

GEORGE AND WILLIAM STRAHAN IN SAMUEL JOHNSON'S
CAREER AND IMAGE

By

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PREFACE

In this thesis I have avoided as much as possible two almost irresistible paths that tempt many writers inquiring into the life and works of Samuel Johnson. The "literary gossip" surrounding and penetrating every aspect of the personalities, social lives, and works of Johnson and his circle is fascinating reading; moreover, the relationship of Johnson to his household, the Thrales, the Burneys, and James Boswell, to name only a few may draw the attention indefinitely. Another equally tempting avenue for many is the founding of the printing trade in eighteenth-century London, but bibliography is a specialized, lifetime study. I mention Johnson's circle and publishing concerns only as they illustrate the friendship and professional association of the Strahans and Johnson.

Although I offer evidence to explain James Boswell's apparent slighting of the Strahans, this paper does not join the recent attacks upon Boswell's great biography. I shall demonstrate through a study of biographies, diaries, letters, and other papers of Johnson and his contemporaries that William Strahan and later his son, George, were of major importance in Johnson's life and works during the author's lifetime and extended their influence beyond his death in the publications of his works and biographies that they commissioned.

I express gratitude to my professor and adviser, Dr. Loyd Douglas, for introducing me to Samuel Johnson, the author, and for encouragement and advice in continuing the research and the writing of this paper. I

wish to acknowledge a very great debt to both my husband, James, who at all times was understanding and enthusiastic about my writing, and to my mother, Mrs. Charles Price, whose faith and insistence was always that the paper would be written.

GEORGE AND WILLIAM STRAHAN IN SAMUEL JOHNSON'S

CAREER AND IMAGE

The Johnsonian canon grows larger and more accessible each year as manuscripts, correspondence, and private papers are discovered and made public for the first time. With editions of Samuel Johnson's collected works, biographies, and diaries being re-issued, a surge of scholarship and re-examination has emerged, departing the limitations of "The Club," or "Boswell & Company," which was of so much concern in the past century. Many scholars have lamented that Johnson's works were not only out of fashion, but were practically non-existent for many students who read Boswell's Johnson rather than Johnson's Rambler or Lives of the Poets. One Johnsonian remarks that the unique "double tradition" of Johnson's identity "is without parallel for any comparable figure . . ." and Macaulay and Carlyle who dipped into Boswell perpetuated the tradition, thus "making a myth, turning the man Johnson into a personified abstraction."¹ Donald Greene joins Bronson in attributing to Macaulay the neglect of Johnson's own work, "having persuaded the reading public that 'Johnson the man'--that is the amusing figure who is the central character in Boswell's great work of art--was all, and 'Johnson the

¹Bertrand H. Bronson, "The Double Tradition of Dr. Johnson," English Literary History, XVIII (June, 1951), p. 93.

writer' nothing."² However, with the Isham recovery of the Malahide and Fettercairn papers, the critics writing in the 1950's reacted strongly to the noted biographer's inaccuracies or intentional omissions, and began a return to Johnson's own writing and the Dr. Johnson before or without Boswell. Donald Greene and James Clifford comment at the end of the decade in their "Survey of Johnsonian Studies 1950-1960":

Although there have been thorough studies of some close friends of Johnson . . . there are still more who would repay serious examination. One need mention only a few--the elusive William Guthrie, Dr. Richard Bathurst, Thomas Birch, Topham Beauclerk, William Strahan If some of them seem too minor to deserve a whole book to themselves, a volume containing shorter biographical studies of several such figures would be welcome.³

Seemingly in answer to a plea from Johnsonian scholars, a biography of William Strahan has appeared but is disappointingly mistitled Dr. Johnson's Printer.⁴ A more accurate title would have been William Strahan's Authors & Friends; for however excellent and valuable the dissertation on eighteenth-century printing practices and terminology may be to us, it is basically a history of printing using Johnson only to illustrate the trade and devoting fully as much emphasis to Gibbon, Hume, David Hall, and Benjamin Franklin. In a search of primary sources, one finds the names William and George Strahan appearing in Johnson's

²"The Development of the Johnson Canon," Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature, ed. Carroll Camden (Univ. Chicago Press, 1963), p. 407.

³Johnsonian Studies, ed. Magdi Wahba (Cairo, 1922), p. 273.

⁴J. A. Cochrane, Dr. Johnson's Printer, The Life of William Strahan (Cambridge, Mass., 1964).

contracts, letters, title pages, diaries, and conversations. One is at first confused by his biographer's superficial reference to, or the omission of, one or both Strahans. However, the frequency of the name increases steadily, from the first publication after Johnson's death to those of the present at such a consistent rate that each succeeding biographer, editor, and critic seems to credit the Strahans with a more important place in Johnson's personal life and literary career. We are left then, although indebted to all scholarship, to examine a fusing of the many Strahan allusions and to determine the influence that William Strahan, the printer, and his son, Reverend George Strahan, had upon Johnson's life and writing during his career and his publications and reputation after death.

Tom Tyers, in one of the first hasty tributes to Samuel Johnson in the days immediately following his death, does not mention a Strahan. Two years later, another biographer, Sir John Hawkins, gives a lengthy chronicle of a Reverend George Strahan's almost daily attendance upon the ailing Johnson in the author's last months; the only notice of a William Strahan, however, is in the introduction by modern editor, Betram Davis. The Hill-Powell Index (Vol. VI) to that edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson lists both a William and George Strahan, but the reference very often occurs in the editor's notes of the page cited to explain an anonymously mentioned person whom Boswell described as "'a gentleman,' an 'intimate friend of Millar,' 'an eminent printer,' or possibly 'a Scotchman of some consideration in London.'" The Aley Lyell Reade Index (Vol. XI) to the ten volume Johnsonian Gleanings lists only five references to William Strahan and seven to George. In the Johnsonian Miscellanies "Index" are also many page references with

mention of William Strahan, but upon examination yield only such information as a note acknowledging that Johnson's comment upon history, copyright, or politics is contained in a letter to Strahan. The more recent publications of primary source material have numerous listings of both Strahans with some comment that directly bears upon their personal relationship with Johnson. E. L. McAdam, with Donald and Mary Hyde, says briefly in a note explaining mention of Strahan in Johnson's diary: "William Strahan was Johnson's friend for over thirty years, and during the latter part of his life his banker."⁵ Other references record Johnson's visiting, dining with, or receiving money from Strahan with no comment. There are, however, twenty-six references in all to William Strahan in Diaries, Prayers and Annals. Three of those also refer to the son, George, and concern the quarrel between him and his father. In addition to these three, there are seven references to George. Chapman, in publishing correspondence other than that already found in Boswell's Life (Letters of Samuel Johnson, 3 Vols.), prints eleven letters to George Strahan and cites seven of Johnson's letters to others that contain mention of him. There are thirty-five letters to William in Chapman's collection and twenty-four more to others that contain his name. Increasingly clear then, in evidence from Johnson's biographers and editors, and from Johnson's own writing, is the fact that these two were an integral part of Johnson's life. This father and son--William, the printer of Johnson's major works, and the Reverend George Strahan who helped draw Johnson's will, conducted his last

⁵The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, I: Diaries, Prayers, and Annals, ed. E. L. McAdam, and Donald and Mary Hyde (New Haven, 1958), p. 91n; hereafter cited Diaries, Prayers, Annals.

Holy Communion, and published his prayers and meditations--seem significant in the Johnson canon.

William Strahan was a Scotsman, born in 1715 at Edinburgh and trained as a journeyman printer before he "'took the high rode to England,' where he found a place in a London firm, probably that of Andrew Millar" (Dictionary of National Biography). His own papers show that he "set up on his own as Master Printer in London in 1739."⁶ According to D.N.B., "about 1739 he was admitted a junior partner of Millar, with whom he was responsible for the production of Johnson's 'Dictionary,' and upon his [Millar's] death in 1768, he continued in a partnership with Thomas Cadell, the elder." That he was actually a partner of any kind, in the modern sense, of a private publishing firm is somewhat doubtful. In many places Strahan is listed among the "publishers," but in others referred to as a "printer," working for or with the booksellers. Perhaps the modern idea of the limited specialization of a firm's handling only one phase of putting a book into the reader's hands misleads the twentieth-century reader. Cochrane says that "in the eighteenth century these functions were confused, both because one or two of the steps might be bypassed altogether and because the same man quite often performed different functions when dealing with different books."⁷ For instance, "Cadell was a bookseller with premises in the Strand and was also a publisher in our sense of the word, in that

⁶Phillip Gaskell, "The Strahan Papers," The Times Literary Supplement (October 5, 1956), p. 592. The Spottiswoode, Ballantyne and Co., Ltd., a direct descendent of the William Strahan concern, has deposited his business and private papers in the British Museum.

⁷Dr. Johnson's Printer, p. 31.

he bought copyrights and issued books at his own risk."⁸ In that time if the proprietor of a shop owned the copyright, he was called book-seller; if he was merely a link in distributing the book and risked nothing in ownership prospects (the author, printer or anyone else retaining the copyright), he was titled only a publisher. The present connotations of these titles seem to have reversed themselves. William Strahan, particularly in his early career, worked as a printer only, charging by the type set, size of paper, number of lines, etc. The bread and butter of the printer was either the patent (a monopoly) which the crown granted for a certain area such as religion (the Oxford Bible and the Book of Common Prayer), almanacs, laws and statutes, or in the regular publication of magazines or newspapers. These were occasional jobs though, ordered by the crown or booksellers, and did not offer steady employment of the printer's presses. In recounting the facts of his career, William Strahan wrote to a friend: "I quickly saw, that if I confined myself to mere printing for Booksellers I might be able to live, but very little more than live, I therefore soon determined to launch out into other Branches in Connection with my own, in which I have happily succeeded, to the Astonishment of the rest of the Trade here"⁹ William Strahan "freed himself from slavery to the booksellers" by printing two periodicals, the London Chronicle and the Monthly Review bringing in over £280 a quarter.¹⁰ As he became more

⁸Cochrane, p. 35.

⁹Gaskell, p. 592. Letter to David Hall an American is also found in R. A. Austen-Leigh's The Story of a Printing House, being a short account of Strahans and Spottiswoodes (London 1912).

¹⁰P.M. Handover, Printing In London (Cambridge, Mass., 1960) p. 200.

established, he realized that the limitation of presses idle between orders could also be overcome by assuming some of the risk and investing money in a publishing venture. His records show that "from 1751 he bought an increasing number of 'copies', that is, shares in the copyright of publications which he might or might not have printed himself"11

In Johnson's time a portion of a copyright could be bought by many individuals forming the "ad hoc partnership . . . to share the capital outlay, the risk of loss and the chance of profit on the publication."¹² At one time Strahan owned varying amounts of interest in two hundred copyrights.¹³ "Hence," Cochrane concludes, "it has often been stated that Strahan and Millar, and later Strahan and Cadell were in partnership together; this was not so, but they took so many shares together in so many books that the mistake is easily made."¹⁴ William came to London early in 1739 just one year after Samuel Johnson came from Lichfield, and the chronology of their careers and lives is remarkably coincidental. Strahan survived Johnson by only a few months after thirty-eight years of close association.

¹¹Gaskell, p. 592.

¹²Cochrane, p. 36.

¹³Cochrane, p. 137. Also in Handover Printing In London, p. 200 where the year 1771 is cited; Gaskell, in "The Strahan Papers," agrees and cites the letter to David Hall printed in Austen-Leigh's The Story of a Printing House as the source for this information, as well as a "list of copies taken" kept by Strahan in a book "in which he indexed his share in books of all sorts as he bought them," which is in the British Museum (48805; 1751-1775).

¹⁴Cochrane, p. 36.

Johnson, too, was preparing for his career in literature prior to coming to London. In 1734, at twenty-five, Johnson "wrote from Birmingham to Edward Cave, publisher of the Gentleman's Magazine in London, 'offering sometimes to fill a column.'¹⁵ Cave did not accept the offer, and it was late 1737 when Johnson moved to London that he began working for Cave at first as sub-editor and later editor, writing the Parliamentary Debates of the Gentleman's Magazine which Johnson once remarked had a circulation of ten thousand.¹⁶ He also devoted time to writing Irene, a relatively unsuccessful drama, that was not published until 1749 after Garrick's stage production. Robert Dodsley published London, A Poem in May, 1738. Johnson's biography of Richard Savage, a talented but erratic young man who claimed to be the illegitimate son of countess of Macclesfield and the Earl Rivers became a London favorite and brought Johnson to the attention of such men as Sir Joshua Reynolds. Since Edward Cave usually printed only periodicals, it is uncertain who published the Life of Savage, but Cave paid Johnson fifteen guineas for it on December 14, 1743.¹⁷ Samuel Johnson's name was becoming known, but his earnings were small; and since he could not expect even these payments with any regularity, his labors enabled him to do no more than subsist.

It is a unique role as personal benefactor and literary agent that William Strahan served Johnson best. As Tom Tyers points out,

¹⁵ Diaries, Prayers, Annals, p. 33n.

¹⁶ Handover, p. 141.

¹⁷ R. W. Chapman, ed., The Letters of Samuel Johnson, with Mrs. Thrale's Genuine Letters to Him (Oxford, 1952), I. 23n; hereafter cited as Chapman, Letters.

"there is cause to believe he would not have written unless under the pressure of necessity. He wrote to live . . . [and now] Johnson wanted a long and a large literary employment."¹⁸ James Dodsley told Boswell that Johnson declined to undertake the writing of a dictionary when his brother, Robert Dodsley, first proposed it several years before the 1747 "Plan" for the dictionary was published.¹⁹ However, William Strahan, acting as a go-between, brought into partnership the two Knaptons, Longmans, and Dodsleys, Charles Hitch and L. Hawes, and Andrew Millar,²⁰ thus causing "the purses of five eminent booksellers to be opened to pay for the labors of this Hercules."²¹ Johnson dedicated his "Plan" to Lord Chesterfield whom Robert Dodsley had encouraged him to believe might be interested in supporting the publication. The benefits to the Dictionary venture would be twofold: Chesterfield's name giving notice and prestige to the work, and his patronage enriching the author. After this public dedication, Johnson made a formal call upon the earl, which was disappointly unfruitful. "Chesterfield made some suggestions, gave Johnson £10. Seven years later, hearing that the Dictionary would soon appear, Chesterfield wrote two laudatory papers in the World (Nos. 100, 101; Nov. 28, Dec. 5, 1754)."²² Never

¹⁸Thomas Tyers, A Biographical Sketch of Dr. Samuel Johnson 1785, Augustan Reprint Society No. 34 (Los Angeles, 1952), p. 7.

¹⁹James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson, ed. Roger Ingpen (Boston, 1925) I, 104. All references to Boswell's Life are from this edition.

²⁰Boswell, Life, I, 104.

²¹Tyers, p. 7.

²²Sidney Gulick, Jr., "Johnson, Chesterfield, and Boswell," The Age of Johnson, Essay Presented to C.B. Tinker (New Haven, 1949), p. 330.

one to abide condescension, Johnson denied any claim Chesterfield might insinuate was due him in the famous letter of February 7, 1755, surely the most barbed attack in the Johnsonian canon, "without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favour I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a Patron, which Providence has enabled me to do for myself" ²³ Thus, Johnson concludes his first and only attempt at a dedication to a noble patron. "It was an age, so far as Johnson was concerned, of booksellers and authors rather than patrons and authors." ²⁴ Acting as more than just "Dr. Johnson's printer," William Strahan effectively substituted for the patronage which Chesterfield declined in many offices to the eminent author. Perhaps most important in a study of Strahan's influence upon Johnson's works is that he endeavored to generate an interest for a publication by acting as a link between the author and the publisher-booksellers. Boswell notes:

It is remarkable that those with whom Johnson chiefly contracted for his literary labors were Scotchmen, Mr. Millar and Mr. Strahan. Millar though himself no great judge of literature, had good sense enough to have for his friends very able men, to give him their opinion, and advice in the purchase of copyright Mr. Strahan's liberality, judgment, and success, are well known. ²⁵

²³ Boswell, Life, I, 154.

²⁴ Allen T. Hazen, "Samuel Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications," Samuel Johnson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Donald J. Greene (New Jersey, 1965), p. 174.

²⁵ Boswell, Life, I, 104.

Strahan was, then, creating an even newer role in the literary world: bringing the man of ideas and the ability to express them together with men of means to finance, print, and distribute the publications. Much has been written about the magnitude of compiling words, etymologies, and literary examples, centering the attention upon the intellectual genius and drudgery of the lexicographer. Some attention could be directed toward the magnitude of financial arrangements which made publication of the great dictionary possible. "The capital outlay of Johnson's dictionary for instance was between four and five thousand pounds, far beyond the resources of a single firm."²⁶ From Strahan's ledgers the final "printing cost £1,239 11^s 6d., Johnson was paid £1,575 and the paper cannot have cost less than £1,500."²⁷ Strahan, himself, undertook all the responsibility both as paymaster for Johnson's labors and as taskmaster for meeting the printing schedule. He printed sheet by sheet as Johnson handed them to the messenger that Strahan frequently sent to collect them. From many diary entries it is clear that Johnson was given money, usually every Saturday evening, over a span of almost nine years. The other booksellers reimbursed Strahan only periodically. In addition to the payments stated in the contract, Johnson called upon Strahan for money when in need. His biographer points out that "a refreshing fee was perpetually necessary . . . to the amount of three-hundred additional pounds," and that he was astonished at the sum they had advanced when he came to settle; rather

²⁶Cochrane, p. 37.

²⁷Cochrane, p. 37, note 2.

than having money due him was in their debt £300, and although the book-sellers canceled the amount as a gift to him, it left Johnson feeling as if he had worked nine years for nothing.²⁸

Strahan's part in Johnson's life was more personal, however, than arranging contracts for financing and printing the dictionary, or acting as Johnson's paymaster. It is possible, as Charles Norman says, that he arranged to get Johnson his first house in London at No. 17 Gough Square, Fleet St., "convenient to the shop of Johnson's printer and friend, William Strahan."²⁹ Hawkins says:

Johnson who before this time together with his wife, had lived in obscurity, lodging at different houses in the courts and alleys in and about the Strand and Fleet Street, had for the purpose of carrying on his arduous work, and being near the printers employed in it, taken a handsome house on Gough Square, and fitted up a room in it with desks and other accommodations for amanuenses, who, to the number of five or six, he kept constantly under his eye.³⁰

The D.N.B. also lists New Street near Gough Square, Fleet Street, as the place of Strahan's death, so one may assume that it was his residence as well as shop. The two men, then lived and worked in a close association just a few hundred yards apart for a decade.

Johnson's literary efforts of the 1750's were not confined to lexicography as he wrote the Rambler essays from March, 1750, to March, 1752. James L. Clifford names John Payne, the publisher, and "Edward Cave, Johnson's chief sponsor, who strenuously pushed the new venture

²⁸Tyers, pp. 7-8.

²⁹Mr. Oddity: Samuel Johnson, LLD (Drexel Hill, 1951), p. 85.

³⁰John Hawkins, The Life of Samuel Johnson, LLD, ed. Bertram Davis (New York, 1961), p. 77.

in every way."³¹ William Strahan was a less publicized but important backer of the Rambler. He not only printed, but also extended credit for the magazine. Appearing in his ledger entry for January 7, 1756, is the note that the Rambler partners had paid the £86 for printing costs which "was all printed off . . . 16 months ago."³² Edward Cave had died in 1754, two years after the last issue of the magazine, but the partners printed a collected edition of the essays. An even closer connection is evident in that the James Elphinston who was responsible for the Edinburgh edition of the Rambler was William Strahan's brother-in-law.³³ These essays, although affording diversion and relief from the dictionary labors, did not contribute much to his support. Clifford, again commenting on these "obscure years," says: "There can be no doubt that in the 1750's Johnson was engaged in more 'hack' work than we have so far been able to identify."³⁴ It is largely through Strahan's carefully kept records that scholars are aware of these fugitive pieces: ". . . in William Strahan's printing ledger for 1752-68, under April 1755, along with the account of the printing of the first edition of the Dictionary, there is a mysterious reference to printing 'a Pamphlet No convincing identification has ever been offered."³⁵ Since 1747, Johnson had been able to maintain his

³¹"Some Problems of Johnson's Obscure Middle Years," Johnson Boswell and Their Circle, Essays presented to L.F. Powell (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965) p. 107; hereafter cited "Problems."

³²Cochrane, p. 146.

³³Cochrane, p. 93.

³⁴"Problems," p. 109.

³⁵Clifford, "Problems," p. 109.

household on Gough Street by advances from his dictionary publishers. After its publication in 1755, he again found himself in need of "a long and a large literary employment."

Johnson revived his interest in Shakespeare, distributing his Proposals for Printing the Dramatick Works of William Shakespeare in 1756. He had planned eleven years earlier to edit a collection of Shakespeare's plays. In 1745, before the Dictionary, Edward Cave had distributed the proposals for a new edition, illustrated by Johnson's Miscellaneous Observations On The Tragedy of Macbeth.³⁶ However, "Tonson's threat of a suit against Johnson's printer-to-be, Edward Cave, was enough to stifle further proceedings in the edition proposed."³⁷ Boswell inaccurately supposes it was a scheme which "perhaps he laid aside for a time upon account of the big expectations which were formed of Warburton's edition of that great poet."³⁸ This was not so; the venture was aborted because of "Tonson, who claimed perpetual copyright."³⁹ In fact, the names Tonson and Shakespeare had become synonymous. Harry Geduld in a biography on Tonson points out: "With the appearance of Rowe's Shakespeare (1709) . . . Shakespeare and Tonson became inseparable names. Every major edition from Rowe's to

³⁶ The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, VII: Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. Arthur Sherbo, with an introduction by Bertrand H. Bronson (New Haven, 1968), p. 46; hereafter cited as Johnson on Shakespeare. See also for comment on first proposals; Hawkins, p. 7.

³⁷ Bronson, "Introduction," Johnson on Shakespeare, p. xiv.

³⁸ Boswell, Life, I, 100.

³⁹ Diaries, Prayers, Annals, p. 41.

Johnson's was published by Jacob Tonson and his heirs."⁴⁰ By 1756, Johnson's need and a revival of interest in Shakespeare renewed the efforts to publish a collection. The title page of the new Proposals for Johnson's edition of Shakespeare lists, in addition to J. and R. Tonson who owned the right, those with whom we are familiar as the dictionary publishers: J. Knapton, C. Hitch and L. Hawes, and M. and L. Longman.⁴¹ That Strahan continued as a member of the original dictionary syndicate and participated in the Shakespeare publication is indicated by similar installment payments (26 June 1759, 18 December 1761, and January 1763) to him from the booksellers.⁴² However, in this publication, Strahan was not to control the purse strings in regular payments to Johnson as he did in the Dictionary arrangements, so he presumably had no comparable role as taskmaster in meeting any printing schedule. There was no errand boy sent to Johnson's door asking for the daily printer's copy. Johnson signed on June 2, 1756, to undertake the edition by subscription for whatever the first subscription payments should be, and agreed that "the work shall be published on or before Christmas 1757."⁴³ The editing stretched into the 1760's however, and the collected works did not appear until 1765. But it was the subscribers' money he spent and not the booksellers' which may explain his ability to ignore the rage of criticism against his procrastination. Only a few days after signing his contract, Johnson

⁴⁰ Prince of Publishers A Study of the Work and Career of Jacob Tonson (Indiana Univ. Press, 1969), p. 14.

⁴¹ Johnson on Shakespeare, pp. 51-52.

⁴² Johnson on Shakespeare, pp. xxii; and xxiv.

⁴³ Johnson on Shakespeare, p. xvi.

set about raising his subscription money. Typical of his method is a letter to Thomas Birch in June, 1756: "I have taken the liberty of recommending six receipts to your care, and do not doubt of your endeavour to dispose of them."⁴⁴ And to his old school friend, Edmond Hector, he wrote on October 7th, 1756, allowing us a sample of the independent arrangements which he devised:

. . . . It is not in mere civility that I write now to you but to inform you that I have undertaken a New Edition of Shakespeare, and the profits of it are to arise from a subscription, I therefore solicit the interest of all my friends The proposals and receipts may be had from my mother, to whom I beg of you to send for as many as you can dispose of, and to remit to her money which you or your acquaintance shall collect. Be so kind as to mention my undertaking to any other friends that I may have in your part of the kingdom, the activity of a few solicitors may produce a great advantage to me.⁴⁵

The subscription art, says Cochrane, "was exploited until it broke down. Johnson's Shakespeare is . . . evidence of this."⁴⁶ The nine years that passed from the promised edition of Shakespeare brought an outcry among his subscribers who had paid half the price in advance. In October, 1762, Charles Churchill, who had christened Johnson "Pomposo," wrote his satire The Ghost:

He for subscribers baits his hook,
And takes their cash--but where's the book?
No matter where--wise fear, we know
Forbids the robbing of a foe;
But what, to serve our private ends,⁴⁷
Forbids the cheating of our friends?

⁴⁴Chapman, Letters, I, 91.

⁴⁵Chapman, Letters, I, 95-6.

⁴⁶Cochrane, p. 39.

⁴⁷Diaries, Prayers, Annals, p. 75.

"It is conceivable," as Hilles says, "that the book might never have come out if it had not been for the goads administered by Johnson's circle but the edition finally made its appearance a year after the Club had been organized [1764]"⁴⁸ Cochrane's undocumented claim that "Johnson could not, as was customary, print a list of the subscribers for the two good reasons that he had spent all the money and lost all the names,"⁴⁹ raises some interesting implications. The delivery of the edition to his subscribers, whose money and names had been so carelessly recorded, might have been difficult if not impossible in some cases. However, considering only the facts of Johnson's nine year delay in publication and his very inexact, private arrangements leads one to conclude that the lack of William Strahan's careful attention to records and management is no where more evident than in the superb fiasco of the long awaited Shakespeare publication. It may have been true, as Allen T. Hazen says, "The art of dedication and its sister art, the art of publication and subscription, flourished mightily during the Age of Johnson."⁵⁰ But his single attempts at each in his own career were not the most propitious conditions under which Samuel Johnson wrote. The substitute patronage and regularity of management by William Strahan were more conducive to his writing and was the environment under which Johnson flourished.

⁴⁸Frederick Whiley Hilles, The Literary Career of Sir Joshua Reynolds (Cambridge, Archon Books: 1967), p. 27.

⁴⁹Cochrane, pp. 39-40.

⁵⁰"Samuel Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications," p. 175.

It is with Rasselas that Johnson himself most clearly defines Strahan's office as intimate friend, literary agent, and printer-publisher. In January 20, 1759, knowing his mother was critically ill, Johnson wrote to Strahan:

Sir, when I was with you last night I told you of a thing which I was preparing for the press . . . I shall have occasion for thirty pounds on Monday night when I shall deliver the book which I must entreat you upon such delivery to procure me. I would have offered it to Mr. Johnston, but have no doubt of selling it, on some of the terms mentioned I am Dear Sir your most humble Servant

Sam: Johnson
Get me the money if you can.⁵¹

Strahan obviously did advance some money, as Johnson sent £20 on January 23rd to Lucy Porter at Lichfield for his mother's burial expenses.

Strahan, in partnership with Dodsley and Johnston, published Rasselas, paying Johnson £100 plus £25 for the second edition.⁵²

The 1760's were the years of the pension ('62), Boswell ('63), the Literary Club ('64), and the Thrales ('65). Long weeks at Streatham, tea drinking, and conversations occupied his time. The belated Shakespeare edition, largely planned and partially written in the fifties, is the only major publication of a decade. Johnson's mode of living during these years, when the combination of financial ease provided by the government pension and the hospitality of a finely appointed house offered by the Thrales, resembles the life of an artisan under the ancient system of patronage. Johnson had finally achieved a manner of living that he may have anticipated when applying to Lord

⁵¹Chapman, Letters, I, 117-118.

⁵²Cochrane, p. 147.

Chesterfield fifteen years earlier. After meeting the Thrales in 1765, he paid increasingly longer visits to them:

For the next sixteen years Johnson spent the greater part of his time with the Thrales either at Streatham or in Southwark. He grew to think and speak of both these houses as 'home' and constantly referred to his host and hostess as his 'master' and mistress."⁵³

Against the siren notes of Streatham this great author's friends could neither close his ears nor bind him. Such an environment was more encouraging to his bent for procrastination than to his literary production. The absence of publications during this period highlights the fifties and the later seventies as eras of more intense writing and supports the theory of how much more his readers are indebted to William Strahan for his influence during this time. Although absent in his professional capacity, Strahan continued his favors in his author's private life: In 1766, for instance:

old admission books of the Bethlem Hospital show Johnson's lunatic cousin, Elizabeth Herne, 'admitted on 19 April 1766 . . . her sureties being William Strahan, of New Street, Shoe Lane, printer, and Thomas Davis . . . bookseller . . .'. The fact that Strahan and Thomas Davis, two of Johnson's friends . . . acted as sureties, shows clearly who it was that gained Elizabeth's admission to Bedlam.⁵⁴

Johnson's publications in the latter half of the 1770's are representative of his major personal interests of that day, and again include his publisher, William Strahan. Johnson's trip with James Boswell in 1773 resulted in Strahan's publishing Journey to the Hebrides in 1775. Strahan's ignoring of Boswell's desire to have his own

⁵³ James L. Clifford, Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mrs. Thrale) (Oxford, 1968), p. 64.

⁵⁴ Aleya Lyell Reade, Johnsonian Gleanings (privately printed, 1909-1952), II, 53n.

accounts of the travels published probably initiated the coolness with which Boswell later treated Strahan in his Life of Johnson. Boswell sent a packet of notes and suggestions to amplify the Journey. Johnson, in part blaming his printer for keeping the pages, gave only partial credit to Boswell for his effort. After receiving an advance copy of Johnson's Journey, Boswell returned it to the author with notes for correction of the printer's copy. These Johnson never used. When Boswell arrived in London later in 1775, however, he had the manuscript of his Tour with him and obviously considered its publication as a sequel or supplement to Johnson's popular work. For instance on March 17th, the day after his arrival, he and Johnson visited Sir Joshua Reynolds to whom Boswell read selections of the journal out of Johnson's hearing. Boswell gleefully reports Sir Joshua's opinion was that his account was more entertaining than Johnson's. Later on the way to visit Strahan, Johnson saw the journal and advised Boswell not to show it to anyone, but to extract parts that were publishable and he would look it over. At any rate, Strahan turned the conversation to Boswell's future in English law, should he move to London, and diverted the mercurial Boswell's attention.⁵⁵ In February 1777, after acknowledging the safe arrival of twelve copies of Johnson's Journey, Boswell wrote to Strahan: "It is a great performance I think, however that I could write notes upon it, which would improve it."⁵⁶ Strahan

⁵⁵All information (from Volumes IX and X of Boswell's Private Papers) concerning his intention to publish is conveniently collected in Mary Lascelles' "Notions and Facts: Johnson and Boswell on Their Travels" in Johnson, Boswell and Their Circle (Oxford, 1965), p. 215-229.

⁵⁶Letters of James Boswell, ed. Chauncey Brewster Tinker (Oxford, 1924), I, 250.

made no reply to this offer. Thus, Strahan's biographer rightly concludes that "Boswell seems to have remained on friendly terms with Strahan although his private feelings toward him were never warm; the printer was of course a useful acquaintance through his intimacy with Johnson."⁵⁷ William Strahan, in declining the honor of becoming "Mr. James Boswell's Printer," undoubtedly prompted Boswell to say in 1779 that the eminent publisher "as poor Garrick said, was an obtuse man."⁵⁸

Johnson's interest in law and politics culminated in 1775 with Taxation No Tyranny, which Strahan published, and the honorary degree, Doctor of Civil Law, from Oxford University. Johnson's desire to know law and be in politics stretched back several years. One of the first references in his own hand is the prayer "Before the Study of Law," September 26, 1765.⁵⁹ Boswell says the "prayer in view of becoming a politician is entitled 'Engaging in POLITICS with H___n.'"⁶⁰ Johnson may have been qualifying himself to fill the post, vacated by his friend Edmund Burke after six years service, as associate of William Gerard Hamilton, M.P. The position presumably would lead to a seat in Parliament. However, nothing seems to have developed for Johnson at this time. It may well have been Strahan, as much as anyone else, who encouraged Johnson's interest in law and politics. He, too, had tried on at least one occasion, March 31, 1771, to approach Lord North

⁵⁷ Cochrane, p. 152.

⁵⁸ Tinker, Letters, II, 286.

⁵⁹ Diaries, Prayers, Annals, pp. 97-98.

⁶⁰ Boswell, Life, I, 296.

with the idea of procuring a seat in Parliament for Johnson.⁶¹ Strahan, himself, became a Member of Parliament in 1774 and held the seat until 1784, but his interests like Johnson's go back a decade. By 1766 he owned the King's Printing House patent with Charles Erye, and in 1769, "became a partner with Henry Woodfall in the Law Printing House."⁶² These two privileged concerns admitted him to an ex officio seat in any of the legal proceedings of the day. In addition, William Strahan was a publisher and genial host for many authors of economic and political works. It is only reasonable to assume that Samuel Johnson, a most frequent guest, was present in such company. For instance, Benjamin Franklin was a particular friend of Strahan's since the earliest times. "They took a pride in one another as old compositers who had risen in the world"⁶³ While neither Johnson nor Franklin left any record of their acquaintance, the minutes of the Dr. Bray's Association show that Franklin became a member January 2, 1760, and Johnson joined on April 6th of the same year. Of the eight members present at the May 1st meeting, two were Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Johnson.⁶⁴ Another personage with whom Johnson associated at his friend William Strahan's house was Adam Smith whose Theory of Moral Sentiment (1759) he had published. It was at Strahan's home one September night in 1761 that

⁶¹Boswell, Life, II, 382. See for complete copy of letter Strahan wrote recommending Johnson.

⁶²Gaskell, p. 592.

⁶³John Rae, Life of Adam Smith, 1895 (New York, 1965), p. 151.

⁶⁴Maurice Quinlan, "Dr. Franklin Meets Dr. Johnson," New Light on Dr. Johnson, ed. Frederick Hilles (New Haven, 1959), p. 109.

the somewhat famous "altercation" between the two men occurred.⁶⁵ No first hand record exists of the particulars in the disagreement, but the two men typify the poles of thought in their day. Adam Smith was a staunch advocate of free trade (laissez-faire), and Samuel Johnson favored control by the government (mercantilism).⁶⁶ That neither modified his theory is evident by their publications, both of which Strahan published, fifteen years afterwards. Johnson's Taxation No Tyranny (1775) was followed in 1776 by Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations. That Strahan could remain the friend in common of men holding such divergent views exhibits his powers of diplomacy. At any rate, D.N.B. summarizes that Strahan was "rather an advanced Whig and was extremely fond of political negotiation."

Strahan's total experiences in law, finance, and publishing were to serve Johnson well as maneuvering over a ten year period was necessary to establish the contract for The Lives of the English Poets, Johnson's final "long and large literary employment." The maze of legal entanglements in publishing ten volumes of collected works of the most noted English poets can be realized by noting that the disputed ownership of copyright to the Shakespeare edition can be multiplied by as many poets as the Lives contained. That "propriatorship" of a publication could be violated or contested was a sudden crisis in the 1770's. Traditionally, "the sole law concerning copyright was the common law which governed any species of property; its right was

⁶⁵Rae, Smith, pp. 154-7.

⁶⁶Donald J. Greene, The Politics of Samuel Johnson (Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 281.

perpetual and it was as capable as land of being bought and sold, the title passing with any legitimate transaction."⁶⁷ The London publishers honored this custom for fifty years after the "1710 Queen Ann's law" set a limit of twenty-one to twenty-eight years for a protected copyright. When Andrew Millar brought a suit to test the Queen Ann's law in 1763, the courts upheld perpetual ownership. But when another case was tried in 1774, the courts reversed themselves. Thus, "the doctrine of perpetual copyright was dead, and the booksellers thought they faced ruin 'near £200,000 worth of what was honestly purchased at public sale, and which was yesterday thought property, is now reduced to nothing.'"⁶⁸ Publications of newly edited collections of each writer would presumably renew for a limited time a copyright, or at least satisfy a market, thereby stifling other reprints.

When a pirate edition of a few English poets was printed in Scotland and sold in London, Edward Dilly wrote to Boswell concerning the very poor quality of the volumes and added that:

many inaccuracies of the press, as well as the idea of what we call our Literary Property, induced the London Booksellers to print an elegant and accurate edition of all the English poets of reputation, from Chaucer to the present time. Accordingly, a select number of the most respectable booksellers met on the occasion . . . agreed, that all the proprietors of copyright in the various poets should be summoned together . . . a meeting was held, consisting of about forty . . . when it was agreed that an . . . edition of 'the English Poets' should be immediately printed, with a concise account of the life of each author, by Samuel Johnson; and that three persons should be deputed to wait upon Dr. Johnson . . . viz., T. Davies, Strahan and Cadell.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Cochrane, p. 132.

⁶⁸ Cochrane, p. 133.

⁶⁹ Boswell, Life, II, 674.

The last two, Strahan and Cadell, represent the continuation of the original Dictionary syndicate, still active in providing contracts fees, and publication for Johnson's talents. It is notable that, "Thomas Cadell had been in turn Andrew Millar's apprentice, partner, and [in 1768] successor."⁷⁰ Johnson named his own price of £200 and undertook the biographies and criticisms which employed the next five years. He delivered the first four volumes in 1779, and the last six in 1781, the year of Henry Thrale's death.⁷¹ The labor and effort of Millar, Cadell, and Strahan during the eighteen years from the 1763 testing of the copyright law to the final publication in 1781 made possible a publication of this great scope. It offered Johnson the vehicle to which he was so suited, and which added finally to a lasting fame. From a combination of biography and criticism, Johnson created The Lives of the English Poets which many now consider his greatest work.

The publication of the Lives in 1781 marks the last year that Johnson wrote seriously, as the last three years of his life were troubled with the maladies, stroke, gout, and asthma that took his life in 1784. William Strahan as Johnson's personal banker during the latter part of his life is well known. He received the pension check or the monies from various editions of publications still being issued, and Johnson drew upon him to supply his needs.⁷² On most Saturdays of 1782 and 1783, Johnson's journal records £4 to £5 from Strahan.

⁷⁰ Cochrane, p. 138.

⁷¹ Hawkins, p. 301n.

⁷² Diaries, Prayers, Annals, p. 281. See for amounts due him from individual works and cash "in hand."

On occasions of trips out of London, to Oxford or Lichfield, he was advanced £20. Strahan's own health was failing, however, and he was forced to curtail some social activities with Johnson who wrote to William Bowles in July, 1784: "The Club [Essex Head] flourishes . . . Mr. Strahan has resigned, and my fellow traveller Mr. Boswell is put in his place" ⁷³ On the other hand, his private duties to Johnson continued even to the last months of their lives. In October, Johnson, on his last trip to Lichfield, writes: "My living has not been without some expense, though not much, and I shall be glad of two bank notes of ten pounds each as soon as you can." ⁷⁴ Back in London at the end of November, Johnson sends a note:

I am very weak I will beg you to inform me in two lines, when you shall have received my pension to Michaelmas, how much shall be coming to me. ⁷⁵

The last letter known in Johnson's hand is to Strahan on December 7th:

I was not sure that I read your figures right, and therefore must trouble you to set down in words how much of my pension I can call for now, and how much will be due me at Christmas. ⁷⁶

However, he dictated a note to Strahan on December 10th, asking "that I may have whatever portion of my pension you can spare me with prudence and propriety." ⁷⁷ Chapman, in a note (III, 254), adds

⁷³ Chapman, Letters, III, 179.

⁷⁴ Chapman, Letters, III, 229.

⁷⁵ Chapman, Letters, III, 250.

⁷⁶ Chapman, Letters, III, 253. This last specimen of Johnson's handwriting is also the frontpiece of this volume.

⁷⁷ Chapman, Letters, III, 253.

"Johnson's receipt for £75, 'one quarter's pension', dated 13 December," which was the day of his death.

Johnson formed an attachment to William Strahan's second son, George, who was born in 1744. At this time the Strahans were living in New Street, near the Gough Street residence of Johnson from 1747 to 1758. Although William Strahan had intended all his sons to join him in the trade, George desired a classical education which Johnson encouraged him to pursue.⁷⁸ In 1782, Johnson acted as mediator in a quarrel that developed between the father and son, advising William in August that George's discontent at Oxford was a tendency of mind and not meant as disrespect to the father.⁷⁹ In October he wrote to George that he had seen his father and as he "found difference between them still subsisting," advised him to make the first move toward a reconciliation before the argument "goes too far for pride to yield."⁸⁰ William purchased the vicarage at Islington for his son, now the Reverend George Strahan, providing him and his wife a comfortable country home. The closing of Streatham resulting from Henry Thrale's death and Johnson's estrangement from Mrs. Thrale following her marriage to the Italian singing teacher, Piozzi, left him despondent and without comfort. The young vicar and his wife welcomed the old, ailing Johnson, and he spent many days as their guest. For instance, Johnson's friend, John Hoole, recorded in his diary that Johnson spent

⁷⁸ Chapman, Letters, See I, 149-156 for letters to George advising on Latin studies; and I, 170-171 to William exhorting him to properly outfit son for Oxford.

⁷⁹ Chapman, Letters, II, 502.

⁸⁰ Chapman, Letters, II, 510.

November 24-27 of his last month in the Strahan vicarage, hoping the country air would restore his health.⁸¹

Sir John Hawkins chronicles the young man's almost daily attendance upon Johnson in the last three months of 1784. During this time, and "shortly before his death, Johnson gave the manuscripts of Prayers and Meditations to his young clergyman friend George Strahan to edit and publish They consist of fourteen paperbound volumes of various sizes some with loose leaves slipped in."⁸² The material is dated from September, 1738, to his death in 1784. That George was the ideal choice for Johnson to have made is evident in many ways. He was of course an Anglican clergyman and therefore very suited by his training to edit a volume of prayers, but also perhaps the happy combination of editor-son and father-printer had influenced Johnson. Another major consideration was George's membership in the Dr. Bray's Association that Johnson had supported since 1760. It was a charitable organization "formed to supply Anglican clergymen with libraries and later to convert Negroes in the American colonies."⁸³

Although Johnson had other friends who might meet one or more of these qualifications--for instance, Bennet Langton had joined Dr. Bray's Association in July, 1783-- and some others (Dr. William Adams, master of Pembroke College, Oxford, and Dr. John Taylor of Ashbourne) who could be considered fit to edit prayers, no one acquaintance satisfied in all points. Another important fact is that, among all those of

⁸¹In Johnsonian Miscellanies, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, II, 148.

⁸²Diaries, Prayers, Annals, p. xvi.

⁸³Quinlan, "Dr. Franklin Meets Dr. Johnson," New Light, p. 108.

of Johnson's circle who were undoubtedly willing and at least partially qualified, George Strahan was there as his father had always been on the immediate occasion of Johnson's need. It was at George's home that Sir John Hawkins found Johnson in the last few days of November, 1784, and where he finally prevailed upon the author to make his will. It is clear that Johnson intended for a sizable portion of his estate to go to the Dr. Bray's Association:

Although he did not mention it in his final will, he provided that it should receive the royalties from the first edition of his posthumously published prayers. The execution of this bequest was left to George Strahan, to whom he entrusted the manuscript for editing and publication.⁸⁴

E. L. McAdam with Donald and Mary Hyde also emphasize Johnson's intentions by "the fact that eight or perhaps nine of the books were dated by Johnson, and all the prayers in the first book 1738-1760 endorsed by him suggests how important he considered them" ⁸⁵ George Strahan was severely criticized at the time for including so many random meditations of a too personal nature among what Johnson's friends thought he meant to be merely a book of prayers. But it is to these entries that many of his biographers are indebted for their information. Strahan published Johnson's prayers and meditations, which is really a diary, early in 1785, one year before the Thrale-Piozzi Anecdotes; two years before Hawkins' biography; and seven years before Boswell's Life of Johnson. Indeed, together with the Johnson correspondence which has taken over a century to collect, this publication forms much of the

⁸⁴ Quinlan, New Light, pp. 118-119.

⁸⁵ Diaries, Prayers, Annals, p. xvii.

primary source material for Johnsonian scholarship of all ages. Even so, the early critics held George Strahan responsible for revealing an unflattering aspect of Johnson's character. More recently, however, scholars such as James Clifford and Donald Greene have re-examined Strahan's shaping of Johnson's image:

It now appears . . . that Strahan was interested in creating and preserving a conventional pattern of Johnson's religion and marriage In instances where Johnson is talking about his relations with Tetty or about his religious doubts and scruples, Strahan, with an eye to posterity, has cross hatched Johnson's words so thoroughly that they cannot be read by ordinary means.⁸⁶

To substantiate this claim, the editors of Johnson's diaries write "that this heavy editing was done by Strahan and not Johnson is proved in part by four places where Strahan had inserted a word above a heavy deletion" ⁸⁷ More scientific investigation was necessary for other alterations of the text, as McAdam, and Donald and Mary Hyde report:

Strahan erasure . . . was very heavy. He blocked out words, lines, and paragraphs so completely that often few traces of the words remain we have depended on infra-red photographs or an infra-red converter to decipher some few passages where the surface of the paper has not been destroyed by the editing.⁸⁸

George Strahan, attending Johnson in the last days, was party to an episode which has had another great influence in re-creating the Johnson character. On December 5th, Johnson invited a few friends to his home to join him in prayer and a communion ceremony at which the Reverend Mr. Strahan was to officiate. The executor of his estate,

⁸⁶ Johnsonian Studies, p. 271.

⁸⁷ Diaries, Prayers, Annals, p. xvii.

⁸⁸ Diaries, Prayers, Annals, p. xvii.

Sir John Hawkins, and Bennet Langton were also among the guests. Just before the ceremony started, Johnson sent several of the company to another room to search for a paper he needed for his will. Although we can never know exactly what happened during these few minutes, there are varying accounts to consider. "Boswell asserts," says F. A. Pottle, "that Hawkins pocketed one of Johnson's 'pretty full and curious Diary of his life' and that it was the agitation into which Johnson was thrown by this incident that caused him to burn the diary and other personal papers."⁸⁹ Hawkins himself says:

I laid my hands on a parchment-covered book . . . upon opening the book, I found it to be meditations and reflections in Johnson's own handwriting . . . I put it, and a less of the same kind, into my pocket; at the same time telling those around me, and particularly Mr. Langton and Mr. Strahan, that I had got both After the ceremony was over, Johnson took me aside and told me that I had a book of his in my pocket.⁹⁰

Hawkins readily admitted that he took the papers "to prevent their falling into the hands of a person [George Steevens] who had attempted to force his way into the house" and that he had strong reasons "to suspect that this man might find and make an ill use of the book"⁹¹ Bertram Davis in tracing the origin of the Steevens-Hawkins quarrel explains that

in 1775 Steevens [nicknamed The Asp] had carried from his house 'a paper of public nature and of great importance,' and had published it without Hawkins' knowledge or consent;

⁸⁹ Frederick A. Pottle, "The Dark Hints of Sir John Hawkins and Boswell," New Light, pp. 157.

⁹⁰ Hawkins, pp. 271-272. Editor Bertran Davis adds (p. 303n) that this confession was not given in the first edition but added to the second of Hawkins' Life of Johnson.

⁹¹ Hawkins, p. 272.

and one tradition attributes the disappointing sale of Hawkins' history of music to the severity of Steevens' criticism.⁹²

Hawkins says that Johnson's reaction to the admission and reasons for taking the papers was: "You should not have laid hands on the book; for had I missed it, and not known you had it, I should have roared"⁹³

Although no name is mentioned, Pottle assumes from Hawkins' account that Bennet Langton is the one who told Johnson that Hawkins took the papers.⁹⁴ Boswell merely says Johnson was "acquainted of it without delay by a friend."⁹⁵ John Hoole, whom Hawkins lists as one present at the December 5th Holy Communion in Johnson's home, does not mention the missing papers episode at all in his diary.⁹⁶ Thus, of three or possibly four men, George Strahan, Bennet Langton, and the servant Frank Barber, who could have witnessed the act, only Strahan and Langton figure in the controversy that followed Johnson's death December 13, 1784. Whatever else George Strahan said, it is probable that he told his father, William Strahan, about Hawkins' looking into these private papers, because immediately in the hours following Johnson's death, "Thomas Cadell and William Strahan, representing a large number of London Booksellers, called upon Sir John Hawkins with their

⁹²Hawkins, p. xii.

⁹³Hawkins, p. 272.

⁹⁴New Light, p. 157.

⁹⁵Boswell, Life, III, 1133n.

⁹⁶Johnsonian Miscellanies, II, 155-156.

proposals for a biography and an edition of Johnson's works."⁹⁷ Johnson was buried on the twentieth, and the following day the announcement of Hawkins' forthcoming biography, based upon his authority as executor of the estate and possessor of Johnson's private papers, was made in the St. James's Chronicle.⁹⁸ The publisher's haste was "to discourage competition among the celebrants in his court and to preempt the services of the accomplished knight who had Johnson's papers in his custody."⁹⁹

This announcement brought a storm of attack from the opposing forces of Johnson's circle. George Steevens wrote in the same St. James's Chronicle just after the first of the year:

Little indeed did he [Johnson] suppose that a Person whom he had made one of his Executors would have instantly claimed the office of his Biographer. Still less could he have imagined that this Self-Appointment would have been precipitately confirmed by the Booksellers.¹⁰⁰

It seems that "precipitately confirmed" is hardly the phrase to use for a man whom Johnson had chosen as a member for his clubs from the Ivy Lane Club of 1749 to the Essex Head Club of 1783. Johnson's announced biographer was a man whose "wide experience and acquaintance as attorney, writer of Vauxhall songs, contributor to three editions of Shakespeare, critic, antiquarian and collector . . . a magistrate-chairman of the quarter Sessions for the county of Middlesex--" allows

⁹⁷Hawkins, p. xii.

⁹⁸Bertram Davis. Johnson before Boswell, A Study of Sir John Hawkins' Life of Samuel Johnson (New Haven, 1960), p. 2.

⁹⁹Davis, Johnson before Boswell, p. 2-3.

¹⁰⁰Hawkins, p. xii.

his editor to conclude: "Johnson had few friends who had done so much."¹⁰¹ Yet few men had been so attacked. Ironically, the animosity toward Sir John was a result of his disagreement with the membership of the very clubs which gave him association with Johnson. In addition to the break with George Steevens, Hawkins' very rough treatment of Edmund Burke caused him to resign or be unwelcome at the Literary Club. This episode prompted Johnson to coin his famous phrase: "Sir John was a most unclubable man."¹⁰² Bennet Langton, the only man other than George Strahan who witnessed Hawkins' taking of the papers, sided with George Steevens and Edmund Malone in attacking Hawkins' biography. As Davis so significantly demonstrates, "The book was as good as condemned before it left the presses."¹⁰³ Just after publication George Steevens, using the pseudonym Philo Johnson, wrote: "Sir John Hawkins, with all the humanity and very little of the dexterity of a Clare-Market butcher, has raised his blunt axe to deface the image of his friend."¹⁰⁴ "It is obvious," says Davis, "that what Johnson's friends looked for in his biography was a monument . . . they sprang up in anger upon the man who could so unfeelingly dissect their idol."¹⁰⁵ James Boswell, the one of Johnson's circle who was the most personally agitated by

¹⁰¹Davis, Johnson before Boswell, p. 2.

¹⁰²Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arbly, ed. Austin Dobson (London, 1904), I, 59. Fanny Burney was a young favorite of Johnson's and was the daughter of Dr. Charles Burney, a close friend and member of Johnson's circle.

¹⁰³Davis, Johnson before Boswell, p. 35.

¹⁰⁴Hawkins, p. xv.

¹⁰⁵Davis, Johnson before Boswell, p. 31.

the Booksellers' announcement of the "precipitately confirmed" biography, quickly joined the ranks. Boswell wrote a letter from Edinburgh on January 18th which was published in London on the 25th praising the anonymous author who attacked Hawkins, and also thanking him for exalting so highly Boswell's own qualifications.¹⁰⁶ All members of the Literary Club, and indeed any acquaintance, knew that Dr. Johnson's fellow traveler had been collecting material for twenty years to write his magnum opus. To find that a rival biography had been commissioned by William Strahan--father of the man to whom Johnson entrusted his meditations and annals, and the man who had thwarted his own 1775 Tour publication--must have been a severe blow. It was a gauntlet flung; and I believe Boswell's final answer was the neglecting of the Strahans in his Life of Johnson.

Despite all oppositions, Hawkins finished the composition of his Life and Collected Works of Johnson, and "on 12 February 1787, Hawkins presented the first set of eleven volumes to the King."¹⁰⁷ In London that spring, Boswell met with the Literary Club where

'Malone suggested an admirable thought, which was to have a solemn Protest drawn up and signed by Dr. Johnson's friends, to go down to Posterity, declaring that Hawkins's was a false and injurious Account.' 'The suggestion was generally approved, but Sir Joshua Reynolds hesitated.' 'I resolved,' wrote Boswell, 'it should not sleep' (Private Papers, 17, 57).¹⁰⁸

Gentle Sir Joshua was perhaps never completely persuaded; he did, however, allow Boswell the use of his papers and correspondence with

¹⁰⁶ Davis, Johnson before Boswell, p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ Davis, Johnson before Boswell, p. 12.

¹⁰⁸ Davis, Johnson before Boswell, p. 23n.

Johnson, and in 1791 James Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson appeared, edited and footnoted by Edmund Malone and dedicated to Sir Joshua Reynolds.

It has been fortunate for Johnsonian scholars that Strahan and Cadell were farsighted and persistent enough to publish Hawkins. The Malahide papers prove that his estimate of Johnson was valid and that Boswell, and presumably others in the circle such as Bennet Langton and Edmund Malone, not only knew it, but wished to destroy the truth along with Hawkins. F. A. Pottle now says that he credits Hawkins when in disagreement with Boswell because:

When I first collected my thoughts on the matter eighteen years ago, I assumed that Boswell could have seen nothing in the diary . . . because in no known record does he say that he did. Now I am by no means sure. His papers provide more instances of reticence and complete silence on delicate points than I was then aware of.¹⁰⁹

In a further estimation which represents the thought of many scholars, Pottle frankly admits:

I am also ready to believe that Hawkins put the correct interpretation on what he read. He was something of a prig, but he was not a fool. On the contrary, he was a hard-headed lawyer and magistrate with extensive practice in weighing of evidence. There is no reason to suppose that he was not as well equipped to read and understand the literal sense of a Johnsonian document as any twentieth-century editor or biographer.¹¹⁰

Perhaps both Strahans realized that Johnson's friend of forty years was more familiar with his life and would be more faithful to Johnson's own philosophy in biography of presenting both the good and

¹⁰⁹Pottle, pp. 156-157.

¹¹⁰Pottle, p. 158.

the unfavorable to leave a balanced character of him to the world. Whatever the Strahans' intentions, Johnsonians are in their debt for the publishing of Johnson's own Prayers and Meditations as well as Hawkins' Life of Samuel Johnson.

That Dr. Johnson would have been published and famous without either of the Strahans is not questionable. William Strahan survived his friend and author by only a few months, dying in 1785. He had lived to publish the Dictionary, Rasselas, Shakespeare, the major political pamphlets and travels, and the Lives of the Poets, all of Johnson's major works and the posthumous Diaries, Prayers, and Meditations. Gaskell says: "It was surely a combination of orderliness with his other qualities of shrewdness and ambition that enabled William Strahan to build up the greatest printing house in London."¹¹¹ It was also this same combination of qualities that made him the perfect complement for Johnson's temperament and genius. No Johnsonian student denies that James Boswell is responsible for perpetuating the conversational character of Dr. Johnson; a study of William and George Strahan indicates that they deserve credit for establishing the Johnson-as-author in the "double tradition of Johnson's identity." In addition, both Strahans were also faithful friends throughout his life and deserve from Johnsonians a more prominent place in "The Circle."

¹¹¹Gaskell, p. 592.

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VITA

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