are like these Indians.” Rousseau is also “often severely critical of historians [because] they say with overbearing certitude just what went wrong for one side in a battle and how the other side maneuvered to victory” (Perkins 272). In other words, many historians fail to take a multitude of occurrences into consideration when documenting history, or allow self-aggrandizement to take precedent over accuracy. Perhaps a more concise way to sum up Rousseau’s quotation is to say that he believed many so-called learned men were all sizzle, no steak.

An examination of Johnson’s Idler 20 (1758) furthers the aforementioned claims regarding Johnson’s French tendencies in the discipline of history. In the essay Johnson prognosticates about how the Siege of Louisbourg will be documented by a pair of future historians: one English, one French, opining:

Every historian discovers his country; and it is impossible to read the different accounts of any great event, without a wish that truth had more power over partiality. Amidst the joy of my countrymen for the acquisition of Louisbourg, I
could not forbear to consider how differently this revolution of American power is not only now mentioned by the contending nations, but will be represented by the writers of another century. The English historian will imagine himself barely doing justice to English virtue, when he relates the capture of Louisbourg in the following manner… (62)

Johnson’s depiction of the Englishman’s record is clearly hyperbolic in that the exaggeration involved in justifying his own country’s violent conduct is replete with fallacy and conjecture. The hypothetical English historian’s tale, though its gusto and zeal are reflective of a true patriot, is chock-full of nationalistic bias which obfuscates reality rather than magnifying it: “A [English] fleet and army were sent to America to . . . repress that power which was growing more every day by the association of Indians with whom these degenerate Europeans [the French] intermarried, and whom they secured to their party presents and promises” (63).

The “stereotypical” English historian’s view is contrasted by that of Johnson’s “future French historian, [who] on the contrary, is imagined remarking scornfully on the English lack of reverence for any goals but wealth and self-interest” (Hudson, Modern 206); indeed, Johnson’s French historian is presented in a much more favorable light than is his bombastic, swaggering English counterpart. In fact, the essay does not conclude with Johnson (the English author) proffering any last word or final opinion on the matter; instead, it ends with the closing sentence of Johnson’s fictitious French historian, whose liberality so greatly contrasts that of his English counterpart: “Thus was Louisbourg lost, and our [French] troops marched out with the admiration of their enemies, who durst hardly think themselves masters of the place” (65). In a historical vein, then, Johnson entertained a favorable view of the French when compared to overzealous countrymen like the one depicted in Idler 20. Further, it may be inferred that the
trademark English fervor to personify liberty and freedom actually caused many of them to mistakenly champion Rousseau’s beliefs, despite the fact that Rousseau’s ideal *citizen* was not necessarily concordant with their perception of the term.

Indeed, many Englishmen subscribed to Rousseau’s ideas when they *seemed* consistent with their own self-perception as a nation that epitomized liberty but they had great qualms with his ideas when they were applied to situations the English viewed as retrograde: “When Rousseau’s ideas crossed the channel, they took on a different meaning; citizen remained an attractive word since it implied a compliment to that native virtue on which the British especially prided themselves, the virtue of freedom . . . but the English tended to be defensive about the supposed advances of civilization” (Lipking 118). As evidenced by Voltaire’s aforementioned response to Rousseau’s *Second Discourse*, the English were no more defensive about civilization than were the French (or at least their nation’s most well-known author and thinker). Johnson, whether a proponent or censurer of so-called advances in civilization, nonetheless looked to the England of antiquity as a utopia of sorts227 and Rousseau also looked to the past when formulating his concept of an ideal society and how people under its umbrella should function as *citizens* rather than *men*.

Early in book two of his *Confessions* (which covers his life from age eight to twelve), Rousseau writes that he was “continuously preoccupied with Rome and Athens, living as one might say with their great men, myself born the *citizen* of a republic and the son of a father whose *patriotism* was his strongest passion, I took fire by his example and pictured myself as a Greek or Roman” [my emphasis] (20). Vance observes that it is precisely this brand of thought which Johnson viewed as being so dangerous, for Johnson believed that “any event or person despicable to the penetrating eye of history . . . may be cleverly disguised in the beautiful
garments of patriotism, whether the time be 44 B.C. or 1756” (History 89). Rousseau’s childhood imagination facilitated such delusions; but, like Johnson he nonetheless came to believe that proper patriotism (the love of one’s fatherland) was of paramount importance to forming good citizens, and shows this tendency in the dedication to Second Discourse by evincing his hope that upon his death he will be remembered as “a good man and a decent and virtuous patriot” (Second Discourse 6). Of course, there is a difference between fanaticism--what Johnson believed far too many Americans were succumbing to--and patriotism, the love of one’s country. Indeed, the definition of the word patriot as found in his Dictionary, “One whose ruling passion is the love of his country,” certainly seems emblematic of Johnson’s anglophile sensibilities. Rousseau’s Discourse on Political Economy, published the same year as Johnson’s Dictionary (1755), contains an extremely similar rhetoric of patriotism, for Rousseau asks, “Do we want people to be virtuous? Let us then start by making them love their fatherland.”

Greene notes that Observations on a Letter from a French Refugee, written just one year after the Dictionary, contains an allusion to Aesop’s fable of The Body and the Members: “To free ourselves from beggars and strollers by sending them to America, is to cure an ulcer by cutting off a limb” (176). In Political Economy, Rousseau deals with the similar metaphor of senseless amputation, reasoning, “It is not credible that an arm can be harmed or cut off without pain being transmitted to the head. And it is no more credible that the general will would allow many member of the state, whoever he might be, to injure or destroy another, than it is that the fingers of a man using his reason would put out his own eyes” (152). To suggest that both men extract this metaphor from Aesop may be somewhat difficult to prove from just these two quotations; but, Rousseau’s belief that “law that is abused serves the powerful simultaneously
against the weak, and the pretext of the public good is always the most dangerous scourge of the people” (Political Economy 154) is eerily reminiscent of the moral of Aesop’s *The Wolf and the Lamb*: “The tyrant will always find a pretext for his tyranny, and it is useless for the innocent to try by reasoning to get justice, when the oppressor intends to be unjust.”

Metaphors and their sources aside, Johnson nevertheless subscribed to the same essential philosophy as Rousseau in regard to what must, and will, happen when a political system injures its subjects. In *Life of Johnson*, Boswell draws specific attention to Johnson’s animation as the Great Wordsmith describes how perverted governments will eventually be overturned: “It is better in general that a nation should have a supreme legislative power, although it may at times be abused. And then, Sir, there is this consideration, that *if the abuse be enormous, Nature will rise up, and claiming her original rights, overturn a corrupt political system*” (Life I, 424). It may be quite telling, and no less interesting, that Rousseau championed a return to nature as the solution to man’s degradation while Johnson seemed to believe that the restoration of nature was the only way the artificial, manmade institution of government can possibly be subdued when it degenerates into venality.

Indeed, Johnson believes that “the nature of government should be an increase in the individual’s sense of his own responsibility for the preservation of the welfare of society . . . Johnson does not like the use of power by one individual over another; rather, he hopes that if men recognize that the ultimate sanction of government is power, they will be able to minimize its use” (Greene, Politics 247). Evidence for such a claim can be seen in *Taxation no Tyranny*, where Johnson clearly tempers the importance of subordination with his belief that man’s individual happiness is predicated upon the happiness of his fellow man: “The government protected individuals, and individuals were required to refer their designs to the prosperity of the
government. By this principle it is, that states are formed and consolidated. Every man is taught to consider his own happiness as combined with the publick prosperity, and to think himself great and powerful, in proportion to the greatness and power of his governors” (420).

Again, there is nothing wrong with men conceding authority to a centralized figure; for (similarly to Rousseau, one of the major proponents of contract theory) Johnson believes that subordination is, in its own way, an unwritten agreement between subject and governor. Moreover, subordination can be a rewarding endeavor if it truly is a compromise between both parties rather than a vulgar display of power exerted upon the subject by the sovereign ruler. Furthering this idea, Boswell writes that Johnson declared himself “a friend to subordination as most conducive to the happiness of society” adding that “there is a reciprocal pleasure in governing and being governed” (Life I, 408). The pleasure that Johnson and Rousseau derived from acquiescing to authority can likely be attributed to each man’s belief that the key to a successful society is selfless exercise of individual responsibility.

Both Johnson and Rousseau, then, fully understand that members of a community must concede their own independent desires in order to better meet the expectations of those in power, but this servitude can lead to destruction if personal sacrifice is not met with great reward. Rousseau believes that when a man gives all of himself under the auspices of an improved life without receiving any of the commensurate benefits, he becomes no more than a slave, and “slaves lose everything in their chains, even the desire to be rid of them.” Johnson similarly ventures, “Chains need not be upon those who will be restrained without them,” and concludes by delineating the difference between domination and supremacy, concluding that the American Revolution “may end in the softer phrase of English superiority and American obedience” (Taxation 454). Johnson, ever the precision wordsmith, evidently believes that the expression
“English superiority and American obedience” has a nicer ring to it than “English assessors and American dependents.”

England as greater than America does seem to be the hierarchy under which Johnson operates in *Taxation*, but a more thorough reading reveals that Johnson did not expect Americans to kneel before the Union Jack and blindly worship a monarch living four-thousand miles away. Johnson simply wanted bilateral equality for *all subjects* of England; he believed many Americans felt that because they were so far removed from England geographically, English laws no longer applied to them. Johnson, though, asserts that “all government is ultimately and essentially absolute, but subordinate societies may have more immunities, or individuals greater liberty, as the operations of government are differently conducted . . . an English individual may be by the supreme authority deprived of liberty, and a colony divested of its powers, for reasons of which that authority is the only judge” (*Taxation* 422-3). Arguably, Johnson does seem to imply in this instance that government is somewhat arbitrary; but as previously noted, he was also a firm believer that if a government becomes ruthless, man’s true nature would rise to the surface, and rebellion will be imminent.

In his *Second Discourse*, Rousseau notes what happens when there are distinctions between a ruling body and its subjects, and he believes that this discord naturally spreads to the populace. In turn, their dissatisfaction soon presents itself in squabbling, feuding, and ultimately, behavior which can only be described as tit-for-tat, because “domination becomes dearer to [the citizen] than independence, and they consent to wear chains in order to give them to others in turn” (62). For Rousseau, such potentially combustible situations can only be regulated by laws; but, in much the same way that eighteenth-century English debtors were imprisoned until their
debt was paid (which was impossible for many who had no benefactors), he realized that some laws were simply incongruous with the punishment for violating them.

Although Rousseau understands--and even encourages--the use of laws to regulate man’s behavior, he also brings about the age-old “chicken and egg” question about them, declaring that: “It would still be good to examine whether these disorders did not arise with the Laws themselves; for then, even should they be capable of repressing these disorders, the very least that ought to be required of the laws is to stop an evil which would not exist without them” (Second Discourse 38). Rousseau, then, questions the logic of creating laws in order to curb specific actions which were previously considered acceptable. Was such behavior always deleterious? Or, do laws designating it as such actually encourage individuals to partake in now illicit acts because of the thrill obtained by undermining authority? While Rousseau believes that there is an element of honor in compliance with an authority, his great concern--as French theorist Michel Foucault would reiterate in the 1970’s--is that establishing laws only serves to make man more diligent in subverting them, particularly if they infringe upon his personal pleasure.

Foucault draws particular attention to the idea of the confessional as an almost subversive gesture, and doubtless, the source of much of his contention is Rousseau’s autobiography bearing the same name. Indeed, The Confessions is a case in point illustrating Foucault’s premise, for the underlying principle of Rousseau’s often shocking memoir is to thumb his nose at conventionally accepted standards and practices. And, much like his initial voluntary childhood submission to Mlle Lambercier, Rousseau understood that there are extenuating circumstances in pledging obedience to a sovereign. When the ruler becomes an oppressor, the contract between
governor and governed will certainly change, as Rousseau describes the end of his time with the Lamberciers:

[My cousin and I] lived as we are told the first man lived in earthly paradise, but we no longer enjoyed it; in appearance our situation was unchanged, but in reality it was an entirely different kind of existence. No longer were we young people bound by ties of respect, intimacy, and confidence to our guardians; we no longer looked on them as gods who read our hearts; we were less ashamed of wrongdoing, and more afraid of being caught; we began to be secretive, to rebel, and lie. All the vices of our years began to corrupt our innocence and to give an ugly turn to our amusements. *(Confessions 30-1)*

Therefore, the Lamberciers’ abuse of power has exactly the opposite effect than what they had intended: Rousseau did not become pliable and well-behaved, but instead morphed into an insubordinate and dishonest youth. It is for precisely this reason that Rousseau disavows the inalienable and uncontestable will of a sovereign ruler to impose his will upon the subjects of his dominion; Steven Johnston contends that Rousseau “scorns regimes that resort to terror to generate the obedience and respect they cannot otherwise obtain” (1).

Likewise, Johnson detested gross abuses of authority, as proven by his condemnation of many English practices during the late 1750’s, but true to form, his opinion shifted once more in the 1770’s. Because perception is reality, Johnson likely could not understand that Americans, whether rightly or wrongly, apparently viewed England’s actions during the 1770’s as oppressive (as Johnson did during the Seven Years’ War). Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, first published anonymously in January 1776, was one of the first pro-American tracts to be printed in England, and the date of publication alone makes it seem quite likely that at least some of Paine’s essay
was a response to *Taxation no Tyranny*. *Taxation*, as has already been noted, is characteristic for its depiction of Americans as scofflaws; conversely, *Common Sense* paints a picture of England as tyrannical and even cannibalistic in its attempts to impose order in the colonies. In the section entitled “Thoughts of the Present State of American Affairs” (which bears a striking resemblance to the title of Johnson’s 1756 *Observations on the Present State of Affairs*), Paine proselytizes, “But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young; nor savages make war upon their families . . . Hither have [English emigrants] fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster . . . and that same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home, pursues their descendants still.”

Many Americans, Paine possibly included, viewed Johnson as an instigator of sorts, as many select passages of *Taxation no Tyranny* read like a call to arms for natives to revolt; for example: “Let us give the Indians arms, and encourage them now and then to plunder a plantation. Security and leisure are the parents of sedition” (451). Johnson, whose logic and reason rank amongst his most prevalent trademarks, may well have had good reason to submit to emotion in his political writings of the 1770’s, however. As Linda Colley notes, “Until the American Revolution and beyond, the British were in the grip of collective agoraphobia, captivated by, but also adrift and at odds in a vast empire abroad and a new political world at home which few of them properly understood” (*Britons* 105). Johnson almost certainly “properly understood” what was happening in England, and although his opinions “may have changed with changing circumstances” (Clark 51), if Johnson’s sentiment in his pamphlets of the 1770’s reflects even a modicum of authenticity, then there is very little debate as to whether or
not Johnson is fulfilling the role of *patriot* as he defined it in his *Dictionary* (as opposed to being “the last refuge of a scoundrel,” that is).

Of course, we cannot forget one point which has already been stressed more than once, that John Cannon furthers: “Deep in Johnson was a desire to shock and provoke and we must distinguish Johnson sounding off from Johnson reflecting and writing with deliberation” (114). Whether or not Johnson was writing to “sound off” or “reflect,” *Adventurer 85* espouses his philosophy that one of the great endowments of writing is its ability to keep the author true to himself, for “to fix the thoughts by writing, and subject them to frequent examinations and reviews, is the best method of enabling the mind to detect its own sophisms, and keep it on guard against the fallacies which it practices in others.”236 The distinction between thoughtful, retrospective writing and more *pathos*-oriented diction may garner a work like *Rasselas* much higher praise than *The Patriot*; but, with Johnson’s philosophy from *Adventurer 85* in mind, it is hard to imagine he ever wrote *anything* he did not believe--at least *at the time*--even if it contradicted things he had already written, or if his opinions would later change.

As such, to suggest that Johnson’s nationalism in the latter stages of his life was unerring would likely be quite an overstatement. As late as 1773, when the fourth edition of the *Dictionary* was published, Johnson held firm in his treatment of English philosopher and political theorist Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). Johnson refused to include any quotations from Hobbes in his *Dictionary* because Hobbes’s brutal appraisal of his fellow man was incongruous with the overall intent of the *Dictionary*: to morally improve and instruct the reader. Rousseau, despite being branded “iniquitous” (*Life* II, 12) by Johnson, clearly shared some of the Great Moralist’s qualms with mankind as depicted by Hobbes. Rousseau’s admiration of the “natural” state leads him to challenge Hobbes’s position in *Leviathan* (1651), for Hobbes theorizes that
natural man exists in a perpetual state of war, writing: “If any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, the become enemies; and . . . only endeavor to destroy or subdue one another.”237 While Johnson refused to include a single quotation by Hobbes in his Dictionary, Rousseau directly challenges Hobbes’s assertion that man in his “natural” state was brutish and violent: “Hobbes claims that man is naturally intrepid and seeks only to attack and fight . . . [but] nothing is so timid as man in the state of Nature, and that he is always trembling and ready to flee at the slightest noise he hears, at the slightest movement he perceives” (Second Discourse 21).

Rousseau believes that man in his natural state (which he considers to be either solitary man or man and his immediate family, over whom he exercises control) never even has the opportunity to be put in the type of position Hobbes so greatly decries; not living in close proximity to anyone who presents any sort of threat to him, in fact, makes natural man completely oblivious to the concept of being threatened at all. In his Essay on the Origin of Languages Rousseau asks,

How am I to imagine ills of which I have no idea? How would I suffer in seeing another suffer, if I know not what he is suffering, if I am ignorant of what he and I have in common. He who has never been reflective is incapable of being merciful or just or pitying. He is just as incapable of being malicious and vindictive. He who imagines nothing is aware only of himself; he is isolated in the midst of mankind . . . these barbaric times were a golden age, not because men were united, but because they were separated. Each, it is said, considered himself master of all. (Origin 32-3)
Such statements may lead readers to believe that Rousseau oddly equates ignorance with bliss; however, it is perfectly congruous with most of his socially-based ideologies. Rousseau, perhaps akin to the logic used by many modern national governments, feels that there are vast amounts of knowledge or sensitive information of which the public should remain unaware. Natural man, living an isolated existence, has no need or desire to know of his neighbors’ affairs because he has no neighbors. When man came into close contact with other men, his existence went from a state of independence to one of dependence, and it is this condition that Rousseau so greatly deplores.

Rousseau also looked to the past as a time when man’s life was defined not by boundaries, but by a pronounced lack of them; man lived in a world where he was not dependent upon other men for his everyday existence. In a manner of speaking, Rousseau was nostalgic for these times, although he—and anyone with whom he would ever have been acquainted—had no real concept of what such a life would be like. All he could do was conjecture, and what he could not verify did not concern him, for he believed it was “easy to imagine the rest” (Second Discourse 51). We may then theorize that like Johnson’s nostalgia for the England of old, Rousseau looked to the times of uncivilized man as a utopia of sorts. And, although Rousseau was more reluctant than Johnson to realize the fact that “there was no returning to “nature” anywhere, for all the world, including Great Britain and all of Europe, was ‘post-colonial,’” Johnson nonetheless “considered himself as participating in the first properly “civilized” time in English history” (Hudson, Modern 197; 140).

Johnson thus believed that he was living in an England which he might have characterized as a transitional period from barbarism to civility, and his struggle with this epoch can be seen in the Plan for an English Dictionary (1747). He clearly realized that language--the
great leveler of men--could never be fixed, and so-called “civilizing” features of life like commerce and colonial domination only served to further corrupt it. Similarly, those same endeavors also serve to “reduce people wholly to subjection,” a scenario with which Johnson was uncomfortable to say the least. Perhaps modernity, by placing so much importance upon trade, profit and goods, played a role in the nostalgia Johnson had for the English values and way of life he grew up reading about in works like *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Spectator*. Ironic as it may seem, many of Johnson’s concerns for England’s future find their roots in a thorough examination of its past, particularly by sometimes fancifully comparing it to the present. As noted in the first chapter, Johnson and Rousseau were never disinclined to use their imaginations.

During the eighteenth century, Johnson and many other English citizens were actively trying to forge, or even *rediscover*, their own national identity, and this may be the impetus for Johnson’s reputed love of history. The 1707 Act of Union, established just two years before Johnson’s birth, must have mystified him and others of his generation; Johnson was born in an England that was no longer like the one about which his parents or teachers would have remembered and spoke. It had, in fact, become much more homogenized. Thus, the once proud English identity that Johnson so revered had now become bastardized, and this may shed even more light upon why Johnson enjoyed looking backwards: it showed him how he, and his fellow citizens (especially English) of the world, ended up where they were. “Towards the middle part of his career,” Hudson notes, “Johnson increasingly prized the modernity of England, delving into history mostly with the view of tracing the progress of England towards its current state” (146).

Although Johnson wrote *Taxation no Tyranny* nearly seventy years after the Act of Union was signed (and well beyond the “middle part of his career”), his attack on settlers across the
Atlantic may well prove that old wounds are the slowest to heal. As Linda Colley puts it, “It is sometimes supposed that the Act of Union was a piece of cultural and political imperialism foisted on the hapless Scots by their stronger southern neighbor. But this was not how many eighteenth-century Englishmen regarded it . . . [Some] bitterly disapproved of ‘English’ and ‘England’ giving way to ‘British’ and ‘Great Britain,’ as they were in both official and everyday vocabulary by the 1750s” (Britons 13). It is intriguing that Colley refers to the 1750’s, for *Rambler 50*—written in 1750—epitomizes Johnson’s disillusionment with the present or nostalgia for a more heroic past. It seems as if Johnson could see the writing on the wall, as it were:

> Every old man complains of the growing depravity of the world, of the petulance and insolence of the rising generation. He recounts the decency and regularity of former times, and celebrates the discipline and sobriety of the age in which his youth was passed; a happy age, which is now no more to be expected, since confusion as broken in upon the world, and thrown down all the boundaries of civility and reverence. *(Rambler Vol. III, 269)*

Though Johnson turned forty-one the very day *Rambler 50* was printed, the above passage is not merely a social commentary by a man acknowledging that because he is now officially over forty, he is “over the hill.” There is a much more profound and deeper meaning to what Johnson writes here: England, as he and others have known it, is no longer the same place, and there is a feeling of sadness mingled with concern about what the future holds. Specifically addressing Johnson’s greatest literary accomplishment, the *Dictionary*, Mel Kersey explains that to Johnson “the objectionable practice of colonialism . . . had led to the degeneration of the English language, corrupting into a lingua franca of the converging languages and identities of Britishness.”238
Taking such an idea into consideration may illuminate why Johnson had such a fondness for Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. Although Crusoe’s island is not technically a “colony”—at least at first—his English pride and manners are unyielding, and his success in the face of harrowing circumstances through sheer determination, perseverance, and hard work represent the English idea of the Protestant Work Ethic. Johnson wholly believed in merit as a derivative of hard work, for he “convinced himself that opportunity was available to those with talent and initiative,” and even espoused the belief in his own writings, for his moral essays “insist on the possibility of self-advancement through enterprise and self-control.”

*Robinson Crusoe* is likewise placed on a pedestal by Rousseau, but for slightly differing reasons.

Crusoe ultimately becomes the monarch of his own island, and as Karl Marx would go on to note in *Das Kapital* (1867), the items that enable him to maintain his day-to-day existence are “exclusively the result of his own personal labour, and therefore simply an object of use for himself.” As Crusoe learns to make bread, cure meat, and perform other tasks necessary for survival, he does not need to impress others with his expertise; conversely, he does not have to rely upon the expertise of others to supplement his daily life. In addition, because of his isolation there is no producer surplus; because Crusoe does not generate goods to make profit and because he is the sole consumer of those goods, very little is wasted and competition is nonexistent. To Rousseau, this constitutes an ideal society, although he realizes it is not really a feasible option.

Therefore, as *laborer*, Crusoe lacks the requisite motivation of “social man” to manufacture more, and better, products than his counterparts. As *magistrate*, it is not necessary for him to worry about exerting power over others (or resisting it), because his commonwealth is entirely autonomous. Rousseau believes “Adam was sovereign of the world, like Robinson of
his island, as long as he was its only inhabitant. And what was convenient in that empire was that the monarch, secure on his throne, had neither rebellions, nor wars, nor conspirators to fear” (Social Contract 133). Piotr Hoffman elaborates upon Rousseau’s comparison of Crusoe to a Biblical character: “Isolated on an island, Rousseau can experience his existence in that feeling of “sufficient, complete, and perfect happiness” which makes him ‘self-sufficient like God’” (193). Indeed, after concluding that he is a direct descendant of Adam, Rousseau fantastically wonders, “How am I to know to know whether . . . I would not discover that I am the legitimate king of the human race?” (Social Contract 133).

While both Johnson and Rousseau admittedly enjoyed Robinson Crusoe, both men routinely looked much further back than 1719 when formulating their respective ideas of great societies or “golden ages.” Johnson’s use of such rhetoric is strategic, for he “often used examples from antiquity to illustrate his moral lessons or color his arguments, and he realized his readers probably had more familiarity with Roman history than with any other period; it was, after all, fashionable to claim a knowledge of Roman events, leaders, and artifacts, if nothing else” (Vance, History 87). Likewise, in his Discourse on the Sciences and Arts, Rousseau turns to several ancient civilizations--Greek, Arab, Turkish, Egyptian, and again like Johnson, Roman--to illustrate his belief that the written word (in this instance) had a debilitating impact upon what was once a simple and rustic society:

It is in the time of Ennius and Terence that Rome, founded by a Shepherd and made famous by Farmers, begins to degenerate. But after Ovid, Catullus, Martial, and that crowd of obscene Authors whose names alone alarm decency, Rome, formerly the Temple of Virtue, becomes the Theatre of crime, the shame of Nations, and the plaything of barbarians. That World Capital finally falls under
the yoke she had imposed on so many Peoples, and the day of her fall was the eve of the day one of her Citizens was given the title Arbiter of Good Taste. (8)

For Rousseau, though, it was not enough to simply suggest that only the most well-known civilizations met their demise because of intellectual and technological progress. Rousseau believed this to be a universal truism about man on the whole.

Earlier, I referenced Johnson’s satirical poem *London* as an example of his early works which broach political matters. His other most well-known poem, *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) also addresses a wealth of political issues; moreover, *Vanity* was written just one year prior to Rousseau’s *Sciences and Arts*, and both use allusions to the ancients in order create ironic contemporary parallels. Johnson writes, “Once more, Democritus, arise on earth, / With cheerful wisdom and instructive mirth . . . How wouldst thou shake at Britain’s modish tribe, / Dart the quick taunt, and edge the piercing gibe!” In a footnote, Greene writes of the reference to Democritus: “The gist of the passage is ‘If Democritus could find much to ridicule in the primitive simplicity of ancient Greece, he would find much more in modern Britain.’”

Johnson also alludes to Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Xerxes, and Croesus in *Vanity*; and by essentially depicting their societies as superior to England it again appears that Johnson would not necessarily have objected to living in a simpler time.

Arguably, such an image of Johnson can be seen in his *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), for despite his sometimes condescending attitude toward the Scots, it is apparent that Johnson was greatly disappointed when the warlike clans and rude manners he was expecting to see were nowhere to be found. Further, he clearly believed, like Rousseau, that intellectual and social progress had eradicated the once proud and simple ways of Scottish Highlanders, for “in becoming more ‘civilized,’ the Highlanders were losing their national
character,” a trend that Johnson only mourned, but dismayed as well (Hudson, *Modern* 161). Over a three-month period in 1773, the sixty-three year old Johnson accompanied Boswell to Scotland, a journey that adequately evidences Johnson’s appreciation of ancient history and his devotion to reporting that history in the most honest and accurate terms possible.

In the “Highlands” section of *Journey*, Johnson shows a deep-seated nostalgia for the rustic ways of the Highlanders, an interest which clearly emanates from his knowledge of, and love for, ancient history. Johnson again acknowledges figures of antiquity in order to better relate his feelings to readers whom he hopes, or assumes, are acquainted with Roman history:

> As mountains are long before they are conquered, they are likewise long before they are civilized. Men are softened by intercourse mutually profitable, and instructed by comparing their own notions with those of others. Thus Caesar found the maritime parts of Britain made less barbarous by their commerce with the Gauls . . . such are the effects of habitation among mountains, and such were the qualities of the Highlanders, while their rocks secluded them from the rest of mankind, and kept them an unaltered and discriminated race. They are now losing their distinction, and hastening to mingle with the general community."^{243}

Johnson’s inconsistency or subterfuge (whichever we prefer to label it) is again evident when referring to the impact of the Act of Union on Scotland. In *Journey*, he mocks Scotland for the very same qualities he seemingly admires in the prior passage, for he believes that before “the [Act of] Union made them acquainted with English manners, the culture of their lands was unskillful, and their domestick life uninformed; their tables were coarse as the feasts of Eskimeaux, and their houses filthy as the cottages of Hottentots” (28).
Moreover, Boswell chronicles Johnson objectively--not disparagingly--observing that “there were very few books printed in Scotland before the Union” (*Life* II, 216). Here, a significant parallel can be drawn between Johnson and Rousseau: while Johnson is at times harsh toward Scots (specifically the Highlanders) for their comparatively uncivilized ways, there is also an aspect of Johnson which shows great reverence for their traditional customs and norms. If Johnson’s admiration, then, is at all related to the ignorant and rude customs of the Highlanders, we may believe that an increase in the circulation of books in Scotland helped contribute to an erosion of the Highlanders’ “natural” manners, and that Johnson’s comment about the lack of books found there before the Act of Union is not an attack, but rather a requiem.

Akin to the way Rousseau believed that the arts and sciences were having a detrimental impact upon natural man, it seems that Johnson--despite his purported castigation of the ridiculousness of Rousseau’s “anti-civilization” reform--found himself following the exact same train of thought while in Scotland. So, although there is much fuel to add to the fire regarding the two men’s vast dissimilarity, it is not beyond the pale to liken the delicate Frenchman with the hearty Englishman, for Boswell himself “was convinced that his two distinguished friends would have got on famously” (Cannon 168). Besides, Rousseau evidently respected Johnson, although he believed that Johnson would not necessarily reciprocate the feeling, for Rousseau reputedly said: “I should like that man. I should respect him... I should like to see him, but from a distance, for fear he might maul me” (*Grand Tour* I, 258).

Rousseau did spend a brief amount of time in England but never traveled to North Britain; however, Johnson’s disappointment with the eradication of feudal Scottish life very neatly overlaps with Rousseau’s admiration of natural man. The two writers’ views actually intersect in an unrelated work of literature written shortly after Rousseau’s death (and shortly prior to
Johnson’s), in the process demonstrating that veneration for a more natural way of life was no
more a French phenomenon than an English one.

French author J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*
(it is also worthy of note that Crèvecoeur immigrated to the United States in 1759, at the peak of
the Seven Years’ War) illustrates what life was like for typical American settlers. One chapter
addresses a character named Andrew, who is referred to as “The Hebridean” (from the Hebrides
Islands in Scotland, where Johnson and Boswell spent part of their tour). Andrew is obviously
representative of the natural man, whose relative isolation in Scotland has greatly retarded his
development, not only intellectually but socially as well. It is evident that he is completely
overwhelmed at the prospect of living in a city as advanced as Philadelphia, and he has next to
no idea how to function in a community as opposed to living a subsistence-oriented, more
solitary lifestyle. Rousseau would maintain that such a person is simply destined to be subsumed
by the dominant culture, and subsequently exploited by it; Crèvecoeur, however, presents such
immersion as a routine and beneficial practice.

The narrator, James, writes in language that is reminiscent of Rousseau (but ideology
which greatly differs) that emigrants to America “will be well clad, fat, possessed of the manly
confidence which *property* confers; they will become useful *citizens*. Some of the posterity may
act conspicuous parts in our future American transactions.”244 James, who represents a property
owning and already established American *citizen*, views Andrew (and other such newcomers) as
commodities which may at some point in time become viable producers and contributors to the
American “cause.” Of course, in order for this to happen, Andrew must shed his native ways and
adopt a new way of life commensurate with that of his fellow countrymen; when, and only when,
he does this, will he be considered a worthy component of the Philadelphia community. The
narrator assures Andrew, “thee art going to be a citizen,” and the title will be conferred upon him after one month of useful residency there (95). James, though not anywhere near as curious about Scotland as Johnson, nonetheless questions Andrew about his homeland, and in portraying it Andrew echoes many of Johnson’s observations of North Britain.

When Andrew describes Barra, the region of the Hebrides from which he hails, he presents it in much the same way Rousseau would describe his perfect society, for there is no inequality amongst its residents, most likely because when one is perpetually suffused in abject poverty, he literally knows no other way of life. Andrew confesses that in Barra, “We have no poor; we are all alike, except our laird; but he cannot help everybody” (96). In his *Journey*, Johnson laments that civilization and all its accouterments have contributed to negligence on the part of lairds, who have become indifferent to the needs of their tenants because their once family-oriented, patriarchal society has been eroded with the introduction of property ownership and money. Johnson decries the fact that lairds have “gradually degenerate[d] from patriarchal rulers to rapacious landlords” (*Journey* 89). Andrew’s defense of the laird in his own village shows the extent to which he has become what Rousseau would call a “slave,” for it stands to reason that if the laird cannot help *everybody* he will not help *anybody*, because no man likes to be treated worse than his neighbor, even if collectively their treatment is unsatisfactory.245

Andrew’s “story” ends with a ledger sheet notating his financial gains over four years, which are the result of his hard work, industry, and adherence to the contractual obligations outlined to him by the narrator. Ultimately, Andrew is “rescued” from his solitary existence in the Hebrides and transformed into a pillar of the Philadelphia community. “Instead of being the last man towards the wilderness, [Andrew] found himself in a few years in the middle of a numerous society . . . he was made overseer of the road and served on two petty juries,
performing as a citizen all the duties required of him” (104). While Rousseau believes that relinquishing one’s desires for the betterment of the general populace is an honorable and necessary component of becoming a citizen, he would not approve of Andrew’s absorption (actually assimilation) into American society. Like Johnson, Rousseau ridicules “the pursuits of money, luxury, and excess [which] obliterate national distinctions and lead peoples to subject themselves to any master” (Johnston 95). In his Discourse on the Sciences and Arts Rousseau sermonizes, “Let our political thinkers deign to suspend their calculations in order to think over these examples, and let them learn for once that with money one has everything, except morals and Citizens” (15).

Rousseau and Johnson were never wealthy men and we may liken Johnson’s household, which was comprised of the downtrodden and indigent, to Candide’s farm, because in a manner of speaking Johnson served as a benevolent patriarch. From Robert Levet to Francis Barber, everyone had their designated position and various responsibilities which accompanied it. Within the walls of his own home, Johnson was more of a figurehead than the master, for he was apparently unable to maintain a great deal of order or camaraderie amongst his tenants, and a letter written to Hester Thrale in 1778 attests to this fact. Johnson observes the somewhat sorry state of his household, observing that, “Williams hates every body; Levett hates Desmoulins, and does not love Williams; Desmoulins hates them both; Poll loves none of them” (Life III, 368).

Rousseau, though never the lord of a manor so to speak, did actually serve as secretary to a French ambassador in 1743-44, and describes the position at length in Book Seven of The Confessions.

If his account of the time he spent employed is reflective of reality, then we can see more than one reason about why Rousseau had a distrust of government and, moreover, the
covetousness that comes with even the most miniscule sense of power or superiority. As Rousseau explains it, he was not only an exceedingly competent secretary, but his political acumen was such that he was often compelled to act on behalf of the bumbling ambassador (without receiving credit), which created tension between the two and simultaneously illustrates Rousseau’s idea about man seeking to maintain superiority over his counterparts. Rousseau’s employer later accused him of a crime which Rousseau denied, at which point social inequities show themselves, for Rousseau recalls that the ambassador “made a show of calling his servants to throw me out the window,” but Rousseau simply “walked calmly across the ante-room past all his servants, who rose in the usual way, and who I think would rather have taken my part against him than his against me” (292-3).

The ambassador’s servants, according to Rousseau, have no loyalty for their master, and the anecdote may well evidence his belief that “political distinctions necessarily bring about Civil distinctions . . . the most adroit Politician would never succeed in subjecting men who wanted only to be Free” (Second Discourse 62). Clearly Rousseau was a man who desired independence, perhaps not in the sense that he did not want to interact with others, but in that he did not want to feel as if he had to interact with others. Furthermore, if interacting with others meant that Rousseau was unable to achieve on a level field of play, then he wanted absolutely no part of it, as his story from the Confessions illustrates. Although a staunch believer in the importance of government, the laws, and subordination, Johnson also refused to be anyone’s puppet in the political game. He did with great reservation accept a pension from George III in 1762, for Boswell was told by Lord Loughborough that “the pension was granted to Johnson solely as the reward of his literary merit, without any stipulation whatever, or even tacit understanding that he should write for administration” (Life I, 373).
Again, we see the dynamism that Johnson and Rousseau both so regularly epitomize: submission to an authority is respectable and honorable; on the other hand, becoming someone else’s puppet in hopes that it may later prove advantageous is simply unacceptable. Such a perspective may underscore why Johnson, Rousseau and Voltaire not only tolerated the advances of James Boswell, but humored him as well. Although far from a resplendent intellect, and equally lacking in worldly experience, the young Scot did seem to have a rather uncanny understanding of human nature. His almost identical strategy in interacting with the three authors discussed in this study shows that he did not consider any of them to be vastly different; further, their almost universally parallel responses to Boswell most appropriately evidence the idea that, in terms of opinions or beliefs, none of these three vast literary figures was an island unto himself.
CHAPTER 6

BOSWELL’S TRIUMVIRATE OF SAGACIOUS AND SOMETIMES SALACIOUS FATHER-FIGURES

“Sir, I love the acquaintance of young people; because, in the first place, I don’t like to think myself growing old. In the next place, young acquaintances must last the longest, if they do last; and then, Sir, young men have more virtue than old men; they have more generous sentiments in every respect.” —Johnson, the Life of Johnson (July 21, 1763)

“It is not when one has just performed a wicked action that it tortures one. It is when one remembers it long afterwards; for the memory of it never disappears” —Rousseau, the Confessions (Book Four)

Reverence for and subsequent submission to an authority may be precisely the reason that Johnson, Rousseau, and Voltaire so readily accepted the social advances of James Boswell (1740-95). While none of the three older men ever fathered their own children, it is fairly evident that for much of his life Boswell—who had a tenuous relationship at best with his own father—was seeking the sort of male guidance that one typically obtains from a parent. This dogged pursuit of a suitable father-figure makes Boswell an integral component in illustrating the commonalities between Johnson and the French contingent of Voltaire and Rousseau. Not only did Boswell essentially approach all three in same manner (and at approximately the same period of his life), but he no doubt found many of their responses to his queries to be eerily similar. Boswell’s “full disclosure” about the circumstances of his life to various male role models illustrates his complete submission to them, for “he would attach himself to an admired older man and encourage this person to talk, offering himself--his frailties, fears, ambitions--as bait.”
Further, despite Johnson’s negative opinion of Voltaire and Rousseau, and their collectively negative perception of Johnson as reported by Boswell, the nationality of each sage was obviously secondary to the advice they could give. Clearly, then, Johnson’s opinions did not taint Boswell’s perception of the French writers with whom he so desperately yearned to converse. Similarly, he did not allow the French writers’ views of Johnson dissipate the reverence he had for the Great Moralist. The three men, however, likely did not surprise Boswell a great deal by telling him things he was not already expecting to hear, in large part because the young man relished the opportunity to drop the names of those famous people he had conversed with, particularly when in the company of other well-known individuals. Of course, after having first mentioned Johnson and Voltaire to Rousseau in late 1764 and having received a less than cordial response, Boswell surely must have realized that (at least in public circles), each man was *persona non grata* with the other two. So why did Boswell continue to stir the pot by talking about Rousseau and Voltaire to Johnson, Johnson and Voltaire to Rousseau, and Johnson and Rousseau to Voltaire?

By mentioning famous names in the company of the famous, Boswell not only exuded an air of legitimacy, but it also afforded him an opportunity to test the waters with each man. Moreover, he was shrewd enough to allow the opinion of the older man whose company he was in at the time to prevail; thus, he did not intend to disabuse Johnson, Voltaire, or Rousseau of their preexisting beliefs. In short, Boswell believed that he needed to meet (and befriend) the literati, and despite his compunction towards petulance, he also understood that it was necessary to indulge the egos and personalities with whom he was engaged. A cardinal trait of this understanding was his ability to know when it was appropriate to speak his mind and when to defer to whoever was speaking to him.
Indeed, the first time Boswell encountered Johnson it was Boswell who was on the defensive and intimidated by the abrasive wordsmith, for in their very first exchange, the young man’s submission to his elder was solidified. The two met on May 16, 1763, and two weeks to the day after their famous first encounter Boswell received a letter from his father, Lord Auchinleck. As the letter draws near its conclusion, it becomes evident that Boswell’s father’s discouragement has reached its zenith, as he essentially tells his son to go elsewhere for counsel next time it is required. Auchinleck (ironically) advises: “I would further recommend to you to endeavour to find out some person of worth who may be a friend, not one who will say as you say when with you and when he is away will make a jest of you as much as of any other” (London 342). Clearly, the door was now open for the young man to seek out new influences while far away from his native Scotland, and having met Johnson just two weeks earlier, the letter may well have been the final straw which compelled Boswell to seek Johnson’s fatherly embrace, so to speak. Johnson, who was no stranger to feeling alienated from his own father and had no children of his own with whom he could banter, readily accepted this new role as his uncle had done with him nearly forty years earlier.

When Johnson was sixteen years old, he was invited to say with his uncle, Cornelius Ford, who was the same age as Voltaire (fifteen years older than Johnson). In his acclaimed psychological biography Samuel Johnson, W. Jackson Bate concludes that Johnson’s behavior, “especially at such an impressionable age—involved a strong identification with [Ford] as a new and, for Johnson especially, a liberating “role model” . . . [Johnson’s father] was already becoming—and now, after Cornelius, would increasingly become—a “negative image,” associated with melancholy, a narrow world, and, for Johnson, a rather sour smell of failure, or at least of blundering helplessness before life” (53-4). Johnson’s staunch advocacy of Boswell’s traveling
Europe under the premise of associating with educated and knowledgeable men was not simply Johnson pawning Boswell off onto others so as to let him become their problem; instead, it was Johnson providing Boswell the benefit of his own life’s experience.

Bate also implies that Johnson’s father was withdrawn, and at times, an absentee figure, forwarding that during the many frequent quarrels Michael and Sarah Johnson had, Michael was inclined to simply get on his horse and ride away (20). Rousseau’s father was also removed (albeit for a far greater period of time than was Michael Johnson), for when Isaac Rousseau was exiled from Geneva, a young Jean-Jacques also went to stay with his uncle, who likewise had a profound influence on him. Rousseau’s memories of his uncle, like Johnson’s with Ford, potentially shed light upon how he came to endorse some of the ideas he held as an adult. In the following instance, Rousseau nostalgically recalls his isolation from others: “One day Uncle Bernard read us a very fine sermon in his serious style, and we then began to make up sermons . . . our early education was on the right lines. For though we were almost our own masters at a very early age, we were scarcely ever tempted to misuse our time. So little were we in need of companions, indeed, that we even neglected opportunities for finding them. When we went for walks we watched the children’s games without envy, from a distance, and did not so much as think of joining in” (Confessions 35). In his older age Rousseau eschewed the idea of society and interaction and it is apparent that as a child, under the tutelage of his uncle, these beliefs were already being formed and honed. Perhaps to Rousseau the idea of solitude always carried with it the greater connotation of religious introspection, for he seemingly associates his solitary time here with the composition of sermons.

Meanwhile, Ford’s emphasis upon breadth of knowledge as opposed to extensive knowledge in one specific area clearly stuck with Johnson even in his advanced years; indeed,
even well into his sixties, Johnson would still recall his uncle’s advice on at least a semi-regular basis. Johnson candidly quoted his uncle’s recommendation to “obtain some general principles of every science; he who can talk only on one subject or act only in one department, is seldom wanted, and perhaps never wished for; while the man of general knowledge can often benefit, and always please.” Such a thought process is eerily reminiscent of Imlac telling Rasselas that “the business of a poet is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest” (Rasselas 43). If Howard Weinbrot is correct in contending that Imlac is not Johnson, then Imlac may actually be more like Cornelius Ford; and his pupil, Rasselas, is the fictional manifestation of a young Johnson.

Regardless, Johnson’s counsel to Boswell is obviously akin to that he received from Ford so many years before, and as such it is no surprise to see Boswell taking on the role of pupil with Johnson--the very same position Johnson occupied in his relationship with Ford. In fact, Johnson’s situation within Boswell’s conversational equation is firmly established, for “the older man was likely to give advice and chastisement, but he was also likely to share stories of his own more successful experience” (Radner 150-1). In the following instance Johnson not only confesses to Boswell, “I never believed what my father said. I always thought that he spoke ex officio, as a priest does,” but also advises him: “Sir, I think your breaking off idle connections by going abroad is a matter of importance. I would go where there are courts and learned men” (London Journal 284). Whether or not Johnson was casually implying that he was one of the “learned men” from whose judgments Boswell could benefit is up for conjecture; nonetheless, Johnson wholeheartedly endorsed his young companion’s plan to meet and converse with the
enlightened and educated, even if the men Boswell would ultimately consult were not necessarily on Johnson’s list of scrupulous individuals.

When Boswell finally returned to London after his grand tour he was—as could be expected—inclined to talk about the things he had done and learned on (or, essentially to brag about) his excursions. He was arguably more excited to drop the names of the famous men whose company he had been graced with, but he must have mistaken Johnson for someone who was impressed by names and reputation. Johnson, upon hearing Boswell talk about spending time with Rousseau in Switzerland and English radical John Wilkes in Italy sarcastically gibed, “It seems, Sir, you have kept very good company abroad, Rousseau and Wilkes!” (Life II, 11). Although in this instance Johnson’s perception of Rousseau is entirely negative, one can wholly imagine the Englishman not only agreeing with advice Rousseau provided to Boswell, but applauding actions taken by the Frenchman to ensure that Boswell’s grand tour was as enriching as possible.

Rousseau, despite his reputation as a haughty misanthrope—and moreover, a man who did not wish to travel or move in social circles—went a step further than simply urging Boswell to see the world; he actually appointed a chaperone of sorts named Alexander Deleyre to accompany Boswell on his trip to Italy. Subsequently, a letter from Rousseau to Deleyre illustrates that the former was genuinely concerned with Boswell’s somewhat fragile psyche. In fact, Rousseau went so far as to caution Deleyre about (and restrict him to) broaching only appropriate subject matter with his impressionable disciple: “If you philosophize with him, I beg you to restrain your own inclinations, and to present him with moral objects only under such aspects as are consoling and tender. He is a convalescent whom the least relapse will infallibly destroy” (Grand Tour I, 275).
As has already been amply mentioned, Rousseau was as enigmatic as Johnson, and exhibiting atypical compassion for his fellow man in this circumstance is proof of that fact. Voltaire, perhaps more predictably, did not necessarily promote the idea of travel to Boswell, but he did not attempt to dissuade him from it, either. Upon announcing to Voltaire that he and Johnson planned to visit the Hebrides, the oft cross philosophe replied, “Very well, but I shall remain here. You will allow me to stay here? Well then, go. I have no objections at all” (Grand Tour I, 280). While his interaction with Voltaire is routinely more sterile, it is quite apparent that Boswell attempted to disclose a great deal of himself to Johnson and Rousseau. In the process, Boswell oddly revealed details of his life to the misanthropic Frenchman that he neglected to supply to Johnson.

On the other hand, though, maybe Boswell realized he was dealing with an unpredictable entity and shifted his own paradigm by attempting to cover previously uncharted territory with his newfound mentor. While Boswell’s family-oriented conversations with Johnson, as noted in London Journal and Life of Johnson almost exclusively revolve around disputes with his father, Boswell’s entrée to Rousseau is earmarked by his presentation of the resentment he had for his mother and his description of the deleterious effects her treatment had upon his life. Before meeting Rousseau on December 3, 1764, Boswell provided the former with an outline of his early life (from this point forward labeled Sketch) which is readily distinguishable by Boswell’s almost instantaneous reference to his mother and how she treated him when he was a child.

An item of potentially greater interest than the simple act of describing his mother to Rousseau (rather than Johnson) may well be indicated in the opening lines of the Sketch, as one could intuit that Boswell was hesitant to present Johnson with this rudimentary autobiography. Boswell self-deprecatingly notes, “To men of the world who delight in reading biographies, [my
Sketch] would be nothing, for they would find in it few amusing adventures” (Sketch 1). We cannot forget Johnson’s love of the genre, for in Rambler 60 (1750), an essay with which Boswell was almost certainly familiar, the Great Moralist observes, “It is not easy for the most artful writer to give us an interest in happiness or misery which we think ourselves never likely to feel” (Rambler Vol. III, 319). Boswell may have believed that Johnson was “never likely to feel” sympathy for him as regards his relationship with his mother, but he was quite likely mistaken if he indeed believed as much.

Boswell’s depiction of his mother’s instruction may lend some insight as to why he suffered from depression and was often wracked with guilt over his sometimes less than prudent decision-making:

My mother was extremely pious. She inspired me with devotion. But unfortunately she taught me Calvinism. My catechism contained the gloomiest doctrines of that system. The eternity of punishment was the first great idea I ever formed. How it made me shudder! [. . .] I thought rarely of the bliss of heaven because I had no idea of it . . . I should not have wished to go to heaven if there had been any other way of not going to hell. (Sketch 2)

Rousseau also makes mention of Boswell’s conflicted sense of religiosity in his letter to Deleyre, informing him that as a child, Boswell “got his head confused with a smattering of harsh Calvinist theology, and he still retains, because of it, a troubled soul and gloomy notions” (Grand Tour I, 275). Ironically, though, the mother-son aspect of Boswell’s Sketch may actually have found a more receptive audience in Johnson than Rousseau, whose mother died giving birth to him, thus no truly consistent female figure had a hand in raising Rousseau. Indeed, Boswell’s
mother was never a topic of conversation between him and Johnson,\textsuperscript{254} even though it seems as if the latter could have provided some sort of insight to his young companion.

Even a cursory examination of essentially any Johnson biography reveals his perpetual concern that he was not using fully utilizing the gifts he had been given, and such fears manifested themselves in sporadic, but nonetheless immense bouts of melancholy and guilt.\textsuperscript{255} This guilt may, in fact, be traced to his childhood, for even Thrale’s “table-talk” style biography features some psychological components, as she recalls that Johnson “remembered the first time his Mother ever told him about heaven & Hell, he was in Bed with her he said, & to impress it still stronger on his Memory She bid him tell Thomas Jackson a favorite workman--when he arose what She had said to him” (\textit{Dr. Johnson} 6). In his recent biography of Johnson, Jeffrey Meyers elaborates upon the story, contending that “the idea of death and the threat of Hell destroyed [Johnson’s] warm, safe, happy mood. These thoughts affected his childish imagination and eventually became the greatest fear of his life.”\textsuperscript{256} Such a theory is certainly consistent with Rousseau’s belief about religion as espoused in the \textit{Confessions}: “It is clear, I think, that for a child, and even for a man, to have religion means to follow the one in which he is born. Sometimes one dispenses with part of it, one rarely adds anything to it; dogmatic faith is the fruit of education” (67).

It is a shame that the young Scot was not afforded the degree of interaction with Voltaire that he was with Johnson, and to some extent Rousseau, because Boswell would almost certainly have been shocked at how closely Voltaire’s background paralleled his own. The first, and perhaps most noteworthy commonality between the men, particularly as concerns their discussion of the soul, is the fact that Voltaire’s religious beliefs “were comparable to Calvinism in their severity . . . his values and standards of living were probably largely determined by his
strict and austere religious faith” (Tormented 146). Also of note is Voltaire’s dicey relationship with his father, who wished to dictate his son’s future much like Auchinleck did with Boswell, for his father François Arouet “felt comfortable mapping out a course for a promising professional career for . . . [Voltaire], who was expected first to complete his studies and apprenticeship in law, his father also intended to purchase a lucrative government position” (Tormented 142). Boswell, who for some time had designs on being a soldier, received an offer from his father not unlike the one Voltaire’s father provided him.257 James ultimately decided not to pursue a “commission in the footguards” (Life I, 400), but it seems apropos to surmise that had the aged philosophe been inclined, he could have preached to the choir (Boswell) about the benefits and detriments of living his own life and formulating his own code of ethics over his seventy years.

To suggest that Johnson was subject to the same sort of Calvinist doctrine as Voltaire and Boswell may be a bit of a stretch, but it is nevertheless apparent that his mother inculcated in him a similar sense of fear. Judging from one conversation between Boswell and Johnson, we get what seems to be further confirmation of Rousseau’s aforementioned belief that the religious principles with which one is indoctrinated usually remain with them, even if deviations are not abnormal. Boswell confesses, “Though educated very strictly in the principles of religion, I had for some time been misled into a certain degree of infidelity; but that I was come now to a better way of thinking, and was fully satisfied of the truth of the Christian revelation, though I was not clear as to every point considered to be orthodox.” Johnson, in turn, admits to Boswell that “he himself had at one period been guilty of a temporary neglect of religion” although the entry does not specify at what point in his life Johnson is referring (Life I, 405). Johnson--the Great Moralist--owns up to the fact that he had struggled with his own righteousness, a message that
must have struck a vital chord with the young Scot. And, despite his often imposing demeanor, Johnson does not make Boswell feel like a heathen for his misdeeds by scolding him; instead, he reassures his young companion in such a way as to create a bond with him.

Rousseau and Voltaire likewise possessed religious contradictions and oddities that they shared with the young Scot. Rousseau, seemingly amused by Boswell’s admission that he had converted to Roman Catholicism, told his pupil, “What folly! I too was Catholic in my youth. I changed, and then I changed back again. I returned to Geneva and was readmitted to the Protestant faith. I went again among Catholics, and used to say to them, ‘I am no longer one of you’; and I got on with them excellently” (*Grand Tour* I, 230). Boswell was skeptical of Voltaire and “doubted his sincerity” in religious matters but was apparently placated, albeit vexed, when Voltaire addressed Boswell’s charges of insincerity, answering, “Before God, I am [sincere]. I suffer much. But I suffer with patience and resignation; not as a Christian--but as a man” (*Grand Tour* I, 294). Thus all three men seemed perfectly at ease admitting their religious shortcomings to Boswell, and one wonders if their “confessions” were not strategically devised to comfort the young man about his own uncertainties regarding faith. Conversely, their lack of certitude in matters of scripture could potentially have enabled Boswell to behave duplicitously under the guise of ignorance--because if the great minds of the era were uncertain about proper canonical practices, the young Scot could at least feel as if he was in good company.

Despite the fear of sin and punishment Boswell was taught, it seemingly did not prevent him from performing several rather questionable acts which often involved transgressions committed against his surrogate father-figures. When Boswell initially traveled to Switzerland to meet Rousseau, the first person he saw was Rousseau’s mistress, Térèse Le Vasseur. He immediately describes her physically as a “little, lively, neat French girl” (*Grand Tour* I, 220) (it
should be mentioned that Le Vasseur was forty-three at this time--a full nineteen years older than Boswell). Evidently, even twenty years removed from when Rousseau first met her, Thérèse was still physically attractive, even to a man nearly twenty years her junior. Boswell, who sought Rousseau’s wisdom and guidance as a known philosopher and author, ultimately usurped his adopted father’s authority by having sexual relations with Le Vasseur in early 1766 while accompanying her on a trip from Paris to London at Rousseau’s request.

Perhaps due to their quite sizeable age difference or the fact that Johnson was a rather private person in regards to his own relationships with females, he and Boswell do not seem to have had any particularly in-depth heart-to-heart discussions about specific women aside from Boswell’s wife. Typically, Johnson’s mention of her is reserved for expressing his belief that she dislikes him (it must be noted, however, that the topic of marriage is broached on several occasions in the *Life of Johnson*). Johnson, yet again, may have also been a receptive audience surprisingly capable of understanding Boswell’s succumbing to Le Vasseur, given the somewhat unique circumstances of Johnson’s marriage to Elizabeth Porter. Despite this noteworthy coincidence, the element of submission present in Johnson and Boswell’s everyday communication may also factor into why the young man might hesitate to describe such acts to his elder: once Boswell was in Johnson’s good graces, he did not want to risk saying or doing anything that might jeopardize their friendship. And one can certainly imagine the Great Moralist being less than adulatory of Boswell’s sexual exploits with Le Vasseur. Pottle aptly decries Boswell’s behavior in this situation, noting that Rousseau “would have regarded the affair as a betrayal and would have been deeply hurt by it . . . on the only occasion when he had an opportunity to make a practical return for Rousseau’s kindness, [Boswell] behaved grossly, furtively, and meanly” (*Earlier Years* 279). As much as Johnson may have publicly defamed
Rousseau, it is difficult to conjecture that he, like the Frenchman, would be anything other than aghast at Boswell’s gaucherie.

Further, Boswell’s sexual indiscretion in this circumstance cannot, or at least should not, be attributed to the impetuosity of youth or mitigating circumstances, for in describing his last sexual liaison with Le Vasseur, Boswell declares, “Yesterday morning had gone to bed very early, and had done it once: thirteen in all” (*Grand Tour* II, 279). Boswell, then, had time to ponder the ramifications of his actions after the fact, and had those consequences been as horrible for Boswell as he sometimes presented them to be, he certainly could have ceased and desisted. Indeed, Pottle’s description of Boswell’s behavior while accompanying Thérèse creates the impression that he realized *en medias res* that what he was doing was wrong. Rather than focusing on the task at hand, Boswell “instead of joining [Thérèse], paced up and down asking questions about Rousseau,” and later, while instructing him on how to be a better lover, the young man “brought up the subject of Rousseau, hoping at least to gather a few *dicta philosophi* for his journal” (*Grand Tour* II, 278-9).

Boswell likewise allowed his avarice in gathering documents for his journal to alienate him from Johnson, albeit only briefly. In an April 1768 letter, Johnson chastises Boswell for his dishonesty, interrogating: “Who would write to men who publish the letters of their friends, without their leave?” Boswell somewhat pretentiously returned the correspondence, writing, “Surely you have no reason to complain of my publishing a single paragraph of one of your letters” (*Life* II, 58). There is an unmistakable element of gall or nerve exhibited by Boswell in situations such as these, and it is certainly possible that like a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar, the young man was simply testing the waters with his surrogate fathers to see what he could get away with. It is also fairly apparent that, when made to incur the wrath of his “parent”...
(as with Johnson), Boswell attempted to downplay the entire incident and make it appear as if his accuser was overreacting. Of course, Boswell’s own journals are not devoid of overreaction or overstatement, either—but all end with a variation of the same theme: submission to an elder.

The true motivation for Boswell’s “soul searching” may well evidence itself in a March 1767 letter to Voltaire, where the former admits: “I am happy to think that I can boast of having had several conversations with M. De Voltaire.”263 With good reason, Boswell felt compelled to advertise the fact he had discoursed with the likes of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Johnson; but, his own self-aggrandizement in the letter to Voltaire may underscore the idea that Boswell was not only trying to curry the favor of the famous, but trying to liken himself to them as well. Boswell recounts a conversation with Voltaire in which he actually presents himself to be, at least for some portion of the debate, Voltaire’s intellectual equivalent (a somewhat difficult story to believe), explaining, “At last we came upon religion . . . and if ever two mortal men disputed with vehemence, we did. Yes, upon that occasion he was one individual and I another. For a certain portion of time there was a fair opposition between Voltaire and Boswell.” After this heated discussion, Boswell describes Voltaire as being too weak to continue, at which time the young man “changed the tone” of their discussion rather than prolonging the argument (Grand Tour I, 293-4). Again, we see in Boswell the element of submission to a substitute father-figure, especially when he is in danger of having his visitation cut short.

Boswell similarly depicts himself debating Johnson at various times, especially throughout his Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, where from the tone it is apparent that the thirty-three year old Boswell is much less hesitant to oppose Johnson than he was when he met him a decade earlier. For example, in his February 26 entry, Boswell recounts a conversation he had with Johnson about poverty, which begins with Boswell’s belief that “philosophers and
satirists have all treated a miser as contemptible,” to which Johnson somewhat omnisciently retorts, “He is so philosophically; but not in the practice of life.” The conversation continues, and--contrary to routine--Boswell gets the last word, but does so only after agreeing with Johnson, concluding, “No doubt, sir . . . No man borrows who is able to pay on demand quite conveniently.” Deference to Johnson’s knowledge, particularly after a dispute or argument, only serves to reinforce the relationship between superior (Johnson) and subordinate (Boswell).

The discussions Boswell had with Voltaire were, by and large, of a similar ilk to the ones Boswell presents in his Journey, as they can be characterized by their more philosophical content (as already noted, Boswell and Voltaire deliberated upon religion and the existence of the soul). We see again that Boswell, never one to shy away from an argument, clearly knew his place among the intelligentsia. Boswell’s servility in such circumstances is indicative of the great need on his part to be accepted and extolled by those men whose company he so desperately sought--and this desire for acquiescence is aggregate, for it does not simply apply to one of the three writers examined in this study, it applies to all of them.

In talking to Johnson it is evident that Boswell seeks the unwavering approval of his own father, but is more than willing to accept a prestigious substitute. After asking Johnson, “If he was my father, and if I did well at law, if he would be pleased with me,” Johnson replied, as a father should, that he would “be pleased with you whatever way of life you followed.” Boswell wraps up the passage by noting that he gave Johnson “many thanks for having established my principles” (London Journal 326). It is quite telling that in a matter of roughly seventy-five days during Boswell’s twenty-third year that Johnson would be able to establish Boswell’s principles. Is this not something that Boswell’s biological father should have done, and years before?

Boswell asks Rousseau almost the exact same question some eighteen months later, querying,
“Do you think that I shall make a good barrister before a court of justice?” Rousseau’s reply, though somewhat of a backhanded compliment, nonetheless supplies the sort of reinforcement Boswell is obviously seeking: “Yes. But I regret that you have the talents necessary for defending a bad case” (Grand Tour I, 264).

Furthermore, Boswell sought affirmation of his abilities as an intellect and interlocutor from Voltaire. In a January 1765 letter, Boswell fondly recalls his religious debate with Voltaire and seemingly attempts to coax a congratulatory response from the philosophe, writing: “I reflect with great satisfaction on my spirited candour when we talked of religion . . . you may remember that I showed no mean timidity; and while I maintained the immortality of my soul, did I not glow with a fire that had some appearance of being divine?” (Grand Tour I, 319). Even if the questions posed to his three newfound mentors differed, they all revolved around the same basic premise: Boswell wanted to be reassured about his worth as a man, and as an intellect, by those who were old enough and wise enough to make a valid judgment. Although Boswell had no idea about the similarity between his father and Voltaire’s, he continued to describe himself to Voltaire in terms not unlike those he used with Johnson and Rousseau, for Boswell recalls that his mindset struck Voltaire as “very gloomy” (Correspondence 132).265 That admission aside, his few fairly brief meetings with Voltaire would never have afforded him the opportunity to open up as greatly as he did with Johnson, or even Rousseau. As a result of their more comprehensive dialogues, Johnson was chock-full of advice to Boswell about how to deal with his depression, but the sometimes recalcitrant young man was not necessarily always receptive to Johnson’s input.

In a July 1776 letter (although the specifics of Johnson’s advice are omitted) Boswell essentially paraphrases Johnson’s counsel in such a way as to make him appear cruel and
inconsiderate. Boswell notes Johnson’s “reflections upon melancholy,” and is of the mind that Johnson is “strangely unreasonable in [that he] had suffered so much from it himself.” Boswell is further appalled that Johnson’s reply offers “a good deal of severity and reproof, as if it were owing to my own fault, or that I was, perhaps, affecting it from a desire of distinction” (Life III, 86-7). Johnson was seemingly correct on at least one level in his assessment of Boswell’s disingenuousness, as the London Journal illustrates. Boswell received comfort from discussing his disorder with Johnson not because of any wisdom Johnson could give him about how he might remedy it, but because “the greater the person our fellow sufferer is, so much the more good does it do us” (London Journal 319).

It appears, then, that Johnson’s affliction as opposed to his advice actually made Boswell feel better about his own depression, because if a man who had achieved as much as Johnson could do so while suffering with intense malaise, there may have been hope for Boswell yet. Thus, the “greatness” that men like Johnson and Rousseau evoked was obviously the reason Boswell was desirous of gaining their favor, and it is evident that he sought out Rousseau in hopes of having him as a guide, for the former implored of the latter, “Will you, Sir, assume direction of me?” (Grand Tour I, 231). This request differs only minimally from his imploration of Johnson, “Will you really take a charge of me?” some eighteen months prior (London Journal 285). Such questions further reveal the source of motivation for Boswell’s pursuit of knowledge and wisdom: he was searching for a father-figure who would be able to tell him what he should do with his life, and if he should choose an alternate direction, he would not feel the same sense of obligation that he did to his natural father.

That is not to say that any of the advice given by the paradoxical Rousseau and the equally mystifying Johnson was intended to be taken by Boswell as an inalterable blueprint to
which the young man must adhere, as Brian Evenson notes: “Instead of wanting to become Johnson, [Boswell] wants Johnson to direct him in such a way that he will become his best self.”

A great example of this takes place in an April 5, 1776 conversation the two men had about prostitutes, where Boswell (a frequent patron of prostitutes) attempts to justify the use of such women without actually coming out and saying as much. However, Johnson proceeds to annihilate Boswell’s logic, concluding, “It is very absurd to argue, as has been often done, that prostitutes are necessary to prevent the violent effects of appetite from violating the decent order of life . . . depend upon it, Sir, severe laws, steadily enforced, would be sufficient against those evils, and would promote marriage” (Life III, 18). Unfortunately, the advice fell on deaf ears, and Boswell routinely had extramarital affairs, some of which famously left Boswell with various forms of venereal disease.

It is readily apparent that Boswell no doubt took greater liberties while interacting with his adopted male role models than he would have with his birth father. In his Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, Boswell decided to broach the topic of sex with Johnson, seemingly in an attempt to interweave the tutor/tutee relationship with that of a close friend. Boswell (at this time thirty-three years old) somewhat immaturity admits that he often envisages himself managing a seraglio and recollects Johnson speaking “ex cathedra, of his keeping a seraglio, and acknowledging that the supposition had often been in his thoughts” (Journal 262). Johnson’s confession that he had entertained such an idea of his own volition was greatly incompatible with Boswell’s perception of the pious lexicographer, who jocularly proclaims that the image “struck me so forcibly with ludicrous contrast that I could not but laugh immoderately. [Johnson] . . . instantly retaliated with such keen sarcastic wit, and such a variety of degrading images, of everyone of which I was the object, that . . . I yet found myself so much the sport of all the
company, that I would gladly expunge from my mind every trace of this severe retort” (262). As readers we are left with the image of Boswell cowering in a corner as Johnson makes an example of the young man to anyone within earshot. Once more we see Boswell’s ability to realize when he has crossed the line, and if eating crow will keep him in the good graces of his sagacious elders, then he is more than willing and able to do so.

Rousseau was also subject to hearing about Boswell’s sexually lascivious fantasies; but in this instance, the roles were somewhat reversed in comparison to the seraglio conversation between Johnson and Boswell. Although Rousseau was the one laughing at (and possibly dismissing) his young companion’s ideology, it is evident that he, like Johnson, had seemingly indulged in similar fantasies. Boswell, disputing the morals of fidelity as espoused by the Christian faith, tells Rousseau, “I should like to have thirty women. Could I not satisfy that desire?” to which an amused Rousseau wished to offer an honest explanation, but did not feel he could because of present company, replying: “No! Ha! Ha! If Mademoiselle were not here, I would give you a most ample reason why” (Grand Tour I, 253). Regardless, Boswell was seeking approval or permission to be sexually promiscuous; he was given neither by Johnson or Rousseau. The dissonance, yet similarity, in both Johnson and Rousseau’s responses to Boswell’s fanciful sexual notions--one man thrashes Boswell while the other essentially defers the conversation to a later time--illustrates a concept that Boswell may have been forced to learn through trial and error: a man can seldom serve as both a mentor and a friend simultaneously.

By extension, Boswell’s interaction with Voltaire was rather brief and impersonal, so he did not proffer the same level of self-exposure that he did with his other two exalted figures. That noted, perhaps one of the most enlightening conversations Boswell had on his journey was actually about Voltaire. Presumably because his own interviews with Voltaire provided him
little or no intimate knowledge, Boswell resourcefully turned to Voltaire’s physician, Théodore Tronchin (b. 1709, the same year as Johnson), in hopes of finding out more. Again, though, what he discovered may not have been exactly what he was hoping to, for Tronchin declared that Voltaire “is mad. I call any man mad who has no fixed principles to serve him as a compass in the great crises of life. Such a man is the weakest creature in existence” (Grand Tour I, 314). As shown in his earlier conversation with Rousseau about Christian morals, Boswell was no more stable in a religious sense than was Voltaire.

Further, the dialogue between Tronchin and Boswell seemingly did not taint the young man’s view of the witty Frenchman, as evidenced by his subsequent repeated boasting about having met and discoursed with Voltaire. In the Life of Johnson (published over a generation after his meeting Voltaire), when writing of Johnson’s lifelong struggles with faith, Boswell defends his mentor in terms that denounce Tronchin’s castigation of Voltaire: “Let [the profane and licentious] not thoughtlessly say that Johnson was an hypocrite, or that his principles were not firm, because his practice was not uniformly conformable to what he professed” (Life IV, 396). Boswell, then, apparently came to understand that everyone is a critic, and to allow others’ negative judgments to erode the beliefs he had searched far and wide to attain was ultimately defeating to his project of creating his best possible self. It is no doubt a valid contention to suggest that without having met this trifecta of great, yet somewhat afflicted minds, James Boswell--as he came to define and perceive himself--would never have existed.

The impressionable young man undoubtedly hoped that his involvement with this triad of great writers/thinkers would serve him in good stead; and although he initially felt compelled to emulate his newfound idols, it is also evident that when he finally found his own way in the world, he did in fact become his own man. In his writings, Boswell does not seek to be a
polemist, philosopher, moralist, or lexicographer. Instead, Boswell’s literature is readily identifiable by its lack of stylistic flair and complexity; and while he certainly did not imitate Johnson’s style of writing, Boswell nevertheless followed Johnson’s maxim supplied in *Rambler* No. 4 (1750), which states that good writing requires “experience which can never be attained by solitary diligence, but must arise from general converse, and accurate observation of the living world” (*Rambler* Vol. III, 20).

Had Boswell simply obeyed his father and studied law without first traversing Europe, his general converse and observation of the living world would have been much more greatly prohibited. Even if his interaction with the French contingent of Voltaire and Rousseau was comparatively speaking, minimal, the conversations prompted by the mere mention of their names in the *Life of Johnson* shed no small amount of light upon how Johnson viewed the French and their various philosophies. Boswell’s real-life actions may cast doubt upon the amount of regard he had for any of his surrogate fathers, but the confoundedness Boswell seems to have experienced when Johnson assailed the beliefs of Voltaire and Rousseau implies that, even in the face of the man he arguably revered above all others, Boswell was unable to completely separate himself from the sphere of influence he experienced on his travels.

Marlies K. Danzinger adds that “by the very excitement of meeting Rousseau and Voltaire, [Boswell] became more expansive in his presentation in his journal, able to set down complex ideas more fully than before.”267 Indeed, the French “contributions” to the *Life of Johnson* are not only some of the most entertaining found within Boswell’s tour-de-force, but one wonders if the entire work would have the same complexion had Boswell only ventured to have one “father,” that being Johnson himself.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

All too often, a writer’s legacy is defined, if not tarnished by, his actions and behavior as opposed to his writing itself. For example, when reading Johnson’s Life of Milton, it is readily apparent that Johnson--try as he might--could simply not ignore the fact that Milton’s puritanical ideology was at odds with his own. Johnson, in large part due to being the subject of the most famous literary biography in the history of the English language, has fallen victim to much the same treatment over the past two-hundred plus years. Because the vast reading audience of the Life of Johnson was (at least initially) British, they--like Johnson with Milton--were afforded the luxury of judging the propriety of Johnson the man as opposed to Johnson the writer based upon their own unique value system as Britons. As the work became more popular over time, many readers felt that reading Boswell’s Life was a suitable replacement for reading Johnson’s writing; thus, Johnson the character has come to be more readily identified, quoted, and misquoted than Johnson the author.

Completing the Dictionary established Johnson as England’s foremost man of letters and his lofty ambition to solidify the English language compelled many to treat the work as a source of national pride. Therefore, Johnson became as much of a cultural icon as a writer and, I contend, that despite the distinctly anti-English elements of many of his productions (Rasselas, Observations on the Present State of Affairs, and The False Alarm for example), readers had already constructed an image of “Dictionary” Johnson, whose immense intellectual and physical power embodied all that was great about England as a nation. In other words, Johnson’s
reputation preceded him to the point that what he actually wrote was less important than the fact that he was the one writing it. Johnson had a heavy hand in shaping and molding this image, and because he “disdained the idea that others wanted to control him” (Vance, Laughing 221), Johnson also attempted to manipulate his persona while in Boswell’s presence. Quite possibly, then, Johnson took calculated measures to make his public/conversational demeanor consonant with the ideal readers held of him, even if his presentation was not always reflective of the genuine article.

Indeed, how many acquaintances of Johnson would have believed that he had nearly four-dozen works of French literature in his personal library? Further, how many readers with no knowledge of Johnson the man would have ever conceived such a possibility? Johnson almost certainly believed he had a certain image to uphold, and even if it was based upon a misconception, he nonetheless maintained it rigidly. Hawkins, referring to Johnson’s 1775 trip to France, humorously remarks that Johnson’s

Garb and mode of dressing, if it could be called dressing, had long been so inflexibly determined, as to resist all the innovations of fashion. His friends had therefore great difficulty in persuading him to such a compliance in this respect, as might serve to keep them in countenance, and secure them from the danger of ridicule: he yielded to their remonstrances so far as to dress in a suit of black and a Bourgeois wig, but resisted their importunity to wear ruffles. (LL.D 239)

It is certainly not inappropriate to refer to a passage from Voltaire’s Philosophical Dictionary in conjunction with Hawkins’s anecdote about Johnson’s wardrobe. In the section entitled “Prejudices,” Voltaire describes an individual who (at least in appearance) resembles Johnson, and explains that such a man dresses and acts as he does in an attempt to garner respect from
those who do not know him. However, when one becomes more familiar with such an individual, the previously held veneration disintegrates, for

It is through prejudice that you will respect a man dressed in certain clothes, one who walks and talks in a grave manner. Your parents have told you that you must bend to this man; you respect him before you know whether he merits your respect; you grow in age and knowledge; you come to realize that this man is a quack, filled with pride, interest, and artifice; you despise that which you revered, and so prejudice yields to judgment. (Philosophical 350)

Johnson certainly dressed, and often spoke, in a grave manner and was respected by many. Conversely, there were many who believed he was “filled with pride” and not worthy of the respect that he commanded. Without compunction, Johnson was a stubborn individual who did not submit to popular trends or to the urging of others. Therefore, to dress in the French style (even while in France) simply because it was the “thing to do” would have rendered his carefully-molded image innocuous. Thrale remarks upon Johnson’s visage, describing him as “a sad man to carry to publick place, for every body knew him, & he drew all eyes upon one; & by his odd gestures & perhaps loud voice got people to stare at one in a very disagreeable manner” (Dr. Johnson 81). Whether writing or speaking, Johnson seems to have always been keenly aware that he was putting on a performance, whether he wished to or not.

Rousseau, like Voltaire, also writes of nationalistic prejudices and their ability to taint an individual’s perception before he is able to make an informed decision for himself, writing of Scottish empiricist philosopher David Hume (1711-76), “He had earned a great reputation in France, and particularly among the Encylopadeists [with whom Rousseau feuded], by his treatises on commerce and politics . . . not having read his other works, I considered from what I
had heard of him that, although an extreme republican in spirit, he had at the same time the paradoxical English prejudice in favour of luxurious living” (*Confessions* 581). Much like my belief that Voltaire, Johnson, and Rousseau did not rush out to pick up copies of each other’s work, Rousseau wholly admits that his *entire* opinion of Hume is based on conjecture. More to the point, Hume was not even English despite living in England at the time Rousseau corresponded with him. Thus, Rousseau paints Hume with an English brush, suggesting that he enjoys the finer things like *most* Englishmen; Johnson’s relatively provident lifestyle demonstrates the degree of prejudice present in Rousseau’s perception of the “highfaluting” English. Further, Johnson himself would have been dismayed by the idea that to foreigners the term *English* had become interchangeable for *British*, and that the Scotch and English were considered by some to be one and the same.

That noted, despite his portrayal in the *Life of Johnson* as a man who seemingly chomped at the bit for any opportunity to berate the Scots, it stands to reason that Johnson’s supposed dislike of them was only skin-deep *or* again done simply to uphold appearances; if he truly disdained Hibernians he would not have befriended Boswell. I maintain that Johnson’s treatment of the French fulfilled very much the same purpose: because historically speaking, the English had always been at odds with France (and because Johnson was such a visible representative of England), he took it upon himself to embody not only his country but its national sentiment as well. Always the enigma, Johnson described his 1775 meeting in Paris with journalist Élie Freron in positive terms, noting, “I was pleased with my reception.--He is to translate my book, which I am to send him with notes” (*Life* II, 392); in their actual conversation Johnson--staying true to form by speaking Latin while in France--supposedly remarked that Voltaire was *’Vir est*
acerrimi ingenii et paucarum literarum’ (A man of acute intellect and little literature) (Life II, 406).

Assuming that the French took great pride in their literature, particularly in that Voltaire was one of the most popular writers of the century regardless of location, we must ponder why Johnson would say such a thing to a Freron while visiting France and while getting along with so well with the Frenchman. I am not suggesting that Johnson’s words here are disingenuous, but when cataloguing the many things Johnson said to agitate or antagonize, it becomes quite likely that Johnson routinely made such comments simply for the response they would evoke. If Johnson found the French and their writers to be as exasperating and/or inferior as he often suggested, we must then wonder why his private collection of works was not at all culturally determined or restrictive. It also seems germane to contemplate why Johnson would be at all desirous of having his works translated into French if he truly disdained them as a nation.

Toward the last quarter of the eighteenth-century, French commentators began to more thoroughly examine Johnson’s writing, and found much of it to be a refreshing change. In 1779 the Journal Encyclopédique reviewed Johnson’s Lives of the Poets, specifically referring to his Life of Milton as “aussi justes, aussi varies que delicats & neuves” (so true, so fair, that it is delicate and new) (Weinbrot, After 283). Weinbrot also illustrates changes in perception that occurred after Johnson’s death, noting, “After about 1786 for many across the channel Johnson becomes a learned version of the English eccentric, a quirky and diminished John Bull rather than the widely admired extraordinary man of letters able to instruct the Académie Française in the art of lexicography. Post-Boswellian commentators . . . replace the intellectual Johnson . . . [with] the repugnant if well-meaning alien barbarian” (After 288). The idea of Johnson the writer and thinker being superseded by Johnson the personality and public figure after the Life of
*Johnson* was published is certainly a viable theory, and one that I would further argue catapulted Johnson into the role of a great English patriot. Even Johnson’s politically charged writing of the 1770’s failed to elevate him to the status of patriot that the *Life of Johnson* did. Indeed, the concept of patriotism--no doubt fueled by prejudice--may be the greatest link that truly binds these three gargantuan personalities, and may also serve to explain the intrinsic degree of antagonism which existed between them.

Rousseau allowed flights of fancy to dictate the feelings of pride he had for his native country, confessing, “Myself born the citizen of a republic and the son of a father whose patriotism was his strongest passion, I took fire by his example and pictured myself as a Greek or a Roman” (*Confessions* 20). Voltaire expounds upon the idea of “Fatherland,” observing, “Such is the condition of mankind, that to wish the greatness of one’s own country is often to wish evil to one’s neighbors. He who could bring himself to wish that his country never be greater or smaller richer or poorer, but should always remain as it is would be a citizen of the universe” (*Philosophical* 354). In short, to Voltaire, there is no possible way for a person to be a “citizen of the universe.” In the *Life of Johnson*, even with his friend Boswell present, Johnson nostalgically yearns for “Old England” at the expense of the Scots. In a comment that is likely a mix of levity and sincerity, Johnson forwards, “Sir, it is not so much to be lamented that Old England is lost, as that the Scotch have found it” (*Life* III, 78). Such prejudices can also be seen in Johnson’s *Dictionary*; however, as James Sledd and Gwin Kolb note, “the form and content of [Johnson’s] definitions are rather his modifications of established traditions than the inventions of his malice.” 268 I could not have put it better myself, and would argue that such a belief extends into the public arena, as well.
To imagine one’s own homeland as superior to others, then, is not a puzzling concept; moreover, to hold other nations and their citizens in contempt may not even be a conscious choice. If in the process of being patriotic one is compelled to make statements that slight a rival nation at the expense of one’s own (like when Johnson told Thrale, “I never yet saw a Frenchman’s gaiety as good as an Englishman’s drunkenness”) (Dr. Johnson 11), then doubt is cast upon whether or not one is falling victim to a classic example of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Of course, Johnson would never have admitted such, for he would simply have called it “talking for victory.”
NOTES TO CHAPTER 1


2 In his essay, “Johnson before Boswell in Eighteenth Century France,” in *Aspects of Samuel Johnson* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), Howard Weinbrot quotes Matthieu Maty, who edited the *Journal Britannique* (1750-55)—a periodical written in French which informed people on the continent about new English thought and literature—as having written, “S'être peu à peu approchée du François, dont il craint qu'elle ne devienne à la longue un barbare dialecte” in reference to Johnson’s *Dictionary* (277). All subsequent citations will be parenthetically noted. Translated into English, Maty is of the opinion that Johnson believes the English language has “little by little approached the French language, which, he fears will eventually become a barbarian dialect.” The statement, while undeniably harsh, is nonetheless fairly applicable to Johnson’s views as written in the *Preface*. Further, Maty, who emigrated to England from Holland in 1740 (at age 22) was fluent in English and French, so his comprehension of Johnson’s *Dictionary* would not have been impeded by a language barrier; and his reasons for judging the work somewhat harshly would seemingly not have been rooted in nationalistic pride or rivalry. Johnson apparently was not galled by that particular comment, but instead angered that Maty (who was friends with Lord Chesterfield) accused Johnson of being ungrateful to his former “patron,” Chesterfield. In the *Life of Johnson* (I, 284), in response to the suggestion that Johnson take Maty on as an assistant, Johnson replied, “The little black dog! I’d throw him into the Thames.” For more detailed reading about Maty and the influence his various commentaries had upon French readers, consult Uta Janssens’s *Matthieu Maty and the Journal Britannique 1750-1755: A French View of English Literature in the Middle of the Eighteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Holland University Press, 1975).

3 In Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* Vol. 2, Eds. George Birkbeck Hill and L.F. Powell (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1934), Boswell includes several letters written by Johnson (to various people) while in France, and many of them show a certain level of disinterest or at the very least, a palpable lack of enthusiasm in regard to his surroundings. Specifically, see two letters written to Boswell on page 382 and 387 and two written to Robert Levet on page 385. All subsequent citations from the *Life of Johnson* come from volumes 1-6 and will be parenthetically noted by volume and page number.

4 W. Jackson Bate, *Samuel Johnson* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 517. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be parenthetically noted. Also of interest to this idea is Johnson’s comment to Boswell that, “A Frenchman must be always talking, whether he knows any thing of the matter or not; an Englishman is content to say nothing, when he has
nothing to say” (Life IV, 15). Perhaps Johnson was simply following his own advice while visiting France and opting to remain silent, not because he did not have anything to say, but because he did not know how to say it. Furthermore, this belief may also translate into why the French were frequently not a conversational topic proposed by him, but rather one that he was often coerced into discussing. For example, in the Life of Johnson, the majority of times Voltaire and Rousseau are mentioned by Johnson, it is in response to Boswell’s prodding or questioning. Intriguingly, in one circumstance worthy of mention when Johnson introduces Voltaire’s name into the conversation, it is done in praise (Life I, 53).

5 See J.C.D. Clark’s “The Cultural Identity of Samuel Johnson” (The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual, 1997, 15-70) for more on the idea of Johnson’s surprising adroitness at adjusting his opinions based on changing circumstances. Specifically, Clark notes Johnson’s shift in position from being a pseudo-patriotic writer early in his career to one who adamantly condemned England in the 1750’s, largely due to its involvement in the Seven Years’ War.

6 Definition one of degenerate (adv.) reads, “Unlike his ancestors; fallen from the merit and virtue of his ancestors.” Definition two, more condemningly, refers to degenerate as “Unworthy; base.” Neither definition is particularly flattering, but “unlike his ancestors” may be complimentary if we are to ascertain that Lewis XVI’s ownership of English dogs showed that he was more willing than previous Kings of France to own dogs that were not of a French breed. Examining the second part of that definition (“fallen from the merit and virtue of his ancestors”), Johnson may actually believe that there is something inherently improper or wrong about a French monarch owning a pack of English dogs. Of course, both points I present here are conjecture.


8 Sir Joshua Reynolds, “On Johnson’s Character,” Ed. George Birkbeck-Hill. Johnsonian Miscellanies Volume 2 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1897), 226. All subsequent citations come from volumes 1-2 and will be parenthetically noted by volume and page number. Also see Hester Thrale’s Dr. Johnson (Ed. Richard Ingrams, London: The Hogarth Press, 1984), where Thrale notes, “We all know how well [Johnson] loved to abuse the Scotch, and indeed to be abused by them in return” (12). Such appraisals no doubt lend credence to the title of Vance’s article, “The Laughing Johnson,” although there is a great tendency on the part of modern critics (particularly psychoanalytic critics like W.J. Bate and Jeffrey Meyers) and even some of Johnson’s contemporaries to view him as a sullen and morose individual.


10 Although I do agree with many of Greene’s assertions regarding the accuracy of Boswell’s Johnson, several other critics make equally convincing arguments about why Boswell’s work should be interpreted in a much less strict manner than Greene chooses to. Arguably, the fulcrum of Greene’s argument lies in his contention that the vast gulf between the image of Johnson the conversationalist and Johnson the author (as presented by Boswell in Life of Johnson) is too expansive to afford Boswell’s account any elevated degree of accuracy. Frederick A. Pottle, for example, persuasively argues in “The Adequacy as Biography in Life of Johnson” (in
Vance, 147-60) that it is not possible to unequivocally separate the identity of the writer from that of the speaker. So, while I am more than willing to acknowledge that there are almost certainly areas of exaggeration or artistic license in the Life of Johnson, I also choose to defer to Hester Thrale’s Dr. Johnson, where she notes that “Boswell, however, is the Man for a Johnsoniana: he really knows ten Times more Anecdotes his life than I do who see so much more of him” (55). Her assertion is upheld by John J. Burke, who writes that “Johnson having read Boswell’s journals and making very few changes assures authenticity . . . [and] many of [Boswell’s] sources were still alive when the Life of Johnson was published and very few contradicted or opposed the work, and those who did were largely upset because they did not want something they said as part of public record” (in Vance, 175). Further, Hawkins quotes Johnson as saying that “the best part of an author will always be found in his writings,” from The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D, Ed. Bertram H. Davis (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), 176. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be parenthetically cited. So, while I do not aim to treat the Life of Johnson as the definitive last word on Johnson’s personality, I nonetheless believe that it is accurate enough to rely upon for the purposes of this investigation.

11 John A. Vance, “The Laughing Johnson,” Boswell’s Life of Johnson: New Questions, New Answers (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 220. Also note Sir John Hawkins’s belief that Johnson “made it a rule to talk his best, but that on many subjects he was not uniform in his opinions, contending as often for victory as for truth: at one time good, at another evil was predominant in the moral constitution of the world . . . I never yet saw the man who would venture to contest his right” (LL.D 110). Here, Hawkins specifically refers to Johnson’s combative nature in the conversational realm, which plays into Vance’s assertion that Johnson was intentionally an inconsistent figure who would voluntarily take a disadvantageous side in an argument simply to engage in the act of argument; thus, much of what Johnson actually spoke was likely never intended to be taken literally, even at the time when it was spoken. Moreover, much of what Johnson purportedly said was almost certainly not meant to be written down for posterity and subsequently published as his testament.

12 Allen T. Hazen, Johnson’s Prefaces & Dedications (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 112. All subsequent citations will be parenthetically noted.


14 Donald Greene, Samuel Johnson’s Library (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 1975). Greene notes no fewer than forty-two works about France or by French authors found in Johnson’s library after his death. Johnson owned works by the following authors: Catrou and Rouillé, Cousin, Hinmar, Mézeray, Pompadour, Sully, Voltaire, Boyer, Richelet, Racine, Béardé de l’Abbaye, Du Fresnoy, Descartes, Le Clerc, Ranchin, Desgodets, Naudé, Ménage, Bayle, Moréri, Réaumur, Gassendi, Mercier, Maupertuis, Macquer, Mallet, Mattaire, La Bigne, Huet, Hotman, Duret, Duhamel, Ladocvat, Budé, Brumoy, de la Croze, Tusunus, des Bruilons, Rapin, Patin, and contributors to the Encyclopédie: Diderot, D’Alembert, Rousseau, Voltaire, and others. Rousseau’s inclusion in the edition of the Encyclopédie owned by Johnson is questionable because he had a falling out with Denis Diderot (the principal editor of the work), which resulted in the omission of most of Rousseau’s contributions. For more see chapter sixteen of Leopold Damrosch’s Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius (New York: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 2005). Although Rousseau feverishly produced several hundred articles for
the collection, they were largely about music, a topic Hawkins states Johnson never really cared for: “To the delights of music, he was equally insensible: neither voice nor instrument, nor the harmony of concordant sounds, had power over his affections, or even to engage his attention” (LL.D 133). So, even if the edition in Johnson’s collection contained any of Rousseau’s essays about music, it seems quite likely that Johnson would have had little to no interest in their content. It should be noted that in Johnson’s entire library, there were only two books whose subject is music, both written by Charles Burney, a man with whom Johnson was personally acquainted, which may help explain why Johnson owned them at all.


16 Richard B. Schwartz, “Johnson’s Johnson,” Ed. Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Interpretations: James Boswell’s Life of Samuel Johnson* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 63. Also see Donald Greene’s “The World’s Worst Biography” in *American Scholar* Vol. 62, No. 3 (Summer 1993), 365-83. In the article Greene elaborates upon the “Boswell Problem,” not by chastising the *Life of Johnson*, but by decrying those scholars and teachers who have placed Johnson’s writings as secondary to Boswell’s biography of Johnson. Rather than examining Johnson’s own literary productions to ascertain truths and facts about him, Greene believes, too many have come to rely upon Boswell’s *bon mots* style of biography, which at times depicts Johnson’s beliefs and ideas in a way which is incongruous to those presented in his own written works.

17 In 1762, Johnson was given a pension by the government, supposedly for his prior literary achievements. However, many of Johnson’s contemporaries believed that it was the impetus for his more politically charged writings of the 1770’s such as *The False Alarm, Taxation no Tyranny*, and *The Patriot*. For more on this idea, see *Life of Johnson* (II, 312-18).


19 See Thrale’s *Dr. Johnson* for her assertions that “Johnson agrees with Rousseau” (22) and her belief that an element of Johnson’s conversation with her about love contains “a touch of Rousseau” (58). Also of note is her comparison of Rousseau and Johnson’s similar view regarding the difficulties of being a devout Christian. In fact, at one point Thrale quotes a passage by Rousseau about Christianity that she believes to be beautiful, and she reports that Johnson agreed with her assessment (66-7). This anecdote lends credence to Johnson feeling the need to “perform” for an audience, particularly an audience of men to whom he needed to appear as the alpha male. If Johnson roundly rebuffed Rousseau’s ideologies in Boswell’s presence, why would he do a complete about-face with Thrale by apparently not only agreeing with the Frenchman’s sentiment, but going so far as to say the wording itself was beautiful?

20 James Boswell, *Boswell on the Grand Tour: Germany and Switzerland 1764*, Ed. Frederick A. Pottle (London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1953), 258. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be parenthetically noted, and referred to as *Grand Tour* I.

22 See Jürgen Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). Habermas also explains how letter-writing constitutes a unique form of public versus private expression that is of relevance to this study as a whole: “From the beginning, the psychological interest increased in the dual relation to both one’s self and the other: self-observation entered a union partly curious, partly sympathetic with the emotional stirrings of the other I” (49). All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be parenthetically noted. What is particularly interesting about this idea is that Johnson, who had absolutely no qualms or pretensions about obliterating or humiliating individuals who dared contest him in the conversational realm, oddly expresses very little similar bombast in his letters (as evidenced in endnote 3). So, if Johnson the speaker and Johnson the writer were such vastly different entities, which Johnson is the *real* Johnson?

23 For more on Johnson’s “declining all controversy in defence of himself or his writings,” see Sir John Hawkins’s *Life of Samuel Johnson LL.D*, 143

24 See chapter two of this study for Voltaire’s full response.

25 See *Life of Johnson* (1, 342) for Boswell’s paraphrasing of Johnson’s response to *Candide*.

26 See Howard Weinbrot’s “Enlightenment Canon Wars: Anglo-French Views of Literary Greatness” (*ELH* Vol. 60, No. 1), 1993. Weinbrot notes that “In 1726, Voltaire does not know English; he cannot pronounce it in 1727 and “hardly understands it in conversation,” but he nonetheless urges that English ‘deserves to be the object of our application in France’” (80). Voltaire, presented by Johnson and many others as an Anglophobe, not only held elements of Shakespeare’s work in high regard, but he also believed the English language (while perhaps lacking the delicacy and beauty of French) had a force and strength that the French tongue could never match. See Voltaire’s *Épic Poetry* (1727) for repeated examples of this belief.


28 Perhaps the most well-known negative comment about *Rasselas* from a one-time friend of Johnson’s is Hester Chapone’s belief that the story was “an ill-contrived, unfinished, unnatural, and uninstructive tale.” Hawkins adds, “This elegant work is rendered, by its most obvious moral, of little benefit to the reader” (*LL.D*, 156).

29 Weinbrot provides only the French. I have done the rough, but fairly simple, translation into English.

30 Intriguingly, Johnson’s library contained three of René Descartes’ works. Descartes’ philosophy inspired, among others, Gottfried Leibniz, whose belief in “metaphysical optimism” is the root of the satire contained within *Candide*. While the later empirical philosophers like Locke and Hume tended to oppose or deviate from the ideas of Descartes, works like *Rasselas* and *Candide* make it extremely difficult to designate Johnson or Voltaire as exclusive empiricists. However, a thorough examination of each man’s corpus of work would lend credibility to the idea that more often than not, both adhered to at least some of the tenets of empiricism.


32 For perhaps the best example of Rousseau’s somewhat flippant attitude about his own writing, see Boswell’s *Grand Tour: Germany and Switzerland 1764*, where Rousseau quips, “I attach very little importance to books. [My own books] are just rigmarole” (253).
33 See Donald Greene’s “The Logia of Samuel Johnson” (*The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual*, 1990) for more on Greene’s belief that the validity of such a quotation is in doubt. Greene’s evidence again relies upon Johnson’s written words, specifically in the poem *London*, which attacks the great city as opposed to defending it as Johnson does to Boswell in their 1777 conversation. This disparity noted, Johnson’s opinions were known to change or shift based upon time period and the company in which he found himself.


36 See *Grand Tour* I (pg. 262) for the conversation between Boswell and Rousseau about Johnson’s pension. Considering Boswell’s comment in *Grand Tour* II (pg. 300), one may wonder if Rousseau were not simply being his usual antisocial self and making such comments out of jealousy rather than a firm belief in Johnson’s hypocrisy for accepting the king’s payment.

37 When Boswell first writes of having met Voltaire in *Grand Tour* I, he notes that Voltaire “spoke sometimes English and sometimes French” (287), but begins the sequence referred to in footnote 37 by telling Voltaire, “You speak good English” (300), which would imply that this conversation was, in fact, conducted in English as opposed to French, in which Boswell was fluent.

38 In the *Life of Johnson* Boswell changed the wording to “an honest fellow” (I, 435).


40 Although this quotation has seeped its way into the lexicon and is attributed to Johnson, I have not been able to unearth its origin; further, there seems to be no record of the work or author to whom Johnson purportedly made the comment. Perhaps this is another example of Johnson’s reputation preceding him to the point that such stories involving him may or may not be grounded in reality.

41 In Ancient Rome, the original Triumvirate consisted of Julius Caesar, Marcus Crassus, and Pompey the Great. When Crassus died, Pompey and Caesar battled one another for control of Rome, as Caesar’s infamous “crossing the Rubicon” in 49 B.C. facilitated a civil war. Ultimately, Pompey was killed during the battle and Caesar became the dictator in perpetuity of Rome, an intriguingly telling comparison to Johnson, who was dubbed “dictator” of the language by Lord Chesterfield.
Allen Reddick’s *The Making of Johnson’s Dictionary* describes Johnson “portraying himself as a laborer burdened with the impossible task of struggling with an intractable and elusive language” which in no small part lent credence to the “heroic myth” surrounding the production of the work (1-3).

Mark J. Temmer, *Johnson and Three Infidels: Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 69. In Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*, Johnson – for lack of a better term – lambastes Rousseau’s premise regarding the inequality of mankind. Dismissing it as a self-centered philosophy, Johnson insists that “If man were a savage, living in the woods by himself” rank and fortune would mean nothing, “but in civilized society we all depend upon each other, and our happiness is very much owing to the good opinion of mankind” (I, 440).

Rousseau’s *Confessions* is considered the first non-spiritual autobiography although the title is derived from St. Augustine’s *Confessions*. In *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Leo Damrosch notes that “to penetrate the inner darkness [Rousseau] invented modern biography” (437).


See endnote 39 for more on this idea.

Johnson and Rousseau alike struggled to suppress emotions and feelings they deemed improper or destructive. For more on this see chapter 11 of Damrosch’s *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* and W. Jackson Bate’s *Samuel Johnson*, specifically chapters 8, 21, and 25.

Although Rousseau claimed that he had no idea about the origins of his depression, Johnson was certain he had inherited the disease from his father. Hawkins notes that Johnson’s “own conjecture was that he derived [his melancholy] from his father, of whom he was used to speak as of a man in whose temper and character melancholy was predominant” (122). Damrosch notes that Rousseau told a friend, “I carry a source of unhappiness in myself whose origin I don’t know how to untangle” (234).
Rousseau writes of good eyesight as if it were an essentially deleterious faculty: “We are blind men at every point, but born blind men who do not imagine what sight is, and, not believing that we lack any faculty, want to measure the extremities of the world while our short sight, like our hands, reaches only two feet from us.” Moral Letters, Ed. Christopher Kelly, The Collected Writings of Rousseau, Volume 12 (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), 183.


James Clifford. Young Sam Johnson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), 21. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be parenthetically cited. Also see chapter two of W. Bate’s Samuel Johnson for a more “psychological” take on Johnson’s perception of his parents.


Rousseau recounts a tale of stealing a pink ribbon from the woman at whose home he was staying, and upon being discovered with it, claims that a female servant (named Marion) gave it to him as a gift. Of course, she did not, and as Rousseau refused to admit his falsehood, Marion was banished from the household. Rousseau’s objective in telling the story is to show the reader that, whatever calamity Marion may have had to endure in her own life, he was the real victim because he has had to suffer with the wrongdoing for nearly sixty years (see pages 86-89 in J.M. Cohen’s edition of The Confessions).

Rousseau notes that after reading his mother’s library of novels, he had access to his grandfather’s, at which time he read Ovid, Plutarch, and Molier, among others (The Confessions, 20). He also evinces his advanced maturity and intellect for his age, proposing that readers, “Find me a Jean-Jacques Rousseau of six, and talk to him of God at seven, and I promise you that you will be taking no risks” (67).

Howard Weinbrot, “Johnson and the Arts of Narration,” Aspects of Samuel Johnson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 131. All subsequent citations will be parenthetically noted.

In Dr. Johnson, Hester Thrale also notes that the dialogue of King Lear seemed to affect Johnson less than the actual scenes: “Johnson was more a Man of Imagination than Passion . . . and Lear’s cursing his Daughter which makes so many People shudder, took no hold of him all I think” (105).


Leo Damrosch, Uses of Johnson’s Criticism (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1976), 171.


Also see Hawkins’s Life, where he suggests that Johnson’s “inconsistency of character . . . failed to attract reverence and respect from those who lived in greatest intimacy with him” (175).

For more on this, see chapter five of Krutch’s Samuel Johnson and, specifically, Hawkins’s observation that “there seemed to be as exact a fitness between the character of [Johnson] and his
associates, as is between the web of a spider and the wings of a fly, and I could not but think he was born to be cheated” (LL.D 172-3). Reddick confirms this as a consensus opinion, noting, “Johnson’s early biographers, some of them contemporaries, tended to be puzzled and somewhat disgusted by the odd characters that Johnson accumulated. Yet these misfits depended upon Johnson, and he obviously needed their presence as well” (65). See also Peter Quennell’s Samuel Johnson: His Friends and Enemies (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1972), 76-82; Hester Thrale’s Dr. Johnson, 40; and for perhaps the most comprehensive view of Johnson’s domestic situation, see Lyle Larsen’s Dr. Johnson’s Household (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1985), where he is unable to conclusively determine the impact of Johnson’s household upon his writings, but believes that they had an overall positive contribution upon his mental state.

66 It may also be inferred that Johnson’s high opinion of Richardson, in part, derived from personal gratitude. In 1756, Johnson arrested for a debt of £5 18s and wrote a letter imploring Richardson to pay off the debt, which he did (Bate; Samuel Johnson, 321).

67 William Cooke, Anecdotes of Johnson, Ed. George Birkbeck Hill. Johnsonian Miscellanies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), 168. In relating an anecdote about Johnson’s kindness to a prostitute, Cooke quotes Johnson as saying that the woman’s venereal disease “may be as much her misfortune as her fault.” Clearly, Johnson’s kindness to the unfortunate was not restricted to his writings.

68 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on the Sciences and Arts, Eds. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly. The Collected Writings of Rousseau, Vol. 2 (Hanover: The University of New England Press, 1990), 1. All subsequent citations are from this volume and will be parenthetically noted.

69 Boswell quotes Johnson telling Goldsmith, “I have written a hundred lines in a day. I remember I wrote a hundred lines of “The Vanity of Human Wishes” in a day” (Life II, 15).

70 In Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques, Rousseau similarly opines, “A hypocrite or an imposter will never expose himself openly. Our philosophers have what they call their interior doctrine, but they teach it to the public only while concealing themselves” (28).


73 On June 2, 1781 Johnson claimed that he read the work for the first time since writing it in January, 1759. We must also remember the incredible mental duress that Johnson must have been under at the time, hurrying to compose the work over the nights of one week in order to pay off his mother’s debts before her death. Had Johnson been able to closely edit and revise the work at the time, it is difficult to imagine that Rasselas would have ended up as it did.

74 For what is likely the most detailed description of Rasselas by a “contemporary,” see Macaulay’s Life of Samuel Johnson (1831). Ed. Charles Lane Hanson (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1928), 25-6. He notes that, “Many readers pronounced [Johnson] a pompous pedant, who would never use a word of two syllables where it was possible to use a word of six, and who could not make a waiting-woman relate her adventures without balancing every noun with another epithet . . . Johnson, not content with turning filthy savages, ignorant of their letters, and
gorged with raw steaks cut from living cows into philosophers as eloquent and enlightened as himself or his friend Burke . . . transferred the whole domestic system of England to Egypt.” For a more current perspective of Rasselas’s lacking, we might consult Peter Quennell’s Samuel Johnson: His Friends and Enemies: “As a novelist, Johnson did not shine; he lacked the gift of invention and, at least when he was attempting to tell a fictitious tale, the knack of condensing his subject-matter into a lively and dramatic form” (178).

Temmer asserts that Rousseau always hoped to “be crystal clear” in his writings (45); and indeed, Rousseau does not use flowery language to achieve a point that can be more easily made in simpler words.

Rousseau notes in his Confessions that “I have related how I suffered from insomnia in my youth. Since that time I had had the habit of reading in bed every night until I felt my lids grow heavy . . . my usual night reading was the Bible, and I have read it right through five or six times on end in this way” (535). See pages 372-5 of Boswell’s Life of Johnson as evidence of the strength of Johnson’s belief that the Bible should be translated into the languages of peoples that have no concept of the Christian faith.

Rousseau recounts that the story of “the Levite of Ephraim [at the end of Judges] . . . greatly moved me and I was pondering over it in a sort of dream” (535). In Life of Johnson, Boswell compares Rasselas to Ecclesiastes by quoting chapter one, verse fourteen of the book. Rasselas is “full of ‘vanity and vexation of spirit’” (241).

In The Confessions Rousseau recounts that the story of “the Levite of Ephraim [at the end of Judges] . . . greatly moved me and I was pondering over it in a sort of dream” (535). In Life of Johnson, Boswell compares Rasselas to Ecclesiastes by quoting chapter one, verse fourteen of the book. Rasselas is “full of ‘vanity and vexation of spirit’” (241).

Damrosch implies that, when Rousseau’s friendships with Diderot and others were beginning to fall apart, he achieved an epiphany of sorts, for “he was coming to understand that what people condemned in him as laziness was something very different.” In large part, he realized the values he held in high regard were diametrically opposed by Enlightenment philosophers, whom he feared would defame him because he refused to adopt their beliefs.


Ralph Rader, “Literary Form in Factual Narrative: The Example of Boswell’s Johnson,” in Boswell’s Life: New Questions, New Answers: “Boswell had in his mind a single dynamic image of Johnson which, though it derived from innumerable manifestations of Johnson’s character, was nevertheless independent of any particular manifestation and even independent of their sum” (28).


Samuel Johnson, Rasselas: “Be not too hasty to trust, or to admire, the teachers of morality: they discourse like angels, but they live like men” (74).

In Boswell’s Boswell on the Grand Tour, Germany and Switzerland, 1764, Boswell questions Rousseau, “Will you, Sir, assume some direction over me?” (231). The request is reminiscent of his pleas to Johnson to do the same in his London Journal. He asks Johnson, “Will you really take charge of me? [. . .] Had I but thought some years ago that I should an evening with the Author of The Rambler!” (Boswell’s London Journal, 1762-1763, Ed. Frederick A. Pottle. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 285. All subsequent citations will be parenthetically noted.
See Book Eight of the *Confessions* (specifically pages 332-5) for Rousseau’s reasoning as to why he gave his children away. Imagining himself as a citizen of Plato’s *Republic*, he believes that giving his children to the state will shield them from the cruel fate which beheld him.

See Sir John Hawkins, *Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*: “He reckoned that he had written about forty sermons; but, except as to some, knew not in what hands they were – ‘I have’ said he, ‘been paid for them, and have no right to inquire about them’” (167).


If Rousseau’s childhood ambition is at all reflected in *The Confessions*, then we may view Rousseau’s autobiography as a sermon of sorts, as well. As a boy, under the influence of his Uncle Bernard, Rousseau “began to make up sermons.” This part of his autobiography is dated 1719-23, at which point Rousseau would have been 7-11 years old (35).

Like Johnson’s fears regarding the incongruity between his behavior and the teachings of Mr. Rambler, Rousseau was concerned that readers would think poorly of him, a “stern moralist,” writing *Julie*, a romantic novel which many still believed to be at worst, tawdry, and at the least, ridiculous.

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Ed. Roger Woolhouse (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 157. Locke writes, “Madmen . . . do not appear to me to have lost the faculty of reasoning: but having joined together some ideas very wrongly, they mistake them for truths.” The astronomer in *Rasselas* is clearly an example of a “madman” in Lockean terms, for he believes that he controls the weather because it rains after he wishes for it.

See footnote 51 for more information about these critics.


Lawrence Lipking, “Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rousseau,” *Common Knowledge* 3 (1994), adds, “Johnson was embarrassed by his paltry French speaking, so he could not communicate with people easily . . . and he did not participate in the discourse that meant most to French intellectuals, the freethinking play with ideas that would soon transform Civilization” (122).


French translations are provided by Dr. Tim Raser, Professor of French at the University of Georgia. Interview conducted on February 6, 2009.

Christopher Kelly, *The Collected Writings of Rousseau* Vol. 12, xxiv.


Adrienne Crew, “In the Year of the (Fake) Snake” (Oct. 2000) observes: “The link between snakes and female sexuality continues through the ages, from Medusa and her snaky coif to Cleopatra and her accessorized asp. Eventually . . . the sacred aspects of snakes were leached from cultural memory and the creatures became a pop culture metaphor for the sneaky behavior exhibited by femmes fatales.”


“Strange Connections there are in this odd World, a dreadful & little suspected Reason for ours God knows--but the Fetters & Padlocks will tell Posttery the Truth.” For more essays on this particular topic, refer to footnote 51.


NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

107 See Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* where Johnson told the French journalist Fréron (in Latin) that Voltaire was “a man of acute intellect and little literature” (I, 406).

108 Endnote 15 references much of the original reply to Johnson. All subsequent citations will be parenthetically noted.


110 Nicholas Hudson, “The Discourse of Transition: Johnson, the 1750’s and Rise of Middle Class,” *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual* (2002), 46. Note also Johnson’s comment in *Life of Johnson*, where he declares that in France “there is no happy middle state as in England.”


114 Thomas Lounsbury, *Shakespeare and Voltaire* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902), 61. All subsequent citations will be parenthetically noted.


116 For perhaps the best example of this, see *The Preface to the Dictionary*, where Johnson writes, “If an academy should be established for the cultivation of [English] stile, which I, who can never wish to see dependence multiplied, hope the spirit of English liberty will hinder or destroy, let them, instead of compiling grammars and dictionaries, endeavour, with all their influence, to stop the licence of translatours, whose idleness and ignorance, if it be suffered to proceed, will reduce to babble a dialect of France” (108-9).


120 Marvin Carlson, *Voltaire and the Theatre of the Eighteenth Century* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 8. All subsequent citations will be parenthetically noted.

121 Voltaire, *The Satirical Dictionary of Voltaire*, Ed. Paul McPharlin (Mount Vernon: Peter Pauper Press, 1946), 40. All subsequent citations will be parenthetically noted.

122 An English visitor of Voltaire, one John Morgan, observed in 1764: “Although at loss sometimes for an english Word . . . he used many Gallicisms . . . he often used the smell of, figuratively for to partake of” (qtd. in *Voltaire’s British Visitors*); 71, 76.

123 Daniel Fischlin writes: “Voltaire had a long and involved relationship with Shakespeare's writings and was responsible for adapting, however loosely, *Julius Caesar* (*La Mort de César* written in 1731, published in 1735), *Hamlet* (*Sémiramis* 1748), *Othello* (*Zaïre* 1733), and
Macbeth (Mahomet 1742) to the French taste for classical theatre.”


124 Voltaire, Philosophical Letters, Ed. John Leigh; Trans. Prudence L. Steiner (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), 70. See also De Beer’s Voltaire’s British Visitors where a 1760 letter from Englishman John Craufurd states that, “Voltaire confessed to Colonel Craufurd that he looked upon Shakespeare to be the greatest genius that ever the world produced. “Oh but (says the Colonel) he was written monstrous farces” – “True, I have said so (says Voltaire smiling) but notwithstanding these occasional defects, his excellencies outbalance everything” (44). All subsequent citations will be parenthetically noted.


126 Interestingly, in Jeffrey Kacirk’s Altered English (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2002), the word Frenchman as extracted from Thomas Blount’s A Law Dictionary (London: 1717) means “anciently used for every stranger. Cf. far-fetched, outlandish, uncouth” (83). While the word Frenchman is not included in Johnson’s Dictionary, determining if, and how long, this word remained a colloquialism might be of some assistance in determining the extent to which and perhaps even the origin of English assigning the word French and its derivatives to unflattering references.

127 Edward Gibbon quoted in Voltaire’s British Visitors (Les Délices, Genève : Institut et musée Voltaire : Sales agent, Librarie Droz, 1967), 34. In the same work a letter discusses John Horne Tooke’s perception of Voltaire echoes Johnson’s, despite the fact that Tooke and Johnson were far from allies. Tooke supposedly “would not suffer [Voltaire] to be compared to any of our great English literary characters, and was accustomed to pronounce him ‘inferior in every time – inferior as a poet, a biographer, and an historian.’” (110).

128 Rudiger Schreyer, “Illustrations of Authority: Quotations in Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary of the English Language” (Lexicographica 16, 2000), 81. In Dr. Johnson, Hester Thrale adds that Johnson “had however very piously and judiciously scrupled among the various authorities he quotes in his Dictionary ever to give one from an immoral or an Infidel Writer, lest says he the Quotation should send People to look in an Author that might taint their Virtue or poison their principles” (50). Consult chapter four of this study for more on Johnson and Hobbes.

129 In his Preface to the Dictionary Johnson writes, “Those who have been persuaded to think well of my design, will require that it should fix our language, and put a stop to those alterations which time and chance have hitherto been suffered to make in it without opposition. With this consequence I will confess that I flattered myself for a while; but now begin to fear that I have indulged expectation which neither reason nor experience can justify” (104).


is glad Milton does not submit himself to its restrictions. All subsequent excerpts are from this edition and will be parenthetically cited and abbreviated LM before the comma followed by the page number after.


135 In *Spectator 291*, Addison postulates that the best critics concentrate upon a poet’s virtues rather than dwell upon his weaknesses. In his Eighteenth *Philosophical Letter*, “On Tragedy,” Voltaire similarly feels that “it is easy to reproduce in prose the defects of a poet, but very difficult to translate his beautiful verse. All those scribblers who set themselves up as critics of celebrated writers have filled volumes . . . more is to be gained from twelve lines of Homer and Virgil than from all the critical commentaries on these two great men” *Philosophical Letters*, 70.


139 Linda Colley’s *Britons* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) notes the tendency of the English to view themselves as a separate (and superior) entity, even to other countries in the empire, and in particular this hostility and elitism was applied to France. See specifically page 35. All subsequent citations will be parenthetically cited.


141 James Boswell, *The Life of Johnson* Vol. 2, 87n. Boswell describes an October 1769 conversation taking place between Johnson, Garrick, and himself about Mrs. Montagu’s essay on Shakespeare. Though Boswell believed that the essay has been of great service in that it “vindicated Shakespeare from the misrepresentations of Voltaire,” Johnson apparently felt the essay was of little worth. In the process, he reveals what he evidently felt were the true tenets of criticism: “Nobody else has thought it worthwhile [to contest Voltaire]. And what merit is there in that? . . . No, Sir, there is no real criticism in it: none shewing the beauty of thought, as formed on the workings of the human heart.”

142 Samuel Johnson, *The Life of Congreve*, 211.

143 Samuel Johnson, *The Life of Pope*, 331. For more on this occurrence, see Ballantyne, *Voltaire’s Visit to England* (London: Smith, Elder, and Company, 1893), 82-3. All subsequent citations will be parenthetically noted.


145 In a footnote, Boswell also speculates that a character in *Rambler No. 83* is reminiscent of Horace Walpole.

146 Stephen Clarke, "'Prejudice, Bigotry, and Arrogance': Horace Walpole's Abuse of Samuel Johnson," *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual* (2003), 249. All subsequent citations will be parenthetically noted.


In *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D*, 300n, Hawkins notes various written comments Walpole made in his copy of Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*.

See Johnson’s *Preface to the Dictionary*: “If the language of theology were extracted from Hooker and the translation of the Bible; the terms of natural knowledge from Bacon; the phrases of policy, war, and navigation from Raleigh; the dialect of poetry and fiction from Spenser and Sidney; and the diction of common life from Shakespeare, few ideas would be lost to mankind” (96).

See *The Uses of Johnson’s Criticism*, where Damrosch notes Johnson’s belief that, “A successful work will continue to give pleasure to such common readers after its local allusions and accidental attractions have become obscure, and in so doing will stand the test of time” (54).


Johnson also uses this passage to illustrate the definition of *doggerel* in *The Dictionary*.


NOTES TO CHAPTER 4


158 The “official” website of Voltaire’s home, Chateau de Cirey, documents the following about Voltaire’s wealth: “Voltaire was a millionaire by the time he was 40 years old. While in his twenties, he cultivated the friendship of wealthy bankers, particularly the Paris brothers. It was through them that he learned how to invest in bonds and speculate in currency and other commodities . . . While in England, he observed that great wealth could be gained in foreign trade and he invested in ships that sailed all over the world. He also invested in art and made loans to people and charged interest on the loans. Voltaire's secretary, Longchamp, reports that Voltaire's income in 1749 was 80,000 francs, which is approximately $600,000 in today's money. Voltaire maintained investments that earned a yearly income of 45,000 francs in each of several foreign countries. This was done to ensure he had a means of support should he have to leave France at a moment's notice.” Chateau de Cirey – Residence of Voltaire.


161 Hester Thrale quoted in H.J. Jackson Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 108-9. Thrale’s quotations are taken from her 1819 edition of Rasselas. In an endnote referencing chapter four of the book, Jackson describes the obstacles facing the scholar who wishes to see much of Thrale’s personal writings, in this instance, the notes she wrote in the margins of her copy of Rasselas, and subsequently, the difficulty in obtaining her 1819 edition of the work, as well: “The dealers who sold off the Piozzi library made a special point of annotated books; see Broster, Collectanea Johnsoniana, and Brynbella. James Clifford estimates that there were “hundreds of volumes” containing her notes, and many survive in public collections, notably the Rotschild Collection at the Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge; the John Rylands Library, Manchester; and the Beinecke Library, Yale University (Clifford, Hester Lynch Piozzi, p. 449 and n. 5). On the history of publication, see Brownell, “Hester Lynch Piozzi’s Marginalia,” and the New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature. Piozzi’s copy of Rasselas was described in a short note by Belloc in 1925 but seems afterward to have dropped out of sight” (276). The lack of direct citation for endnote 48 also reflects this difficulty in obtaining original documentation.

162 Élie Fréron quoted in Mark J. Temmer Samuel Johnson and Three Infidels, 78. In Temmer’s book, the original French is provided; this is my best attempt at translation. All subsequent excerpts are from this edition and are will be parenthetically cited.


165 Among the biographies of Johnson published in the 1970’s are: Christopher Hibbert’s The Personal History of Samuel Johnson (1971); John Wain’s Samuel Johnson: A Biography (1974);
W. Jackson Bate’s *Samuel Johnson* (1975); James Clifford’s *Dictionary Johnson* (1975) and Margaret Lane’s *Samuel Johnson and his World* (1975). Bate’s influential exposition upon Johnson’s psychological constitution may well have contributed to Richard Schwartz’s quotation which is referenced in endnote sixteen.


170 For likely the most in-depth consideration of *Rasselas* as travel literature, see Thomas M. Curley’s *Samuel Johnson and the Age of Travel* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), 158. Curley notes that “when writing the tale, [Johnson] not only achieved a new interpretation of revered travel archetypes but also enriched them with the color and conventions of travel literature . . . *Rasselas* follows a course of ethical inquiry in the tracks of real explorers as well as literary wanderers celebrated by Homer, Bunyan, and Cervantes.” See also chapter six of Casey McIntosh’s *The Choice of Life: Samuel Johnson and the World of Fiction* (pgs. 163-7).

171 Edward Tomarken, *Johnson, Rasselas, and the Choice of Criticism* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press 1989), 101. Tomarken observes that “Nothing is concluded in that the choice of life quest never ends because, for active and inquiring minds, it is bound up with life itself.”

172 See Roger Pearson’s *A Study of Voltaire’s Contes Philosophiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 116. Pearson writes, “Candide is, as his name etymologically suggests, a piece of white paper on which experience comes to write itself.” All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be parenthetically cited.


174 See Edward Tomarken’s *Johnson, Rasselas, and the Choice of Criticism*, 51. Tomarken writes of Johnson’s aeronautical inventor: “The result is less disastrous than outcomes of similar ventures in the tales by Goldsmith and Voltaire because Johnson is not satirizing ignorance or philosophical principles.” Such an assessment may be correct, but it also seemingly implies that Johnson’s characters (and their subsequent ignorance) are never fodder for satire or humor, a point with which I would disagree.

175 Robert Etheridge Moore, “Dr. Johnson on Fielding and Richardson,” *PMLA* Vol. 66, No. 2 (1951), 166.

176 Thomas Babington Macaulay, in his *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1831), states that for six months following the Lisbon Earthquake, Johnson refused to believe in its occurrence, and even afterwards believed “the calamity to be greatly exaggerated” (57-8). For perhaps a less-biased perspective, see Hester Thrale’s *Dr. Johnson*, where Thrale boldly states: “Mr. Johnson believes nothing – the Hurricane which has torn Barbadoes to pieces, & is related so pathetically in the Gazette,” and quotes Johnson’s reply: “not true Madam depend upon’t – People so delight to fill
their Mouthes with big Words, and their Minds with a Wonder . . . I did not give Credit a long Time to the Earthquake at Lisbon” (120).


178 See *Dr. Johnson*, where Thrale remarks that Johnson said “Reason is the only source of happiness to reasonable beings” (104). This quotation relates to Johnson’s habitual unhappiness for the simple fact that Rasselas, in the quotation referred to, appears to be challenging the use of reason as the true “source of happiness” -- almost as if Rasselas is contemplating whether or not there is something more to be found outside of the realm of “reason.”

179 Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters*. In his thirteenth letter, entitled *On Mr. Locke*, Voltaire wholeheartedly agrees with Locke’s assessment of innate knowledge, writing: “I am not more disposed than was [Locke] to imagine that a few weeks after my conception I had a soul full of wisdom, knowing then thousands of things that I forgot as I was being born, and that I uselessly possessed in utero knowledge that escaped me just when I could have used it” (42-3). Such commentary illustrates an inherent objection Voltaire had with the philosophy of optimism: we must learn to reason before any innate qualities become external, and if things are already of the best possible design, then it would be a waste of time for any individual to better himself through the acquisition of knowledge, by whatever means. Robert Shackleton avers that an acceptance of Lockean sensationalism after 1734 was the sign of a true philosophe, and that Johnson fits this criterion. From “Johnson and the Enlightenment,” Ed. L.F. Powell, *Johnson, Boswell, and their Circle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 84.


181 Howard Weinbrot, “The Reader, the General, and the Particular: Johnson and Imlac in Chapter Ten of *Rasselas*.” *Aspects of Samuel Johnson*, 182. All subsequent citations from this essay will be parenthetically cited.


183 In *Voltaire and the Theatre of the Eighteenth Century*, Marvin Carlson writes that after Voltaire offended the chevalier de Rohan-Chabot, “the chevalier’s response was to have Voltaire beaten a few days later in broad daylight by six of his servants while the chevalier directed their activities from his nearby carriage,” and after having Voltaire placed in the Bastille, “Voltaire offered to go into voluntary exile in England” (19).


185 See George Birkbeck Hill’s *Johnsonian Miscellanies* Vol. 2 for an excerpt from Joshua Reynolds’s *Works* (1797), where Reynolds writes, “The desire of shining in conversation was in [Johnson], indeed, a predominant passion; and if it must be attributed to vanity, let it at the same time be recollected, that is produced that loquaciousness from which his more intimate friends derived considerable advantage” (231). When considering the numerous comparisons between Johnson and Imlac, it may well be feasible that Imlac’s egotism is the driving force behind many of his commentaries.
Voltaire condemned Rousseau’s philosophy about natural man in a 1755 response to a letter from Rousseau: “Never has so much wit been used in an attempt to make us like animals. The desire to walk on all fours seizes one when one reads your work. However, as I lost that habit more than sixty year ago, I unfortunately sense the impossibility of going back to it” (The Selected Letters of Voltaire, 179). Johnson likewise concluded that Rousseau’s notions about society were not only fictitious, but disingenuous as well, purportedly commenting: “Rousseau, and all those who deal in paradoxes, are led away by a childish desire of novelty” (Boswell. Life of Johnson Vol. 1, 441).

Johnson and all those who deal in paradoxes, are led away by a childish desire of novelty. (Boswell. Life of Johnson Vol. 1, 441)

See Johnson’s Taxation no Tyranny for some of Johnson’s more interesting/conflicted views on colonial expansion. Although the pamphlet was essentially a call to arms for the British to recognize that a battle with Americans was inevitable, Johnson’s negative views on colonization still rise to the surface. Clearly, Johnson believed that the best policy in dealing with Americans was not to fight them, but rather to ignore them altogether: “Let us restore to the French what we have taken from them. We shall see our colonists at our feet, when they have an enemy so near them. Let us give the Indians arms, and teach them discipline, and encourage them, now and then, to plunder a plantation. Security and leisure are the parents of sedition” (451). In short, Johnson advocates a more benevolent attitude towards colonized subjects, because underestimating their willpower or subjecting them to cruelty will be much more likely to result in a rebellion than treating them fairly.

Nicholas Hudson, “Discourse of Transition: Johnson, the 1750s, and the Rise of Rebellion,” The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual (2002), 40. All subsequent citations of this essay will be parenthetically cited.

Thomas M. Curley, “Johnson and America,” The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual (1994), 54. All subsequent citations of this essay will be parenthetically cited.


See Boswell’s Life of Johnson (IV, 357-8) for Johnson’s apparent lack of gusto for the first balloon ascent in England on September 15, 1784. Johnson writes that hot-air ballooning “can give no new intelligence of the state of the air at different heights, till they have ascended above the height of mountains, which they seem never likely to do.” Boswell adds in a footnote that in a letter to his friend Mr. Ryland, Johnson juxtaposed himself with the “Man in the great Ballon” oddly adding, “I live in dismal solitude.” Might Johnson’s inventor, then, have failed because Johnson did not believe men should be able to perform such feats?


See Annette Wheeler Carafelli’s “Johnson and Women: Demasculizing Literary History.” The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual (1992), pp. 62-114. Carafelli notes that “Johnson’s objections” to women do not lie with him, but with the popularizations of him” (64). In Hester Thrale’s Dr. Johnson, Thrale notes that Johnson greatly advocated the education of women and that he believed denying women education was “proof that we [men] are afraid of them – and endeavour to keep them unarmed” (22).

232
James Basker, “Dancing Dogs, Women Preachers, and the Myth of Johnson’s Misogyny,” *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual* (1997), 73. One can see a similar line of thought in W. Jackson Bate’s “Johnson and Satire Manqué” where Bate notes that “the process of correction, throughout *Rasselas*, was self-correction” (159).

One of the almost “comic book” elements of *Candide* lies in the fact that nearly every central character is murdered, but in one odd (even ridiculous) twist of fate or another, they are resurrected at various times throughout the novella.


See Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* for a more detailed discussion of his belief that families are equivalent to monarchies. He writes that children, “The goods of the Father, of which he is truly the Master, are the bonds which keep his children dependent on him, and he can give them a share of his inheritance only in proportion as they shall have properly deserved it from him by continual deference to his wishes. Now subjects, ar from having some similar favor to expect from their Despot, since they and all they possess belong to him as personal belongings – or at least he calims this to be the case – are redunced to receiving as favor what he leaves them of their own goods. He renders justice when he plunders them; he renders grace when he lets them live” (*The Collected Works of Rousseau* Vol. 3, 58).

Schweratzky writes that “Rasselas’s claim that he will administer justice in his own person testifies to his lack of political sophistication, or his forgetfulness” (110).


See Donald Greene’s “The Myth of Johnson’s Misogyny: Some Addenda,” 16. Greene notes that many critics today tend to view Johnson as a misogynist because he treats the problems of men and women in the same manner. Such equal treatment may best be shown in the conclusion, where the central characters all decide against marriage, and imagine themselves occupying prestigious positions that resemble monarchies.


NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

206 Donald Greene, *The Politics of Samuel Johnson* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 13. All subsequent citations are from this volume and will be parenthetically noted.

207 See chapter three of John Cannon’s *Samuel Johnson and the Politics of Hanoverian England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) for more on Johnson’s belief that the Crown should be strengthened. All subsequent citations come from this edition and will be parenthetically noted.

208 Thomas M. Curley forwards that “Johnson believed in the Lockean maxim: government is necessary to man, and where obedience is not compelled, there is no government” (“Johnson and America,” *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual*, 1994), 61. John Cannon adds that Johnson “was as much committed to preserving property as Locke had been . . . of the correctness of the relationship between property and power he had no doubt” (150). Kevin Hart succinctly sums up the Lockean aspects of Johnson’s political ideology, noting that “when thinking of what is essential to government, Johnson’s emphasis is on property, not royalty,” in *Samuel Johnson and the Culture of Property* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 110.


212 Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The Confessions*. Rousseau notes, again paradoxically: “I can make excellent replies impromptu, if I have a moment to think, but on the spur of the moment I can never say or do anything right . . . I do not suffer from this combination of quick emotion and slow thoughts only in company. I know it too when I am alone and when I am working. Ideas take shape in my head with the most incredible difficulty” (113).

213 Many recent critics have echoed Voltaire and Johnson’s labeling of Rousseau as hypocritical or paradoxical. For example, in *Freedom in Rousseau’s Political Philosophy* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), Daniel E. Cullen furthers that Rousseau’s “political theory is an attempt to think the unthinkable, which explains its paradoxical character” (115). Steven Johnston’s *Encountering Tragedy: Rousseau and the Project of Democratic Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) goes so far as to claim that Rousseau is not only aware of his own inconsistencies, but it is intentional (albeit flawed), for although Rousseau “considers himself a theorist of paradox, his commitment to it is intermittent, imperfect, incomplete” (3). James MacAdam’s *Rousseau’s Response to Hobbes* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1988) humorously puns that Rousseau “is not incapable of entertaining inconsistencies, and of entertaining others with them” (3). Specifically addressing Rousseau’s *Social Contract* (1761), Piotr Hoffman questions one of Rousseau’s confounding premises: “If the possession of natural freedom is said to rest on man’s ability to rise to the level of reason, and if man in the state of nature cannot yet rise to that level, then how can he be “master” of his own fate?” *Freedom, Equality, Power: The Ontological Consequences of the Philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1999), 183.
215 Nicholas Hudson, *Samuel Johnson and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 191. All subsequent citations come from this edition and will be parenthetically cited. For more on the idea of Johnson’s “position shift” in the 1750’s consult Jeremy Black’s “The Tory Tradition in Foreign Policy,” *Samuel Johnson in Historical Context*, Eds. Jonathan Clark and Howard Erskine-Hill (New York: Palgrave Publishers, Ltd., 2002). Black writes that as a young man Johnson supported war with Spain, but during the 1750’s-60’s, Johnson took umbrage with Britain’s involvement in the Seven Years’ War. This attitudinal change, according to Black, was due to a “tempering of youthful optimism and changes in the political situation” (177).
218 In *The Politics of Samuel Johnson*, Donald Greene explains that Johnson’s suspicion of political improvement echoes those of Rousseau and Marx (who get the credit for possessing such an attitude), but he argues that Johnson would be a better spokesman for the attitude itself (257). John Converse Dixon’s “Politicizing Samuel Johnson: The Moral Essays and the Question of Ideology” (in *College Literature* Vol. 25, Fall 1998; 67-90), also applies a great deal of Marxist doctrine to Johnson’s thought process, specifically noting that *Adventurer 67* emphasizes the disparity between production and ownership: “In creating wants, commercial society constantly raises the level of material expectations, yet it can never fulfill them” (80).
220 By this statement, I mean that Johnson seemed to relish being in opposition to a majority stance. When it would have been popular to be an avaricious patriot, Johnson denounced such attitudes. If it seemed favorable to encourage American independence or to simply give in to American demands, Johnson’s attitude often borders on the acidic and antagonistic. See chapter four of *The Politics of Samuel Johnson*, where Donald Greene expounds upon Johnson’s radicalism.
221 Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976), 80-82. All subsequent citations come from this edition and will be parenthetically cited and abbreviated *FPM* for *Fall of Public Man* and followed by a comma and the page number.
224 Martine Watson Brownley. “Samuel Johnson and the Writing of History.” *Johnson After Two Hundred Years*, 99. See also Donald Greene’s *The Politics of Samuel Johnson* for more about contributing factors to “the strong bias of [Johnson’s] mind toward empiricism and skepticism” (72).

In *Samuel Johnson and the Making of Modern England*, Hudson incorrectly labels the essay *Idler* 22.

In *Samuel Johnson and the Sense of History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), John Vance forwards the idea that Johnson was a consummate historian and that his writing often looks to antiquity in order to create parallels with the modern. All subsequent citations will be parenthetically noted. Vance’s argument is obviously valid, particularly when examining the introduction to Johnson’s *Dictionary* (and subsequently, the passages contained within it), for “the period in England just before the [Glorious] Revolution becomes for [Johnson] a golden age, not just for authors but for society at large” (Hart 87). Moreover, the passage from the *Plan of an English Dictionary* which introduces this chapter is an “analogy of Caesar’s invasion of Britain” in Peter Borsay’s “The Culture of Improvement,” *The Eighteenth-Century 1688-1815*, Ed. Paul Langford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 196.


See the “Cornwall Speech” from *Taxation no Tyranny* to learn more about Johnson’s view of “compact” (contract) and the ridiculous notion that contracts must be reworked every so often because subsequent generations of people had no hand in making the original agreement (445-7).


240 Karl Marx, Das Kapital, The Norton Anthology of Literary Criticism, 781.


242 Donald Greene, Samuel Johnson: The Major Works, 794.

243 Samuel Johnson, A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, Ed. Mary Lascelles. The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson Vol. 9, 43-4; 47. All subsequent citations will be parenthetically cited and abbreviated JWI for Journey to the Western Islands and followed by a comma and page number.


245 See Boswell’s Grand Tour: Germany and Switzerland (1764) for a conversation between Rousseau and Boswell about Boswell’s being a laird, and Rousseau’s belief that men in such positions do not respect their tenants (pg. 260).
Rousseau and his mistress Térèse Le Vasseur did have five children together, but all were dispatched to foundling hospitals. Even during his own lifetime, the decision to do so became a source of infamy for Rousseau. Theodore Tronchin, Voltaire’s physician, told Boswell, “I used to be [Rousseau’s] friend, but when I found that, rather than be under obligation to any one, he exposed his own infants, I did not wish to see him any more” (Grand Tour 313). For Rousseau’s account of why he orphaned his children, see book eight of The Confessions, specifically pages 332-5.


Consult Boswell’s London Journal for details of Boswell and Johnson’s initial conversation. Boswell: “Indeed I come from Scotland, but I cannot help it.” Johnson: “Sir, that, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help” (260). Also see the Life of Johnson (I, 392) for a slightly more lengthy psychological presentation, as Boswell had the benefit of more than twenty-five years of experiences between when he wrote his London Journal and when he was preparing the Life of Johnson.

See chapter two of Bate’s Samuel Johnson for a Freudian take on Johnson’s feelings toward his father. Bate, in fact, believes Johnson’s anxiety in regard to his own idleness was a byproduct of Michael Johnson’s self-aggrandizement in putting his son on “display” for the amusement of others.

Hester Lynch Piozzi, Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson LL.D. During the last Twenty Years of his Life (London: T. Cadell, 1776) in Johnsonian Miscellany Vol. 1, 155.

See Weinbrot’s “The Reader: The General and the Particular” (citation information can be found in chapter three) for Weinbrot’s dismantling of the idea that Imlac and Johnson are one and the same.

It must be remembered that, while in the Confessions much of the image Rousseau paints of himself is that of a vagabond, the majority of the book deals with his younger life. When Boswell met Rousseau, the latter was fifty-two years old (similarly, Johnson was not quite 54 when he met Boswell), in relatively poor health, and living an isolated existence with the exception of his mistress, a dog named Sultan, and a cat. At the time of their encounter, Rousseau had been experiencing problems (though perhaps largely psychosomatic) with his kidneys and bladder for over fifteen years according to a 1748 letter he wrote referring to an “attack of colic of the kidneys, with fever, burning pain, and retention of urine” – in short, Rousseau had a unceasing need to urinate, which greatly restricted his ability to travel; further, it “encouraged him to avoid social situations that could cause embarrassment” (Damrosch, Jean-Jacques 221). Also see Grand Tour I, where Rousseau tells Boswell, “I am overcome with ailments, disappointments, and sorrow. I am using a probe.” By “probe,” Rousseau is referring to a urethral dilator. Therefore, Rousseau’s traveling days were far behind him and his encouragement of Boswell’s endeavor seems greatly antithetical to what his own personal practice would have been, which is rather odd when considering Rousseau’s sometimes highly temperamental and even vicious behavior.
See the *Life of Johnson* (I, 404) for Boswell’s very similar word choice regarding the description of his early life to Johnson. Boswell notes that he “gave [Johnson] a little sketch of my life, to which he was pleased to listen with great attention” (my emphasis). In the short recollection of this incident (which covers only about two paragraphs) Boswell does not mention his mother, but does mention his trifles with religion.

The index of the Hill-Powell edition of *The Life of Johnson* does not indicate that Boswell ever discussed his mother with Johnson, although his father was the topic of many conversations. Some of the correspondence may address Boswell’s mother, but I did not find any letters which addressed her specifically.

Sara Jordan, “Samuel Johnson and Idleness,” *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual* (2000), 160-3 specifically. Jordan notes that Luke 12:48 was a greatly disturbing and influential verse in Johnson’s life, for it deals with the parable of talents, and Johnson (who was perpetually plagued by his own idleness) routinely tortured himself by believing that he was not living up to expectations by fully utilizing his God-given abilities.


See *London Journal* for more on Boswell’s desire to join the service. In a letter to Boswell, his father writes, “Though I did not like the idea [of you joining the service] I should procure you a commission in a marching regiment, and had one pressed upon me by my good friend General Sinclair, now no more. But you signified your unwillingness to serve in a marching regiment” (342).

Further, see book two of the *Confessions* (specifically pgs. 67-69) for more about Rousseau’s perspective on Catholicism.

See book seven of *The Confessions* for Rousseau’s first impressions of Le Vasseur, where he observes—not unlike Boswell—her “modest behavior and . . . bright and gentle looks” (specifically refer to pgs. 309-12).

See *Grand Tour* II, pages 274-9 for more specifics of Boswell and Le Vasseur’s affair. The actual journal entries that detail their sexual encounters were destroyed by a Sir William Forbes, but before they were destroyed, a Colonel Isham read the account and was able to recall much of it (277).

Elizabeth (Tetty) Porter, whom Johnson married in 1735, was twenty years older than he was. In the *Life of Johnson*, there is very little evidence to indicate that Tetty was a topic of conversation between the time that Johnson first met Boswell in May, 1763 and when Boswell had the affair with Le Vasseur in early 1766. The only indication of her name during this period is an October 1765 entry where Boswell refers to having transcribed part of Johnson’s journal, of which one line reads: “To come in before service, and compose my mind by meditation, or by reading some portions of scriptures. Tetty” (I, 500). My point in noting Johnson’s apparent reluctance to mention his widow is to illustrate that Johnson did not spend time advertising the fact he was with an older woman, or recommending the practice to Boswell. In fact, one might assume that Boswell’s attitude toward older men—that he could gain personal benefit by acquiring some of their knowledge—may simply have transferred over to his views of older women, as well. Further, the rare occasions where specific relationships with women are observed in the *Life of Johnson* are typically not examples of “man-talk” (like their “seraglio” dispute during the Hebrides Tour). Instead, the conversations/letters fall into the archetypal
construction of an older man providing advice to a younger man based upon his own experiences. In a March 1774 letter to Boswell, Johnson writes, “I need not tell you what regard you owe to Mrs. Boswell’s entreaties; or how much you ought to study the happiness of her who studies yours with so much diligence, and of whose kindness you enjoy such good effects. Life cannot subsist in society but by reciprocal concessions. She permitted you to ramble last year, you must permit her now to keep you at home” (*Life II*, 276). Again, this seems to be as specific as the men were in regard to discussing their significant others, and this letter from Johnson seems to be an example of fatherly advice rather than an example of him relating to Boswell through empathy or camaraderie.

262 See also Boswell’s *Sketch*, where he describes having an affair with Lord Kames’s married daughter. Boswell had also “adopted” Lord Kames as a substitute father figure and clearly betrayed him by committing such an act. For further information on the story, consult Richard B. Sher’s “Boswell and Lord Kames,” Ed. Irma S. Lustig, *Boswell: Citizen of the World: Man of Letters* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995) 71-2. Also of interest is that Boswell sought Rousseau’s advice on how to remedy this situation, and was told that he should tell Lady Kames, “Madam, such conduct is against my conscience, and there shall be no more of it,” concluding that “she will applaud you; if not, she is to be despised” (*Grand Tour I*, 254). It is rather ironic and shameful that Boswell apparently followed Rousseau’s advice in regard to Kames’s daughter, but did not follow it as relates to Térèse Le Vasseur.

263 James Boswell, *Letter to Voltaire* (29 March 1767), Ed. Richard C. Cole. *The General Correspondence of James Boswell 1766-1769, Volume 1 (1766-1767)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 131. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be parenthetically cited. See also the *Life of Johnson* (V, 216) where Boswell, defending himself, admits “If I know myself, it is nothing more than an eagerness to share the society of men distinguished either by their rank or their talents, and a diligence to attain what I desire.” It seems that Boswell, while perhaps unlikely to consider himself a sycophant, was able to nonetheless recognize that he did possess traits that may have caused him to appear that way to others.

264 See both the *Life of Johnson* and *Grand Tour* to see Boswell engaging Johnson and Rousseau in conversations about his melancholy.


266 Marlies K. Danzinger, “Boswell’s Travels in Germany and Switzerland,” in *Boswell: Citizen of the World, Man of Letters*, 34.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 7