

The Cub, the Parson, the Doctor: James Boswell, Laurence Sterne, and Samuel Johnson in London

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Introduction

*Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) was the dominant literary figure of the later eighteenth century. He was most famed in his day as the author of the first comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language, but he would be eventually celebrated in equal measure as a great moral sage, essayist, poet, critic, conversationalist, and the second most quoted person in the English language after Shakespeare. Laurence Sterne (1713-1768) was an Irish-born Anglican clergyman who achieved instant celebrity as the author of one of the most wildly innovative comic novels in English, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Though the novel is now considered a key work in the evolution of the novel and a precursor to postmodernist experiments in self-reflexive writing, not every reader has responded favourably to its dizzying novelties. Samuel Johnson, who likely never met Sterne, notoriously if incorrectly predicted that the novel's popularity would fade. James Boswell (1740-1795) also aimed to become a great literary author of the period but his reputation did not fare as well as Johnson's or Sterne's. A generation after his death, he had come to be seen as a buffoon who had needled his way into the company of the powerful and talented while displaying little talent or wit with himself. The 19th-century essayist Lord Macaulay pronounced him "one of the smallest men who ever lived [...] a man of the meanest and feeblest intellect [...] shallow and pedantic, a bigot and a sot [...] a common butt in the taverns of London." Yet Boswell kept meticulous records of his conversations with the eminent writers and thinkers of his age, and from these records were produced not only a remarkable series of journals, unmatched in their detail and directness, but equally one indisputable masterpiece, his *Life of Johnson*, which is generally regarded as the greatest biography in English.*

In this ambitious and exhaustively researched paper, Adria Young gathers pretty much all evidence available (and there's not much of it) connecting Sterne to Johnson, with Boswell emerging as a go-between connecting these two very different personalities. But more than showing how their lives may have intersected, Young develops a lively and suggestive argument about how Boswell, always in search of a father-figure, ultimately shed the exuberant Sterne's early influence in favour of Johnson's sturdier guidance.

-Dr. Trevor Ross

By 1760, Samuel Johnson had already published his *Dictionary of the English Language*, Juvenalian satires and political and moral essays, and he had been granted both an honorary degree from Oxford and a pension. Known by many and well-established in London's intimate literary landscape, Johnson "stooped to no devices for the sake of popularity,"¹ knowing that he was respected for his works.² Early that same year, James Boswell, aged nineteen, descended upon London from Edinburgh to shake off the demands of the Auchinleck judicature and "stretch [his] prospects o'er the smiling land."³ He made acquaintance with the Earl of Eglinton and dedicated his doggerel poem "The Cub at Newmarket" to the Duke of York.⁴ Thus Boswell and his poetical aspirations elbowed their way into London society. Simultaneously, Yorkshire parson Laurence Sterne was planning a trip to London to consign copies of the first two volumes

of *Tristram Shandy* to the Dodsley Family Publishers. Sterne wrote to Robert Dodsley in October 1759, requesting that he print “two small volumes, of the size of *Rasselas*” for an anticipated profit.⁵ Sterne left York, and after copies of his novel began to circulate, he was told at Dodsley’s shop that no copy could be found in London “either for Love or money.”⁶ This success would continue, and he would publish seven more volumes until 1767. Boswell and Johnson each met Sterne in 1760 and 1761 with distinct reactions to the author: Boswell smiling and Johnson sneering. When looking at their reactions to Sterne and exploring the purpose of literature, morality and conscience, personas and prebendaries, what surfaces is a flow of the modern search for self-identity against the ebb of Christian self-assurance—a tide of difference between Bozzy and Dr. Johnson, understood through Mr. Yorick.

The winds from York and Edinburgh blew south to London. As a child, Boswell read the *Spectator* and was introduced to the intellectual refinement taking place on the Thames.⁷ He was a boy “brought up tenderly”⁸ in the diseased and violent streets of Edinburgh. His family profession was law—the highest station in the Scottish class structure—and Boswell was reared for it, though he had no passion for it.⁹ His religious attitudes, however, had always been inconsistent. His mother’s Calvinism dominated his childhood, and at the University of Edinburgh he followed the Wesleyan Methodism of the Anglican Church.¹⁰ By 1760, the “indulgences of a confused 19 year old”¹¹ were to be found in the Roman Catholic Church, and Boswell fled to London. But his conversion was short-lived, and by April, his faith was in the strain of deism, and his commitment to revelation was no longer.¹² He was a free man in London with poetry and ambition. But his religious flip-flopping signified a restlessness of spirit developing within him, a restlessness Laurence Sterne would influence until 1763.

Sterne, like Boswell, descended from a family with a strong social tradition, and he, too, was reared to continue within it. His grandfather, Richard Sterne, was the Archbishop of York and the editor of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Sterne’s inherited station was that of clergyman, and he preached sermons as a rural Anglican parson for twenty years. By 1759, he had completed the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy*, a novel of its own kind, and in the spring of 1760, he made his way to London. As Frederick A. Pottle remarks, Boswell engaged with almost every fashionable social figure of his day; he was well-liked and had written at least three works in the style of Sterne.¹³ His poems and themes were in the style of *Tristram Shandy*, written with “unbridled imagination [...] at random, without trying to have any order or method.”¹⁴ Their meeting in Pall Mall only further encouraged Boswell’s creative spirit. Boswell read Sterne “The Cub at Newmarket,” and Sterne made a jolly leap, patted him on the head, and called him a poet.¹⁵ Pottle writes: “Boswell was struck, as everyone else was, by the amazing metamorphosis of parson [Sterne] into the most sought-after man of the hour.”¹⁶ Boswell wrote in a letter to Lord Eglinton the next year that Sterne was “the best companion [he] ever knew, and the most taking composer of sermons that [he had] ever read.”¹⁷ The first two volumes of Sterne’s sermons appeared in May 1760 under the pen name of MR. Yorick. His parabolic style of writing emphasized the necessity of self-reflection through reason and revelation and stated that “conscience is nothing else but the knowledge which the mind has within herself of

[religion].”¹⁸ Interestingly, Sterne’s lively reiterations of Anglican ideology seem to have been ignored by Boswell, searching as he was to understand himself and his restless spirituality through a more secular experience of the world, rather than through the Protestant tenet that the “truth abideth in you.”¹⁹ It is obvious, however, that Sterne’s other works had a great influence upon him. Sterne’s style in *Tristram Shandy* was unique and new in eighteenth-century novel-writing. It was not the linear narrative of Fielding or the epistolary structure of Richardson. Take the anonymous review from the *London Magazine*, February 1760:

“Oh rare Tristram Shandy!—Thou very sensible—humorous—pathetick—humane—unaccountable!—what shall we call thee?—Thou hast afforded us so much real pleasure in perusing thy life.”²⁰

The novel is, indeed, unconventional. The hero, Tristram Shandy, tells the story of his life in digressions and suggestions; full of witty and strange characters, the novel opens with a descriptive account of the copulation of his parents. It was not at all Sterne’s sermonic teaching but rather an introduction to a more sentimental approach to knowledge: the mind as susceptible to a multitude of impressions of uncontrollable passions and imaginations, as something “betwixt a natural law [reason] and a positive law [the divine].”²¹ Through the personas of Tristram and Yorick, Sterne captured the imagination of Boswell. Boswell wrote an epistle to Sterne that was discovered in the last century—a dogged verse of rhyming couplets and elaborations that opens appropriately, with a passage from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. He writes: “Who has not *Tristram Shandy* read? / Is any mortal so ill-bred?”²² It is a poem of one hundred and eighty-two lines of praise, with comments on Sterne’s Ecclesiastic dress of “colours dubious, black or brown,” his wit (“there he is, do, Thomas! look, / Who’s wrote such a damn’d clever book”), and the man himself:

Whose sterling jests, a sportive strain,
How warmly-genuine from the brain
And with bright poignancy appear,
Original to ev’ry ear!
Whose heart is all Benevolence;
Whose constant leader is good sense.²³

What a high opinion of an author Boswell met just once! Here, Sterne is envisioned as a personality free from convention, as a man who ventures forth into the world without seeming to adhere to any religious or social system.

Ronald Hafter notes that Sterne was an avid fan of theatre and that he admired the great Shakespearean actor David Garrick²⁴ (there are several apostrophes to Garrick in Sterne’s novel).²⁵ In fact, Sterne admired the theatre so much that he took to replicating the way that stage

acting was performed in his writing, resulting in what he called “a new realism.”²⁶ Take this scene featuring Corporal Trim in *Tristram Shandy* as an example:

——“Are we not here now;”——continued the corporal, “and are we not”——
(dropping his hat plumb upon the ground,——and pausing before he pronounced the
word) ——“gone! In a moment?”²⁷

This theatrical style of writing is characteristic of Sterne’s novel. The dashes serve to mimic the pauses of speech and the parenthetical actions serve as stage directions. It is Sterne’s style of realism, and it is what Boswell imitates. In his *London Journal*, Boswell commands a theatrical style in his conversations with Louisa. For example: “But pray, what was this favour? Might I know? (She blushed)” and “(I then began to take some liberties). ‘Nay, Sir—now—but do consider—.’”²⁸ It is a clear imitation of the great *Tristram!* And not only did Boswell imitate the novel stylistically, but after he left London for Edinburgh in 1760, he adopted an attitude that mirrors Tristram’s own outlook on life as a “whimsical theatre of ours” that we must “enjoy and make the most of,”²⁹ stating that he longed to return again to where “every agreeable whim may be fully indulged without censure.”³⁰ Boswell’s *London Journal* is a fair indication that he was adopting a Shandean way of viewing the world and that he was coming to know himself by it. Upon his return to London in 1762, he entered into this passage into his diary: “Common views [...] cannot like London [...] but a person of imagination and feeling can have the most lively enjoyment.”³¹ Imagination and feeling? That sounds rather sentimental of Boswell. Could it have anything to do with Sterne? Granted, Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey to France and Italy* was not published until 1768 (shortly before his death), but the ‘man of feeling’ was becoming quite fashionable, and Sterne had been the first to use the term in 1741.³² In *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne writes of the “delicious and tender sentiment”³³ available in life. Not only was Boswell experiencing London sentimentally, his personality was at the mercy of influence. He writes: “I have discovered that we may be in some degree whatever we choose. Besides, practice forms a man to anything.”³⁴ Sterne, however, writes before this: “this book of mine [...] has got so strongly into our habit and humour.”³⁵ If practice forms a man into anything, then the habit of reading Sterne’s novel formed Boswell into a Shandean.

Boswell had been living in London for two years before he met Johnson, and he was searching for a personality that would suit. Pottle remarks that even “The Cub at Newmarket” is a “painful attempt to write after the manner of Sterne”; while Sterne was known as the Literary Lion of London, Boswell dubbed himself the “Cub.”³⁶ Sterne had his own collection of personas, allowing him to first write sermons as Parson Yorick and then to transform himself into the bawdy and satirical author of *Tristram Shandy*, the sentimental traveller of the *Journey*, and the grovelling lover in his *Journal to Eliza*. Even the name ‘Tristram’ is played on extensively within the work, from misnaming to misspelling. And here is Boswell in London: in his concern for money, he is a ‘man of economy’; in his concern for sentiment, he is a ‘man of feeling’; and when taking whores in the park, he is a ‘libertine.’ Yet, he is never truly any of these and neither

is he none of them. He tries to be a man of religion (“I took a whim to go through all the churches and chapels in London”), English (“I returned [...] and drank tea”), and he tries to get into the Guards (“the brilliant Guards!”). One thing he did become, however, was a “natural, compulsive writer,” which would later come in handy as a biographer.³⁷ But, for the time being, Boswell was seeking spiritual fulfilment without directing his thoughts inward. For the most part, his goals were reputation, acquaintance, and “acquir[ing] a composed genteel character very different from a rattling uncultivated one.”³⁸ Like Sterne, Boswell adopted different personas in the hope that, through practice, at least one might stick. At the time, however, he did not seem to realize that searching for a moral caregiver in Sterne’s work could not ease his restless pursuit.³⁹ Boswell had difficulty understanding some of his feelings. When he was about to consummate his relationship with Louisa, he wrote: “I was in a strange flutter of feeling [...] I had such anxiety upon me [...] I almost wished to be free of this assignation.”⁴⁰ In his dictionary, Johnson defines anxiety as “solicitude about any future event,”⁴¹ manifest in a drop in spirits, pertaining to action. Indeed, Boswell expresses this uneasiness, though it remains incomprehensible to him, throughout his *Journal*. It is this sense of uneasiness that also marks his restlessness and his search for a personality. It is a symptom of his turning away from religion. He lacks a moral system. By contrast, in Johnson, we see a known self founded in religion. What Sterne symbolizes for Boswell, then, is a shift in the way identity is sought after and realized, a more secular path to self-knowledge, yet it is a model that for Boswell, offers no true fulfillment.

Sterne left London shortly after meeting Boswell and returned again in 1761, on his way to France.⁴² Sir Joshua Reynolds and Sterne had become friends after Reynolds painted his portrait in 1760. On Sterne’s return to London, Reynolds invited him to dinner on a late November evening. Dr. Johnson was in attendance, as usual, being a very intimate companion of Reynolds. Sterne began reading a dedication to Lord and Lady Spencer, doing so “uninvited,” an error for which Johnson interrupted and admonished him: “I told him it was not English.”⁴³ Sterne responded by showing “a drawing too indecently gross to have delighted even in a brothel”⁴⁴ (as Johnson recounted), and the Doctor promptly left. This was their only encounter. Johnson was neither pleased with Sterne as an author nor as a supposed priest, responsible for the souls of his parishioners. Why did Johnson so disapprove of a man of the same religion, acquaintance, and station as himself? Because, Johnson writes, “the legitimate end of fiction is the conveyance of truth.”⁴⁵ For as popular as *Tristram Shandy* was, there remained a crowd unpersuaded by Sterne’s antics. An advertisement in the *Whitehall Evening Post* published this of Sterne in 1760: “for his letters are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.”⁴⁶ One author in the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* quoted Alexander Pope in reference to Sterne’s novel: “Immodest Words admit of no Defence, / For Want of Decency is Want of Sense.”⁴⁷ The clockmakers of the kingdom, reacting to a moment in the novel to be later discussed, assembled to condemn Sterne, stating that “the pernicious author of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.* is to be looked at with horror and detestation.”⁴⁸ Johnson, however, spoke and wrote very little of Sterne. If we look at all the words he devoted to Milton or Gray, this is an indication that he did not take Sterne very

seriously as an author. A well-known quotation shows Johnson's take on Sterne's writing: "Nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* did not last."⁴⁹ For Johnson, literature had to communicate the truth of life. It had to have an explicit didactic purpose in order to be worthwhile.

There is no doubt that Johnson was familiar with Sterne's work. In addition to *Tristram Shandy*, he admitted to reading Sterne's sermons but felt they had only "the froth from the surface of the cup of salvation."⁵⁰ For Johnson, Sterne's unconventional writing, the oddity of it, was not a responsible method of moral teaching. In *Rambler No. 4*, published in 1750, Johnson expresses his disapproval of this trend of realistic novels:

Why this wild strain of imagination found reception [...] is not easy to conceive [...] A book was thus produced without [...] knowledge of nature, or acquaintance with life.⁵¹

His criticism of the realistic novel is that it retreats so far into imagination that it is impossible for readers to extract a moral purpose; it confounds "the colours of right and wrong [...] instead of helping settle their boundaries, mix[ing] them with so much art that no common mind is able to disunite them."⁵² This criticism reflects Johnson's belief that literature should depict man in his true state, offer a path that will ultimately allow him to check his passions and vices, and cultivate virtue in the recognition of his folly. James B. Misenheimer writes that Johnson evaluates literature as "a serious force which can redirect human conduct and thereby work for man's moral and spiritual betterment,"⁵³ a view that he attributes to the Christian humanist tradition that Johnson reigns within. The function of literature is to give man cause to reform his spirit by showing him an accurate reflection of human nature and experience, as with the parabolic style of Christ in the New Testament, so that man might "see with his eyes, hear with his ears, understand with his heart, and turn and be healed."⁵⁴ The author's duty, as Johnson writes in the *Preface to Shakespeare*, "is to make the world better,"⁵⁵ and as in the Protestant tradition, literature must be accessible to all for the improvement of being. Literature must neither exceed the bounds of probability nor glamorize or make light of serious moral concerns, confusing the reader's sense of judgement. Most definitely this new "realistic fiction" must not be imitated. With this foundation in place, we can move on to see why Johnson so disliked Sterne as both a novelist and a man.

If Johnson's style of writing was intended to accurately reflect human experience (especially that of London, if we look to the *Rambler* essays and their modest allegories), then we can see how *Tristram Shandy* violates Johnson's principles of literature. Not only is the novel's narrative without linearity or order (a chapter opens "very nonsensically," and the Preface can be found in the middle of Volume III),⁵⁶ but Sterne leaves the understanding of the novel partly to the reader, "halv[ing] it amicably" in a much different manner than the didactic Johnson.⁵⁷ Sterne anticipates that his writing will entertain, employing a sexual innuendo that

merits interpretation. In a scene where Tristram describes the writing process, we can see such bawdiness at work:

Every line I write, I feel an abatement of the quickness of my pulse [...] And this moment that I last dipp'd my pen into ink [...]—Lord! How different from the rash jerks, and hair-brain'd squirts thou art wont, *Tristram!* [...]—dropping thy pen,—
—spurting thy ink about thy table and thy books.⁵⁸

If the abatement of the pulse and the spurting of ink about the room are looked at closely, the passage reveals itself to be an allusion to masturbation, and not even a subtle one. It is a far cry from Johnson's allusions to Truth and justice! Sterne's tone in dealing with the mind-body duality, an issue Johnson would take very seriously, is reduced to a metaphor about "the jerkin" and the "jerkin's lining."⁵⁹ In eighteenth-century clothing, a jerkin was a waistcoat, but here it serves as a playful symbol of the penis and foreskin: "for never poor jerkin has been tickled off [...] ding dong, cut and thrust, back stroke and fore stroke [...] have they been trimming it for me:—had there been the least gumminess in my lining,—by heaven!"⁶⁰ Here, Sterne is treating the vices of the body as counter to the soul's desire for virtue, yet too lightly he says man shifts from side to side, "to button up one cause of vexation!—and unbutton another!"⁶¹ The metaphor also implies that because the jerkin and lining cannot be separated, the soul "will perish with the body,"⁶² a notion that is contra Anglican doctrine and therefore serves no moral purpose for Johnson. Along with the several references to noses (penises), crevices, whiskers (pubic hair), and the assertion that there is "no chaste word throughout all of *Johnson's* dictionary" to describe the bum,⁶³ Sterne's play with sexual and often gross images amid a romp of silly characters and unrealistic events perverts Johnson's belief that literature should seek to teach through simple and relatable circumstances. In a rather famous scene in the first few chapters of Volume I, Tristram recounts his conception. His father, taking up John Locke's 'association of ideas,' winds the clock every Sunday and has sex with his mother, who eventually becomes aroused just by the sound of the clock being wound. On the night of Tristram's conception, his mother, not as aroused as usual, screams out: "'*Have you not forgot to wind up the clock?*'"⁶⁴ Tristram uses the scene to illustrate that his misfortunes were fated from his conception and that the impressionability of his senses began then.⁶⁵ But was there not another way this point could have been addressed? Sterne's manner seems gratuitous. What Peter Quennell observes about Sterne is that "he treat[s] the human character not as a well-established whole, but as a fortuitous 'bundle of perceptions.'"⁶⁶ It is this treatment Johnson abhors—he puts his trust in God for self-knowledge, not, as Boswell does, in popular ideologies of sentimental revelation. When Lady Monckton told Johnson she liked Sterne's writing, he famously replied, "'(smiling and rolling himself about,) that is, because, dearest, you're a dunce.'"⁶⁷ He was not one to be persuaded by groin injuries and widows, and both his moral beliefs and his faith separated him from the popular fashions of "idleness" and "imbecility."⁶⁸

It is, then, Johnson's religious thought that informs his literature and, indeed, his understanding of the world and his place within it. Quennell writes that Johnson had a "firm conviction of his personal identity" through Christianity.⁶⁹ In a 1766 letter to William Drummond, Johnson proclaims that, "Christianity is the highest perfection of humanity!"⁷⁰ It is the end to which all things are done. We know from Chester F. Chapin and Charles E. Pierce Jr. that Johnson dealt with issues of scepticism and the insufficiency of Christianity to wholly explain the ills and sorrows of life.⁷¹ However, it was through reasonable thought that Johnson realized the necessity of accepting religion, despite the growing scepticism of sentimentalists like Sterne. As Chapin writes, Johnson came to see that man was not "the tool-making animal, not even the reasoning animal," but the "religious animal," guided by the contemplation of eternity in the finite realm; the Rasselasean "choice of life" was the "choice of eternity" to "furnish the employment of the whole soul."⁷² Johnson's devotion to this ideal was strong. He fervently believed that the course of the mortal life would be judged in the afterlife⁷³ and that man required an adequate teacher of moral doctrine. His essays, literature, and poetry are centered in Christian morality, and his friendships reflect an inclination toward loving every neighbour, not just the fashionable ones.⁷⁴ It was this spiritual love for mankind that informed Johnson's didactic approach to literature. He was concerned not only with the fate of his own soul but with the souls of others, "in a most liberal charity."⁷⁵ The Anglican clergy, then, was a very serious office, for it mediated between the divine and the human. Boswell records an opinion in *The Life*:

[...] he justly considered that the clergy, as persons set apart for the sacred office of serving at the altar, and impressing the minds of men with the awful concerns of a future state, should be somewhat more serious than the generality of mankind, and have a suitable composure of manners.⁷⁶

Although Boswell recorded this as a conversation in 1781, we can assume that Johnson was consistent in his opinion of the clergy when Sterne's fame peaked. He even whispered to his friend Beauclerk on one occasion that the "merriment of parsons is mighty offensive."⁷⁷ Clearly, the *bon vivant* Sterne was in breach of this sacred code of conduct. Not only was he skipping about London attending parties (as Johnson said, "The man, Sterne, I have been told, has had engagements for three months")⁷⁸ and earning the favours of Lord Chesterfield (which may have annoyed Johnson given earlier Chesterfield incidents),⁷⁹ but he was making a mockery of the establishment of the Church through his writing. How dare an Anglican prebendary write of foreskins and farts! It was mighty offensive, to be sure, but it was certainly more dangerous in its power of influence. Johnson writes that realistic fiction is "written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, the idle, to whom [it] serve[s] as lectures of conduct," and this prophesy seems to be fulfilled by Boswell: young, ignorant, and idle, acting as a Shandean, writing love letters to Sterne, and "following the current of fancy."⁸⁰ Sterne's popularity likely contributed to Johnson's dislike of him since it encouraged those like Boswell to seek knowledge of the self in trivial experiences and to disengage with crucial moral

principles. In Johnson's writing, vice was meant "to disgust" but in Sterne's work, it was called a Hobbyhorse and "stroked" by Uncle Toby.⁸¹ To be fair, Sterne placed the reading of a sermon ("The Abuses of Conscience considered") within his novel, but the characters chide it, interrupt it, misunderstand it, and fall asleep during it. While some scholars assert that Sterne's technique is intended to show how precepts are generally impractical,⁸² Johnson would likely have viewed it as a distortion of otherwise perceptible meaning—"an empty sound, without any relation to practice or to life."⁸³ For Johnson, the purpose of life was to please God, suppress all other passions, and uphold the standard of the established Church, even if by error.⁸⁴ For Johnson, writing presupposed a moral purpose. It is in this sense that Johnson looked inward for self-knowledge, whereas young Boswell preferred to search outward.

Boswell's and Johnson's reactions to Sterne show a fundamental change in views on life and identity in the later eighteenth century. Boswell sought to know himself through objects of the world. He had a very flimsy religious foundation, having been drawn to and from different religious sects and never having grasped a firm footing in any. Johnson describes the danger in this:

‘We ought not [...] desert the religion in which we have been educated. That is the religion given you [...] that Providence has placed in you. But error is dangerous, indeed, if you err when you choose a religion for yourself.’⁸⁵

This is significant to understanding Boswell and his attraction to Johnson after their meeting in 1763. He was seeking a stability of spirit, and in his effort to gain a persona "*a la* Tristram Shandy,"⁸⁶ he only became more restless in London, lacking a base of knowledge with which he might understand his malaise. What good is Shandean sentimentalism if the practice of it answers very few questions about how to conduct one's life? Without a sure footing in religion, he was not able to mend those habits that repeatedly caused him guilt (the whores, for example). As a Shandean, he was immersed in experience. But experience, says Johnson, must have an end, and in life, man must realize that "whate'er he gives, he gives the best."⁸⁷ This is derived from Luke 12:48: "of him, to whom much is given, much shall be required."⁸⁸ The maxim dominates Johnson's conduct in life and literature. It is the goal of the religiously-informed author to help others come to that same knowledge so they might be able to check their passions and reach toward virtue. The goal of the author is not, for Johnson, to misuse the clerical office to write a bawdy novel without an accessible moral system. For Boswell, however, this abandonment of a system was appealing. It reflected a growing trend in an unending search for identity and was set in direct opposition to more traditional means of attaining self-assurance, such as Johnson found through religion. Nonetheless, Boswell and Johnson's immediate intellectual attraction to one another after meeting in 1763 was the beginning of a companionship of travel, dining, and gallivanting. And Boswell, of course, would write what has been called the greatest biography of all time, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*. In the end, what Boswell sought in

Sterne was found in the stable and steadfast moral advisor, Dr. Johnson, and after all, for both gentlemen, *Tristram Shandy* did not last.

Notes

- ¹ Charles Grosvenor Osgood, introduction, *Life of Johnson*, by James Boswell, eds. Charles Grosvenor Osgood and Mowbray Morris (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1917), xiv.
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ Samuel Johnson, "London," *Samuel Johnson: The Major Works*, ed. Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2-8, 1.214.
- ⁴ Frederick A. Pottle, "Bozzy and Yorick," *Blackwood's Magazine* 218.1 (1925): 299-300.
- ⁵ Lewis P. Curtis, *Letters of Laurence Sterne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 80.
- ⁶ Arthur H. Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years* (New York: Methuen & Co, 1992), 3.
- ⁷ Roger Hutchinson, *All the Sweets of Being: A Life of James Boswell* (Edinburg: Mainstream, 1995), 34.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 54.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 55.
- ¹³ Pottle, 300.
- ¹⁴ Curtis, 80.
- ¹⁵ Pottle, 311.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 306.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 304.
- ¹⁸ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, eds. Joan New and Melvyn New (Florida: Penguin Classics, 2003), 111.
- ¹⁹ *The Holy Bible*, KJV, John 2:27.
- ²⁰ In Alan B. Howes, *Sterne: The Critical Heritage* (Boston: Routledge, 1974), 82.
- ²¹ Sterne, 382.
- ²² Howes, 82.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 81, 83, 84.
- ²⁴ Ronald Hafter, "Garrick and Tristram Shandy," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 7.3 (1967): 480.
- ²⁵ See, for instance, Sterne Vol IV chapter 7 and Vol III, chapters 12 and 24.
- ²⁶ Hafter, 480.
- ²⁷ Sterne, 326.
- ²⁸ James Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal 1762-1763*, ed. Frederick A. Pottle (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 20 Dec 1762, 1 Jan 1763.
- ²⁹ Sterne, 213, 310.
- ³⁰ Qtd. In Hutchinson, 61.
- ³¹ Boswell, *London Journal*, 5 Dec 1762.
- ³² Peter Quennell, *Samuel Johnson: His Friends and Enemies* (New York: American Heritage, 1973), 63.
- ³³ Sterne, 46.
- ³⁴ Boswell, *London Journal*, 47.
- ³⁵ Sterne, 53.
- ³⁶ Pottle, 299.
- ³⁷ Boswell, *London Journal*, 26 Dec 1762, 2 Jan 1763, 20 Jan 1763.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 Nov 1762.

- ³⁹ For further discussion of Boswell's feelings, see Susan Manning's "Boswell's Pleasures, the Pleasures of Boswell" *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 20.1 (1997).
- ⁴⁰ Boswell, *London Journal*, 22 Dec 1762.
- ⁴¹ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: J. MacGowan, 1824), 34.
- ⁴² Cash, 104.
- ⁴³ Qtd. In Peter Jan de Voogd, "'The Object of Great Remark': Laurence Sterne and Samuel Johnson," *Essays on English and American Literature and a Sheaf of Poems*, eds. J. Bakker, J.A. Verleun, and J. V.d. Vriesenaerde (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), 66.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 66.
- ⁴⁵ Qtd. In James B. Misenheimer, "Dr. Johnson's Concept of Literary Fiction," *The Modern Language Review* 62.4 (1967): 598.
- ⁴⁶ *The Whitehall Evening Post; Or London Intelligencer* Issue 1128, 24 Jan 1760, in *Early English Books Online*, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.882003&res_id-xri:eebo:citation:99882547 (accessed 20 November 2008).
- ⁴⁷ Howes, 62.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.
- ⁴⁹ James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 696.
- ⁵⁰ Howes, 218.
- ⁵¹ Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* 4, *Major Works*, 175.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 178.
- ⁵³ James B. Misenheimer, "Samuel Johnson's Christian Humanism and the Function of Literature," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 3 (1973):148.
- ⁵⁴ *Holy Bible*, Isaiah 6:9-10.
- ⁵⁵ Samuel Johnson, "Preface to Shakespeare," *Major Works*, 427.
- ⁵⁶ Sterne, 64.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 96
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 193-4
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 302.
- ⁶² Quennell, 215.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 288.
- ⁶⁴ Sterne, 6.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 600 n6.
- ⁶⁶ Quennell, 214.
- ⁶⁷ Qtd. In Howes, 219.
- ⁶⁸ Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* 121, *Major Works*, 217.
- ⁶⁹ Quennell, 204.
- ⁷⁰ Qtd. in Boswell, *Life*, 375.
- ⁷¹ I am referring here to Charles E. Pierce's study *The Religious Life of Samuel Johnson* (Hamden: Archon, 1968), 159.
- ⁷² Chester F. Chapin, *The Religious Thought of Samuel Johnson* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968), 159.
- ⁷³ Boswell, *Life*, 1784.
- ⁷⁴ Take for instance, Johnson's admiration for Richard Savage in this respect in his *Life of Savage*.
- ⁷⁵ Boswell, *Life*, 1784.
- ⁷⁶ Boswell, *Life*, 1124.
- ⁷⁷ Boswell, *Life*, 1125.
- ⁷⁸ Qtd. in Howes, 218.

⁷⁹ For commentary on Johnson's relationship with Lord Chesterfield see Cash, p.82, and pp.183-7 of Boswell's *Life*.

⁸⁰ Johnson, *Rambler* 4, 176.

⁸¹ Johnson, *Rambler* 4, 178; Sterne, 413.

⁸² Arthur H. Cash in particular, but this is a common interpretation post-Cash, as well.

⁸³ Johnson, *Rambler* 4, 178.

⁸⁴ Chapin, 77.

⁸⁵ Qtd. in Chapin, 142.

⁸⁶ Pottle, 304.

⁸⁷ Samuel Johnson, "The Vanity of Human Wishes," *Major Works*, 1.356.

⁸⁸ Holy Bible, Luke 12:48.