Introduction

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When James H. Sledd and Gwin J. Kolb marked the bicentenary of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* in 1955, they summarized the features that were part of the established pattern of contemporary research on Johnson's *Dictionary*. It is remarkable, fifty years on, how many of these have remained with us, some having hardened into clichés:

> Johnson's word-list is criticized as bookish, a little remote from the crudities of everyday life, sometimes almost un-English; but it may equally be praised for its inclusiveness. It is noted that though Johnson marked the accents of words, he said little about pronunciation, and his etymologies and his fussy remarks on usage are treated as rather ludicrous but typical of his age. To Johnson's definitions, his careful distinction and classification of the different senses of words, the historian gives high praise, but praise a little tempered by reference to tart Johnsonian humor or stilted Johnsonese. Unlimited praise is given to his industriously collected illustrative quotations, which are represented, with his definitions, as his grand contribution to the technique of English lexicography.[1]

Their aim was to bring to bear on Johnson's *Dictionary* new knowledge that had been gained in the previous fifty years about English philology, grammatical traditions, theories of language, and the development of lexicography in England, so that the established pattern might be "clarified, modified in some of its details and enriched with some new lore" (pp. 3–4).

The "new lore" may be different now, but our aim in this volume is very similar to theirs. We hope to bring to bear on Johnson's *Dictionary* the most recent research carried out in the distinct fields of literary scholarship, bibliography, textual criticism, corpus linguistics, and historical lexicography. In the process we hope to disturb some received ideas about the *Dictionary* and to suggest new avenues for research that have so far been neglected.

The *Dictionary* can hardly be called a neglected work. In the 250 years since it first appeared on 15 April 1755, Johnson's work has appeared in at least 52 editions, 13 adaptations, 120 abridgments, 309 miniature versions,

7 printed facsimile editions, 4 sets of selections, and 2 CD-ROMs. It has been the subject of more than 350 published works, including at least 28 books and a book-length bibliography. It even features in an episode of a television sitcom. The pace, moreover, seems to be quickening: fully half the published commentary has appeared in the last three decades. The number of passing references in general books about Johnson, English literature, the English language, or dictionaries generally is probably beyond the power of anyone to count.

And yet, despite the mountains of criticism, much of the *Dictionary* remains unfamiliar, even to scholars. This is because the book has led a kind of double life in which it is at once very familiar and very unfamiliar. The "familiar" *Dictionary* is a paradoxical one: it is presumed to have been written as part of a widespread effort in the eighteenth century to codify the language, to establish a standard form of English, and to stigmatize and marginalize the vulgar, the regional, the oral, and the dialect. In this account Johnson's *Dictionary* is seen as a centralizing, class-based, Anglocentric, and nationalist document of high culture and dogmatic authoritarianism.[2] It has at the same time been widely read as idiosyncratic and wayward, reflecting and presenting Johnson's own very individual prejudices and political outlook. Knowledge of this *Dictionary* comes from Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, from Johnson's statements in his Preface, and from a few well-known entries for such words as *whig* and *tory, oats* and *lexicographer*. This *Dictionary*, at once authoritative and idiosyncratic, is the *Dictionary* that has entered the world of legend.

The "unfamiliar" *Dictionary*, on the other hand, has emerged only from deep and sustained research into the book's content. The most recent stage of this research began in earnest in 1986 with Robert DeMaria's investigation of the illustrative quotations in the *Dictionary*, many of which were traced back to their source texts.[3] A picture began to emerge of a much more scholarly Johnson than had been presented by those who relied on the literal truth of his self-effacing comment in the Preface: "The examples, thus mutilated, are no longer to be considered as conveying the sentiments or doctrine of their authours . . . it may sometime happen, by hasty detruncation, that . . . the divine may desert his tenets, or the philosopher his system" (1825 *Works*, vol. v, p. 39).

DeMaria's discoveries were complemented by the groundbreaking research of Allen Reddick, whose *Making of Johnson's Dictionary* (1990) charted in unprecedented detail the genealogy and gestation of the *Dictionary* from manuscript to printed book.[4] This study gave us new knowledge about how the *Dictionary* was compiled, including the astounding

discovery that some of the material from the original notebooks in which Johnson started his *Dictionary* had survived in the form of slips containing illustrative quotations that were reused in revisions to the fourth edition of 1773. Previous work on the *Dictionary* had focused almost exclusively on the first edition, but the new light shed by Reddick's immensely detailed scholarly and bibliographic scrutiny of the text has resulted in renewed study of the fourth edition.

DeMaria and Reddick inaugurated a new stage of serious study of the *Dictionary*, but much remains to be done. Most notably, there has still been relatively little attention to Johnson's *Dictionary* as a dictionary. Compared with the attention paid to literary texts, dictionaries in general have received very little bibliographical, textual, stemmatic, critical, theoretical, or historiographical scrutiny. And most of those who have written about the *Dictionary* are literary scholars, who tend to regard Johnson as a literary lexicographer. They give primacy in their readings of the *Dictionary* to the fact that it was written uniquely by *Johnson*, rather than a part of both English and Continental traditions of lexicography or the result of collaborative effort, both synchronically and diachronically. Many articles have been written about Johnson's use of his source texts, for example, making the claim that Johnson shaped the text according to certain ideological, political, moral, or cultural forces, without always considering that his reasons for selecting and editing the quotations may have been driven by *linguistic* considerations – whether, for example, they sufficiently illustrate or exemplify the meaning of a word.

Linguists and lexicographers have developed a rather different picture. Viewed as a milestone in the history of language and lexicography, rather than in the context of Johnson's life and works, the *Dictionary* has been seen as a culmination of an earlier tradition of English lexicography and as a precursor of the *OED*. But whereas literary scholars have generally celebrated Johnson's *Dictionary*, many lexicographers have reacted against it: the *Dictionary* has been demonized by Noah Webster, then by Richard Chevenix Trench and the early editors of the *OED*, and subsequently by modern lexicologists whose preference for descriptive and non-judgmental recording of the language is seen as running counter to Johnson.

In linguistic scholarship too, however, there have been recent developments, resulting from close detailed reading of the text, and these new insights have revised received wisdom. There have been studies of his principles of word selection (his treatment of lemmas, technical terms, calques or loan words, and ad-hoc coinages); his treatment of morphological

variants, compound words, participles, and phrasal verbs; his definitions and explanations, particularly his treatment of polysemy; and his attempts to trace the semantic history of words. This work has served to alter our conception of Johnson the lexicographer: he is now seen to address some of the central issues in lexicology, linguistics, and the philosophy of language. Patrick Hanks, formerly editor at Oxford English Dictionaries, even goes so far as to claim that "Johnson crisply addresses theoretical issues which were subsequently neglected for some two hundred years . . . until philosophers such as Russell and Wittgenstein, and pedagogical theorists such as C. K. Ogden took them up independently in the twentieth century."[5]

In this collection we have tried to reflect the current state of research by including work by scholars engaged in linguistic, literary, editorial, bibliographic, and lexicographic criticism of Johnson's *Dictionary*. More importantly, we have tried to bring these diverse approaches together, out of a conviction that only a variety of critical methods can do justice to a work of this magnitude. The first edition of the *Dictionary* alone contains roughly three million words of text; no one person can claim to know it thoroughly, and no one approach can hope to treat every aspect of it. Despite the divergent approaches, though, all the contributors to this volume share a few fundamental convictions. The first is the importance of examining evidence critically, whether literary, linguistic, biographical, or bibliographical. They have not been content, as so many other commentators on the *Dictionary* have been, to base their judgments on a handful of famous entries and stories from Boswell. Their concern, in other words, is with the "unfamiliar" *Dictionary*.

One reason this volume places so much attention on the unfamiliar *Dictionary* is that much conventional wisdom about the familiar *Dictionary* is wrong. There is no shortage of legends about Johnson's work, beginning with the "first English dictionary" myth – a surprisingly hardy falsehood. A recent article in the *New York Times*, for instance, refers to "Dr. Johnson's 1755 dictionary, the first in the English language."[6] Few readers of this volume are likely to make that mistake, but many other fables continue to circulate even among professional critics. The volume therefore opens with Paul J. Korshin's discussion of the myths that have developed around Johnson the man, which portray him as an "unreal buffoon, bully, and bigot," and around the *Dictionary*. Korshin revisits many scholarly commonplaces, from the notion of the towering but impoverished genius laboring alone in the Gough Square attic to the story of Frances Brooke looking for all the "naughty words," and challenges readers to pay careful

attention to the nature of their sources. He advises us to resist the urge to circulate dubious stories simply because they are enjoyable.

A similar spirit of skepticism and caution informs the other essays in this volume. For more than a decade Johnson's politics has been a subject of often heated debate, and evidence from the *Dictionary* has been adduced to support positions on Johnson's political thought. Rarely, however, have the various partisans paused to reflect on how, or indeed whether, the *Dictionary* can be considered a political work. Ian Lancashire, Howard D. Weinbrot, and Nicholas Hudson therefore consider the *Dictionary* in various political contexts, each of them suggesting that the book's political uses to date have been too simplistic. Lancashire's interest is the history of patronage, and his goal is to examine Johnson's famous clash with Lord Chesterfield in that light. He argues that English dictionaries had traditionally been collaborative efforts of the lexicographer, the printer-publisher, and the patron. Johnson's renunciation of his patron – "a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery" – is well known, but Lancashire re-examines this episode and the whole issue of patronage and control in the context of the traditional two-tiered patronage system in operation in early modern lexicons.

Weinbrot notes that the *Dictionary* has variously been claimed by the Right, the Left, and the Center, and argues that each has misinterpreted (or perhaps over-interpreted) the text according to this political point of view, paying insufficient attention to the fact that it is, above all, a dictionary. Johnson's main concern in selecting his quotations, Weinbrot insists, was not political, theological, or otherwise polemical, but linguistic. He points out that Johnson's sources were often polemical, even violently so, but that Johnson himself went out of his way to omit the most egregiously sectarian expressions in these texts. The *Dictionary* is a dictionary of the English language, not of Johnson's language.

Like Weinbrot, Hudson remarks that Johnson is often depicted either as a villain or a hero according to commentators' own political affinities, and that "his *Dictionary* seems to take on a different ideological shade as illuminated by political lights of different colors." He offers an argument that Johnson's *Dictionary* emerged out of a complex and amorphous political group, the "Broad-bottom" coalition, which developed after the fall of Walpole and championed the elimination of party difference and the non-partisan promotion of men of merit, as opposed to the rewarding of political favorites. A key figure in this group was Robert Dodsley, whom Johnson regarded as his patron for the *Dictionary* as well as the renounced Lord Chesterfield, and Hudson offers the intriguing suggestion that it was

Chesterfield's reneging on the principle of promoting men of merit that caused this renunciation.

Robert DeMaria turns his attention to what may be the most unfamiliar parts of the *Dictionary*, the Grammar and History of the English Language. From these usually neglected works he derives a lesson about Johnson's working methods. Among DeMaria's most important contributions to *Dictionary* scholarship is his portrait of Johnson as a serious scholar, deeply immersed in humanist traditions of learning, writing a book with a coherent moral and pedagogical purpose. And yet in this essay he offers some salutary advice not to overestimate the degree of control Johnson exerted over his work. "There seems to be a spontaneous, extempore quality to the *Dictionary* as well as a design," he discovers, and he shows a number of instances in which Johnson seems to have departed from his stated plans.

Some of the most pointed debates over dictionaries in the last half-century have concerned the merits of descriptive versus prescriptive lexicography, but there has been little extended consideration of where Johnson's work fits along this continuum. Geoff Barnbrook uses the methods of corpus linguistics to sort through more than ten thousand usage notes in both the first and fourth editions, and argues that roughly a quarter of them can be called prescriptive. He summarizes his results by stating that "the prescriptive approach promised in the *Plan* and detailed, though with reservations, in the Preface, informed the construction of the *Dictionary* to a significant extent." Anne McDermott, on the other hand, agrees that "The mood of the times certainly favored a prescriptive attitude to the language," but she thinks it reasonable to ask "whether the prescriptive expectation was carried out in practice." Likening Johnson's use of his "authorities" to the English common law tradition, she examines his expressed attitudes toward language and concludes that Johnson "seems unwilling to exercise the kind of prescriptive jurisdiction that was expected of him."

Jack Lynch picks up on DeMaria's hints in *Johnson's "Dictionary" and the Language of Learning* about "the encyclopedic qualities of his book," and explores the often permeable boundary between dictionaries and encyclopedias even after the older topically organized reference works had virtually disappeared as a coherent genre. In observing that Johnson's *Dictionary* contains more encyclopedic information than most general dictionaries, he argues that Johnson's approach to what is now often called the "lexicon–encyclopedia interface" is pragmatic rather than principled, and he notes that Johnson carefully reworks his source material to make it more useful to the common reader.

John Stone is also concerned with Johnson's use of earlier encyclopedic reference works, and focuses specifically on dictionaries of law, a subject close to Johnson's heart. The standard accounts of the English monolingual dictionary have traced its origin to "the hard-word tradition," while slighting the parallel tradition of topical dictionaries and encyclopedias. In drawing our attention to Johnson's use of legal reference works, Stone urges readers to recognize "the extent of the general monolingual dictionary's debt to its more specialized counterparts."

Noel E. Osselton draws on his experience as both a historian of lexicography and a practicing lexicographer to consider what exactly constitutes a word for Johnson, and how related words should be ordered in an alphabetical reference work. He notices a "striking mid-alphabet change in lexicographical method" for dealing with a class of words that has received little attention, hyphenated compounds. From the evidence of this small course-adjustment he derives an account of Johnson's increasing tendency toward descriptivism, calling this change in his treatment of hyphens "one small instance of how his desire to regulate the language gave way in the light of experience to the more modest aim of recording it."

For most scholars, "Johnson's *Dictionary*" refers to the large folio work published in two volumes in 1755, but the final four essays in this collection focus on the work's long and rich afterlife. Paul Luna, whose typographical expertise helped to shape the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, gives the most extended treatment to date of the typography of Johnson's work. He addresses not only the familiar first folio edition but also a series of folio, quarto, and octavo editions that have escaped the attention of most critics. He asks "how its visual presentation reflects the structure of the text, its usability, and perhaps even its compiler's intentions," and identifies several respects in which Johnson's *Dictionary* was both innovative and influential in the traditions of English lexicography.

Catherine Dille reminds us that the versions of the *Dictionary* familiar to most modern scholars are not in fact the ones that most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers knew. The folio editions were priced out of the reach of all but the wealthiest readers, and most of those who knew the *Dictionary* knew it in one of its abridged versions. Dille looks carefully at several of these "abstracted" editions, produces evidence that Johnson himself was involved in their production, and discusses the ways in which these shorter and more popular versions differed from their folio sources. "There is not one monolithic Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*," she argues, "but in a sense two parallel dictionaries, the abstracted edition

deriving from the folio as its source, but each work evolving independently and developing its own textual history."

Allen Reddick, whose *Making of Johnson's Dictionary* broke new ground in its attention to the fourth edition of 1773, revisits some of his earlier conclusions in the light of little-known manuscript material Johnson used in preparing the revised text. The role of the six amanuenses has been a puzzle for more than two centuries: some have treated them as little more than unthinking copyists, while others have considered them almost co-authors with Johnson. Reddick's evidence suggests that their role was limited, at least in the preparation of the fourth edition, and that Johnson's *Dictionary* was not collaborative in any important way: Johnson never relinquishes "his own overarching authority as both author and compiler."

R. Carter Hailey demonstrates how analytical bibliography can illuminate a text's reception history. He begins with what seems to be a minor discovery – several "hidden" editions of what have usually been called the sixth and seventh editions – and goes on to argue that Johnson's authority was great enough in the decade after his death that publishers continued to introduce changes to the text in order to operate under the Johnson "brand name." He usefully reminds us that the story of Johnson's *Dictionary* does not end with the fourth edition in 1773, or even with Johnson's death in 1784. "Demand for the *Dictionary*," he points out, "clearly remained strong in the 1780s and 1790s, and such was the iconic status of Johnson's authority that the publishers saw fit not just to reprint their profitable product, but also to employ an unnamed editor who worked diligently to honor Johnson's legacy by increasing the accuracy of its text."

Readers will note many matters on which the contributors disagree: Weinbrot argues that the *Dictionary* has little to do with party politics, whereas Hudson insists that its apparent moderation is itself the product of the political situation of the 1740s; Barnbrook uses the methods of corpus linguistics to find Johnson's work prescriptive, while McDermott's approach reveals it to be descriptive; Lancashire's essay presents the *Dictionary* within the traditional collaborative framework for lexicographical works, whereas Reddick argues for the minimizing of any collaborative contribution, particularly from the amanuenses. It is perhaps inevitable that the diverse approaches have resulted in similarly diverse conclusions. We have not tried to reconcile or gloss over these disagreements. Rather than imposing a uniformity of opinion where no consensus exists, we have worked to highlight disagreements so as to encourage further research on these issues.

Encouraging further research is, after all, the most important aim of this volume. No collection of essays could give all of these neglected areas the coverage they deserve; this one makes no pretense of being the definitive word on the topics it covers. The purpose of the volume is, however, to bring together scholars working in the fields of literary scholarship, bibliography, historical lexicography and lexicology, and history of language. Historical lexicography has begun to move beyond the traditional lineal understanding of the development of monolingual English dictionaries by taking into account political, cutural, and textual considerations, as well as aspects of book history in general, which broaden the scope beyond the narrowly linguistic and Anglocentric. The work of scholars on the new *OED*, on the *Dictionary of Old English* and the *Middle English Dictionary* projects, and on numerous other lexicographical projects has brought renewed energy to the field of old dictionaries, and research on Johnson's *Dictionary* continues to benefit from this. The fruits of this research go far beyond the fields of historical lexicography or Johnson scholarship, since knowledge of the historical formation of the English language is a fundamental part of most English research. We hope that other scholars will pick up on and develop the ideas contained in these essays, that specialists in different fields will address one another and draw on each other's respective areas of expertise, and that the complexity and richness of Johnson's *Dictionary* will continue to inspire scholars to move beyond the isolation of their own distinct fields.

NOTES

1. James H. Sledd and Gwin J. Kolb, *Dr. Johnson's Dictionary*: *Essays in the Biography of a Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 2.
2. The most recent account of this kind is given by Janet Sorensen, "Vulgar Tongues: Canting Dictionaries and the Language of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37 (2003), 435–54.
3. Robert DeMaria, Jr., *Johnson's "Dictionary" and the Language of Learning* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).
4. Allen Reddick, *The Making of Johnson's Dictionary, 1746–1773*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
5. Patrick Hanks, "Samuel Johnson and Modern Lexicography," unpublished lecture delivered to The Johnson Society, Lichfield, 2 March 1999.
6. Katie Zezima, "A Samuel Johnson Trove Goes to Harvard's Library," *New York Times*, 18 March 2004, p. E3.

CHAPTER 1

The mythology of Johnson's Dictionary

Paul J. Korshin

Visitors to libraries will be familiar with the architectural concept of "the building as book." Libraries from Johannesburg to San Francisco embody this kind of engraving: the names of literary worthies from all ages, deeply engraved in Baskerville capitals, form an entablature that helps to identify the building as a house of books. The most ornate such building is the Chicago Public Library, the ground-breaking for which was one of the events of the city's Columbian Exposition of 1892–93. The architects – McKim, Meade, and White, Cass Gilbert, Carrère and Hastings, Sheply, Bulfinch, Richardson and Abbott – helped in this process of marmorealizing the classic past.[1] In the process of creating America's most ornate public building, they had a great many classics to commemorate, so many, indeed, that they arranged their names in genre-groupings. Thus there is a poets' grouping, "Wordsworth – Pope – Byron – Shelley"; a second poets' grouping (perhaps for narrative poets), "Scott – Burns – Tennyson – Gray"; and a historians' grouping, "Macaulay – Carlyle – Gibbon – Hume." Johnson is arranged with some curious associates in a tetrad of miscellaneous writers, "Swift – Johnson – Sheridan – Lamb," a literary fellowship of uncertain axis. There is no archival record about who arranged these tetrads or what taxonomy the framers (one naturally assumes that a committee was responsible for these catachreses) had in mind. We can see that by 1897, the year the city of Chicago dedicated this building, Johnson had already passed into the world of legend. The interpreters of the legend, however, still saw him as a writer, not as the subject of a famous biography: no names of Johnson's biographers appear on the Chicago library's walls or ceilings.

This legendary Johnson had long been available to the world by the time W. J. Bate published *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson*; we can even trace the beginnings of some of the legends to Johnson's own lifetime. Since the 1950s, Johnsonian scholars have not been reverent of these legends. James Clifford's *Young Sam Johnson* tried whenever possible to