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Samuel Johnson: The Man and His *Dictionary of the English Language*

Emilda C. Rivera Pacheco

Resumen

El 15 de abril de 2006 Londres celebra el 251 aniversario del *Dictionary of the English Language* publicado por Samuel Johnson; un evento que le brindó a la lengua inglesa una extraordinaria fuente de información histórica y literaria. Para muchos, los diccionarios siempre han sido una fuente de información, mayormente una referencia para buscar los significados, la pronunciación y la etimología de las palabras. Sin embargo, usualmente no pensamos en las personas que se dieron a la tarea de producir esos diccionarios, o de cómo completaron tal tarea. Nuestro propósito es conocer más sobre el Dr. Samuel Johnson, el hombre, su trabajo, y su *Diccionario* publicado en el 1755 y reconocido como "el diccionario en inglés que fue el estándar durante un siglo y la base de los que le siguieron" [mi traducción] ("The A-Z of Samuel Jonson," 2005).

Descriptores: Dr. Samuel Johnson, diccionario, lenguaje inglés

Abstract

On April 15, 2006, London celebrates the 251st anniversary of Dr. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*; an event that gave the English language an extraordinary source of historical and literary information. For many, dictionaries have always been a source of information, mostly a reference for word meanings, pronunciation, and etymology. However, we usually do not think about the people who undertook the task of producing these dictionaries, and how they completed such task. Our purpose is to know more about Dr. Samuel Johnson, the man, his work, and his *Dictionary of the English Language* published in 1755, recognized as "the standard English dictionary for a century and the basis for those that followed" ("The A-Z of Samuel Johnson," 2005).

Keywords: Dr. Samuel Johnson, dictionary, english language

Samuel Johnson: The Man

Samuel Johnson was born in Lichfield, Staffordshire, England, in 1708. His father was a bookseller and his family had great financial difficulties. His mother could not nurse him when he was born, so she had to find someone to nurse him. The woman who nursed him infected him with scrofula, (tuberculosis of the lymph nodes) and as a result, he was always ill. Bainbridge (2005) described Johnson as "practically blind in one eye, scarred on the lower part of his face, and a lifelong martyr of emphysema and depression." Rábago (2005) also described him as "always feeble and sick as well as very prone to suffer depressions" (p. E3).

The A-Z of Samuel Johnson (2005) from BBC NEWS cites Boswell, Johnson's friend and most known biographer, when describing Johnson.

> Johnson was six feet tall, clumsy, partially blind and deaf, and suffered involuntary convulsions, leading many to mistake him as ill-mannered. Boswell's biography says painter William Hogarth thought Johnson was an 'idiot' until the writer spoke to reveal his eloquence. (p.1)

Since very young, Samuel Johnson reacted to his disabilities by becoming independent and did not like to accept pity from anyone. Although Johnson suffered from illness throughout his life, he nevertheless participated in sports and enjoyed competing and winning against others in physical activities such as walking long distances, swimming, rowing and riding. About this he wrote: "Such is the constitution of man that labour may be styled its own reward; nor will any external incitements be requisites, if it be considered how much happiness is gained, and how much misery escaped, by frequent and violent agitation of the body." ("The A-Z, 2005). His biographers included many instances of this.

In the article *Samuel Johnson, Writer* (n.d.) we find a series if instances describing Samuel Johnson's reaction when confronted with physical challenges. When he was three or four years old, a servant regularly took him to school and walked him home again. One day, the servant did not arrive on time, so young Johnson began to walk home by himself. When confronted with a ditch across the street, he got down on his knees to peer down before crossing it. His teacher had followed him and tried to help, but he angrily pushed her away. In another occasion, a middle-aged Johnson went to swim in a river with a friend after not having swum for years. His friend warned him of a dangerous section where someone had recently drowned and Johnson's reaction was to swim directly to that section. Even in his seventies, while visiting his native Lichfield, he went to a rail that he used to jump over when he was a boy; he took off his wig and coat, and leaped over it twice. After this he said he felt "in a transport of joy" ("Samuel Johnson", n. d., p. 1).

Thanks to his mother's small inheritance, he was able to study at Oxford University, but eventually had to leave before completing a degree. There are two possible versions of why he did not finish his studies. It was either because he could not continue to pay the fees, or it was because he suffered a serious attack of melancholy, yet there seems to be a general idea that it was because he could not continue to pay the fees. Regardless of his lack of money, Johnson disliked to depend on others.

When Johnson was 25 years old, in 1735, he married Elizabeth Porter, a widow who had three children and who was 21 years his senior. Bainbridge (2005) indicates that she was genuinely fond of him and that Johnson really loved her, although he was "stormy by nature and ill-equipped to understand her needs" (p.2). According to Johnson's biographers, Elizabeth, who Johnson called Tetty, was conscious of the age difference and would continuously flirt before him and was ridiculed by others. Eventually, she became a heavy drinker and opium user. He even stopped drinking because of her. Tetty died in 1752, before the *Dictionary* was completed and Johnson was in deep grief. He is believed to have been against remarrying, describing a second marriage as "the triumph of hope over experience" (The A-Z of, ... 2005, p. 3).

After Elizabeth's death, Johnson was never really alone in the house because although he could be very "irritable with, and often downright rude to those he considered his equals, his kindness to others less fortunate than himself was nothing short of saintly" (Bainbridge, 2005, p.2). It is interesting that although Johnson was not wealthy, and sometimes even penniless, he was also called the Good Doctor because of his generosity and kindness to beggars, prostitutes, children and animals.

James Boswell, a man described by Bainbridge (2005) as a "young and often inebriated Scottish lawyer" (p. 1) met Johnson in 1763 and became Johnson's close friend. Ten years later, Boswell decided to write Johnson's life through eyewitness accounts, of conversations and events concentrating on the time he spent with Johnson. Although it is a personal one-sided account, it has been recognized as outstanding. Bainbridge goes further to say that Boswell's biography of the 'Good Doctor' is a "work of genius, so real, so modern in its immediacy, that its subject remains untouchable to this day" (p. 1). *The A-Z of Samuel Johnson* offers an example from Boswell's *Life of Johnson* biography describing how he found a poor tired woman lying on the street and carried her to his house and spent "considerable expense" to care for her. His house became home for a blind lady, a widow, a doctor given to drinking, the woman he had picked

up from the street, and a black boy to whom Johnson left his money and watch.

Although Johnson was not really alone, he nevertheless continued having problems with his depressions. Henry Thrale, a businessman, once found him on the stairs crying out for God to save him from his "madness" and decided to help him. He and his wife, Hester, took him into their house and nursed him. Mrs. Hester Thrale wrote that:

> He loved the poor as I yet saw anyone else do, with an earnest desire to make them happy.... and so he nursed whole nests of people in his house, where the lame, the blind, the sick, and the sorrowful found sure retreat from all the evils whence his little income could secure them. ("Samuel Johnson", n. d., p. 11)

In *The A-Z of Samuel Johnson* (2005) the author indicates that there has been speculation of a deeper relationship with Hester Thrale. The article points out that a line in Johnson's diary in 1771 refers to a "mad reflection on shackles and hand-cuffs" and in a letter to Hester he repeatedly alludes to "bondage." The article also mentions that a biography written by Sir John Hawkins indicated that Johnson had a guilty secret about his sexual past. Nevertheless, the Thrale's house became his refuge for 17 years. During this time he visited his house on weekends to make sure its inhabitants had enough money to live on.

He had struggled to support himself in teaching and journalism but was not financially comfortable until the government granted him an annual pension of £300 in 1762. Although he did not feel comfortable at receiving a pension, he nevertheless finally accepted it. He had defined the word pension as "An allowance made to anyone without an equivalent. In England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country." A friend had to convince him to accept it by indicating that it was a reward from his country for producing the *Dictionary*, not a bribe for the future ("Samuel Johnson," n.d., p. 9). The pension gave him the financial security he had never had.

Johnson was an avid reader. Biographers have indicated that for his dictionary he must have read around two thousand books of various genres such as literature, medical, technical and theological texts, and political pamphlets, always searching for phrases that could document the words as they were correctly used, under his standards. Johnson increased his vocabulary and useful quotations by reading from this wide range of topics and also consulted a copy of Bailey's dictionary. Johnson was accustomed

to this type of work. Since childhood, he had been interested in the meanings of words and had learned Latin, which gave him an advantage while translating as well as etymological information.

Johnson is considered the second most-quoted person in English, only second to Shakespeare. His famous sayings were always indicative of the man he was and his beliefs. Two samples of his sayings as quoted in *The A-Z of Samuel Johnson* (2005) are:

> A woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all.
>
> He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man. [On drinking too much] (p, 2)

The *Dictionary* was published in 1755, and although he did not complete his studies, Oxford University granted him a Master of Arts degree that Johnson included in the *Dictionary*'s front page. Later on, he was awarded Doctor of Laws degrees by Dublin University in 1765 and by Oxford University in 1775, hence the name Dr. Johnson, or the Good Doctor, as he was also known.

Dr. Samuel Johnson died on December 13, 1784, a year after suffering a stroke. The doctors had prescribed opium for his pains, but after having lived through its effects on Tetty, he would only take one-sixth of the drug prescribed. He also asked his doctor if he could last for more than a month, and the doctor told him he probably would not, so he refused to continue taking the opium or any other pain-killer because he "desired to meet his Maker with an unclouded mind" ("Samuel Johnson", n. d., p. 11).

An autopsy at William Hunter's School of Anatomy found diseased liver, pancreas and kidneys, yet his heart was large and strong. He was buried in London's Westminster Abbey. His friend, William Gerard Hamilton, member of Parliament, said: "He has made a chasm which not only nothing can fill up, but which nothing has a tendency to fill up. –Johnson is dead. –Let us go to the next best: –There is nobody: –no man can be said to put you in mind of Johnson." ("Samuel Johnson", n. d., p.11).

Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language

Before Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language,* Edmund Coote had compiled a list of 1,368 words in his *English Schoolmaster* in 1596. A schoolteacher, Robert Cawdrey, prepared the first English dictionary in 1604. It was published as *The Table Alphabeticall of Hard Words,* a volume with the definition of 2,543 "hard words" that had been borrowed from other languages. In the 1600s larger dictionaries offering more information about

the word they included were produced, such as Henry Cockeram who published his work in 1623. In 1721, Nathan Bailey published a dictionary containing about 60,000 words, being the first English dictionary that tried to include all English words, not only the difficult ones, but in contrast with Johnson's *Dictionary,* it mainly included the origins of the words and some definitions.[1] However, these efforts were not comparable to the French dictionary published by the *Académie Francaise* in 1700, or the Italian dictionary published by the *Accademia Della Crusca* in 1612.

In the early 1700s, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Samuel Johnson, and other literary men of England proposed the writing of a dictionary to set the standard of good usage for English, following the influence of the great French and Italian dictionaries. The idea of producing a dictionary of the English language to parallel the dictionaries developed by the French and Latin Academies exemplifies the growing self-consciousness about English and how its good usage had to be promoted as well as preserved. In his *Dictionary*, Johnson called for a diction "free of Gallick impurities" and recommended as models the "wells of English undefiled," as seen in the following quotation from Johnson's *Preface* to the *Dictionary*: "I have studiously endeavoured to collect examples and authorities from the writers before the restoration, whose works I regard as the wells of English undefiled, as the pure sources of genuine diction" (Baugh and Cable, 2002, p. 258).

Samuel Johnson accepted to work on the dictionary and signed the contract while having breakfast in a tavern. After he signed the contract to work on the Dictionary, Johnson rented a house (now a museum at number 17, Gough Square) where he worked. The large upper floor was used as a workshop. He worked with six assistants, who Bainbridge (2005) describes as five Scots and one Englishman who were "close to destitution when hired [and] were possibly chosen out of compassion rather than reason" and Johnson's working area as a three-legged chair propped against the wall to stop the "old crazy deal table" from falling (p. 2).

In 1747 Johnson first published a *Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language.* An interesting anecdote about this event described in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* was the situation that existed between Johnson and Lord Chesterfield, to whom the *Plan* was dedicated. At first Lord Chesterfield demonstrated to be interested and even made some suggestions, but he soon lost interest and did not pay attention to the work, and Johnson could not forget this. Once the *Dictionary* was completed and widely accepted, Lord Chesterfield wrote enthusiastically

and praised Johnson as a way to make amends, but Johnson did not accept it. The result was one of Johnson's most famous letters. In it he wrote to Lord Chesterfield: "Is not a patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the waters, and when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help?" (*New Standard Encyclopedia*, 1974, p. J-88). In the letter he added:

> The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it. (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1982, p. 247).

Although he promised that the *Dictionary of the English Language* would be ready in three years, it took him nine years, a short time, nevertheless. When Johnson was reminded that 40 French academics worked on the French dictionary for 40 years, Johnson has been quoted to have replied: "Forty times forty is sixteen hundred. As three to sixteen hundred, such is the proportion of an Englishman to a Frenchman." ("The A-Z", 2005, p,1). In 1746, months after his 36th birthday, Johnson began his work on his *Dictionary of the English Language*. It was to be the English equivalent to the French and Italian dictionaries already published. When describing Johnson's work, Hitchings (2005) indicated that Johnson worked "in defiance of probability, fighting off creditors, ennui and the depravities of his imagination" (p. 1) Nevertheless, Johnson went forward with his work, searching for the words he believed were examples of the English language he wanted to preserve, and in Hitchings' words, an "educational resource and a keystone of Georgian Britain's identity". (p. 1)

Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* surpassed earlier dictionaries in the precision of his definitions and the literary illustrations. His work was distinguished by the range of readings from which he selected examples of the different shades of meanings of a word. His orthography has been controvertible and his etymologies uncertain, and he even agreed that even while he worked some words were "budding," or beginning to be used, while others were "falling away" or becoming less used. The final paragraph of his preface to the *Dictionary* is another example of his prose style as he justified his work.

> In this work, when it shall be found that much is omitted, let it not be forgotten that much likewise is performed; and though no book was ever spared out of tenderness to the author, and the world is little solicitous to know whence proceeded the faults of that which it

> condemns; yet it may gratify curiosity to inform it, that the *English Dictionary* was written with little assistance of the learned, and without any patronage of the great; not in the soft obscurities of retirement, or under the shelter of academic bowers, but amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow. (Encyclopædia Britannica, 1982, p. 247)

Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary* did not have a section devoted to words beginning with the letter X because he believed that there were no English words that began with this letter, so his alphabetical entries ranged from A to Z, without the X. Curiously, *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language, Deluxe Encyclopedic Edition* (1998) has 88 entries under letter X, approximately two pages of a total 1,466 pages devoted to definitions.

Johnson's Methodology

Johnson's method of collecting words and illustrative samples of usage consisted of first identifying passages where he considered the words were used correctly and which could be used to illustrate the meanings. According to Hitching (2005), his method of "finding source material and using it as evidence was, in British lexicography, an innovation, and it has been influential" (p. 1). Starting from illustrative passages, rather than from word lists was the innovation.

In contrast, James L. Clifford (1979) indicated that evaluating Johnson's overall achievement, scholars would find that "there was little new or original in his approach except his choices of quotations for moral purposes" (p. 145). Clifford understood that earlier lexicographers had already "experimented with every device" Johnson used. However, Johnson "was the first in England to combine in one reliable work the various functions we now demand of a dictionary." His conclusion was that "The overall coverage is astonishing" (p. 145). Johnson's methodology has been influential because this practice continues today in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Johnson's initial plan, according to Hitching (2005), was that there should be at most seven different senses for any word. These would be the "natural and primitive signification," a "consequential meaning," a "metaphorical sense," a "poetical sense," "familiar" and "burlesque" senses, and finally "the peculiar sense in which the word is found in any great author" (p. 1). However, when he examined a dictionary by Benjamin Martin, organized in a similar way, he came to the conclusion that this approach was too rigid

and unempirical. Johnson then decided to permit as many senses of the word as he could find. Examples of this were the definitions of the verb to take with 134 different senses and about 8,000 words that occupied five pages.

He began his task by first searching for passages written by the English writers that he considered were the most correct in the way they used the English language. After identifying the passages, Johnson then underlined every sentence where he believed that the word had been correctly used and that he intended to quote. He then wrote the initial letter of the word on the margin. Johnson kept the selected quotes in 80 notebooks. He then gave these notebooks to his assistants who transcribed each sentence on a separate slip of paper and then arranged them under the word referred to. Once they were arranged alphabetically, Johnson worked on the definitions and collected their etymologies.

According to Clifford (1979), the *Dictionary* was "an extensive anthology of English prose and verse" and he offered the following data:

> In the first volume [of Johnson's *Dictionary*] alone, from A to K, there are about 24,000 quotations from the English poets, with more than 8,500 from Shakespeare, over 5,600 from Dryden, 2,700 from Milton; and there were some 10,000 from the philosophers with over 1,600 from Locke, and some 5,000 from religious writers. The two volumes contained over 16,000 quotations, and Johnson had collected twice that many. (pp. 147-148)

His method of defining words was "to move from the most tangible, literal sense of a word to its most abstract, metaphoric or specialized applications" (Hitchings, 2005, p. 1). As a result, his definitions registered the role of the people's needs and usage in expanding the semantic range of words. Johnson's definitions illustrated how a changing world could affect and change language by causing the meanings to diversify. It was both a logical and historical approach to "mapping meaning" that has had important implications in the way language is studied. Johnson's own poetic talent can also be seen in his definitions, as can be seen in his explanation of embryo as "the offspring yet unfinished in the womb."

Dr. Johnson defined more than 40,000 words, illustrating their meanings with 140,000 quotations from writers from the Middle Elizabethan period through his time (Bainbridge, 2005, p.2). He used his own preferences and judgment when selecting the citations that would illustrate a word; therefore, the *Dictionary* offers insight into his believes and opinions in

regards to the literature, language, science and religion of his time. One of Johnson's principal purposes for accepting the task of producing the *dictionary* was "to preserve the purity [...] of our English idiom" by including such words as were used in "the general intercourse of life" or could be found in the writings of "those whom we commonly style polite writers," that is, those he considered to be the best writers from the "golden age of our language" (As quoted by McDermott, 1996, p.1).

One may believe that during the time he spent working on his *Dictionary*, he understood how the senses of the words would change with usage, and that there was no real way of avoiding these changes, yet he was very selective of the quotations he used and even added his own comments as to what was correct usage, many times offering prescriptive comments on what was correct or incorrect.

Johnson's interest in the written word

Although Johnson accepted the oral origin of language, he recorded only written language. Samuel Johnson was a writer, a journalist, a promoter of the use of the printing press and of its importance as the growing knowledge of reading provided for the increase of communication through reading and writing.

He was not particularly interested in promoting a particular type of pronunciation. In the same way that he transmitted his opinions throughout the illustrating quotations, his word list, and his editorial comments, Johnson selected his sources from those who generally agreed with his ideas about speech and pronunciation as inferior to writing.

From De Maria's book, *Johnson's Dictionary and the Language of Learning*, (1986), I am including two quotations from Johnson's *Dictionary* where we can see Johnson's ideas on writing. [Note: The words used as entries in Johnsosn's *Dictionary* have been written in ***bold italics***.].

A quote from Joseph Addison explained the correct order in terms of plainness as "The man who does not know how to ***methodise*** his thoughts, has always a barren superfluity of words, the fruit is lost amidst the exuberance of leaves." And another from Richard Hooker described the correct order of a composition in "I have endeavoured, throughout this discourse, that every former part might give strength unto all that follow, and every latter bring some ***light*** unto all before." (p. 182).

Writing, to Dr. Johnson, must be consciously organized and 'plainly' "trimmed of excess;" a process carefully thought out, remembering the

importance of written language above speech. And as can be seen throughout his *Dictionary*, he teaches through examples he has carefully chosen; his illustrative quotations and comments.

We also find a selection of quotations selected by Johnson that show his opinion in regards to speech. For example:

> There is certain garbs and ***modes*** of speaking, which vary with the times; the fashion of our clothes being not more subject to alteration than that of our speech. -Denham

Speech sounds as articulate ***figurations*** of the air ... We behold the species of eloquence in our minds, the ***effigies*** or actual image of which we seek in the organs of our hearing. -Bacon

> Language properly used is that of the tongue directed to the ear by speaking; written language is ***tralatitiously*** so called, because it is made to represent to the eye the same words which are pronounced. (p. 188)

Etymology in Johnson's Dictionary

Clifford (1979) wrote that Johnson's etymologies were "often at fault' and that "his accounts of the history of the language are not acceptable by modern standards" (p. 145). In many of his etymological notes, Johnson gives evidence of his wish to see English as a language independent of Latin, but at the same time he often used his knowledge of Latin –and Greek– to explain his native English.

Johnson also explained etymologies based on Old English, onomatopoeias, and eponymy, but his inclinations were always mainly to Latin because he believed the roots of English were Teutonic and classical (De Maria, 1986, p. 112). McAdam and Milne (1963), when preparing their *Johnson's Dictionary: A Modern Selection,* included a note where they indicated that they had "omitted most of Johnson's etymologies [and] retained those which seem particularly individual or eccentric or which are spectacularly wrong."

The Question of Authorship

The question of authorship arises in Johnson's *Dictionary* because of the way he selected his illustrations and definitions. Even when he quotes other writers, there is evidence that he sometimes edited the material, selected only the section he wanted, and wrote many of the definitions himself. At present we see dictionaries as not being attributed to an author, and

dictionaries seem to have authority in their apparent anonymity, in contrast to other genres in literature. McDermott (1996) stated that this authority could be compromised if we knew the author and he/she had "biographically ascertainable character traits. Where authorship obtrudes in this kind of text, some measure of objectivity or authority is sacrificed" (p.1). However, early historical dictionaries announced their authors on the front page and their content identified the tastes and beliefs of their authors.

The evidence of Johnson's authorship is not only in the front page, but also in the entries; therefore, this attention to the concept of authorship distinguishes it from modern dictionaries. Can Samuel Johnson be considered the author when so many of the illustrating quotes come from the work of other writers? According to McDermott,

> What needs to be applied to Johnson's *Dictionary* is a wider notion of authorship. ... Johnson had particular intentions in selecting the material for the illustrative quotations ... having a great deal to do with the extra-lexical purposes that Johnson had in mind for the *Dictionary*. (p. 3)

Johnson selected the quotes he wanted to use, edited others, and wrote his own comments to make them more suitable to his purposes.[2] Not only did Johnson specifically select the quotations he wanted, the order of the quotations within a specific definition also reflected the emphasis he wanted. In the example that follows, the order of the quotations give different inflections to the meaning and show some of the religious meaning the word has for Johnson. As a Christian and moralist writer, Johnson was aware of the moral obligation to make good use of our time, and this is seen in the arrangement of the quotations he used to illustrate the meaning of ***mispend*** (sic) in the following sample entry (as explained by McDermott, 1996).

> To ***MISPEND***. *(sic.)* v. a.
>
> 1. To spend ill; to waste; to consume to no purpose; to throw away.
>
> What a deal of cold business doth a man ***mispend*** the better part of life in? In scattering compliments, tendering visits, gathering and venting news.
> *Benj. Jonson's Discovery.*
>
> First guilty conscience does the mirror bring,
> Then sharp remorse shoots out her angry sting;

> And anxious thoughts, within themselves at strife,
> Upbraid the long ***mispent***, luxurious life.
> *Dryden.*
>
> I this writer's want of sense arraign,
> Treat all his empty pages with disdain,
> And think a grave reply ***mispent*** and vain.
> *Blackmore.*

The way McDermott (1996) analyzes this entry is according to the way the quotations are arranged. The first one is a general complaint about wasting time in social courtesies, but the second by Dryden associates waste of time with moral guilt and by thinking about past actions, it has the feel of a "death-bed repentance." The quotation from Blackmore deals with the time wasted when taking a bad writer seriously and bothering to answer to his errors, but its position following the religious association, means to McDermott "that the waste of time involved begins to seem morally reprehensible" (pp. 4-5). There we can see the hand of the author, in the deliberate organization of the text and so creating a meaning that was not present in any one of the quotations, but when read collectively, they convey a particular ethical and theological viewpoint.

Regardless of any mistakes in his work, Johnson's *Dictionary* is considered a very powerful influence in English lexicography. His work has served as a basis for all dictionaries published since then. The *New English Dictionary* (now the *Oxford English Dictionary)* was published with the collaboration of literally thousands of scholars, although not all of them full-time, and took 70 years to complete. Johnson and his six copyists completed his in nine years.

> Nothing is ever perfect; everything has its positive and not-so-positive sides, and Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* was no exception. I believe Baugh and Cable summarized this well. They indicated that regardless of the defects that can be seen at the present, it exhibited the English vocabulary much more fully than had ever been done before. It offered "a spelling, fixed, even if sometimes badly, that could be accepted as standard. [And] It supplied thousands of quotations illustrating the use of words" (p. 272).

Concluding comments

Dr. Samuel Johnson could be seen from two angles: the poor, rough, unkept, ill, depression-stricken lexicographer and the journalist, or the thinker,

the avid reader, the friend, the writer. There is definitely so much more to know of the man than just what one finds when reading about his *Dictionary of the English Language.* There is still much to know of the writer, so admired during his days, and now beginning to re-surface and becoming known to those of us who did not know him before. A quote from the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1982) says it all. I find it a proper ending.

By the writing of books he strove to earn his daily bread; by the reading of books he sought to enlarge the range of his ideas and of his scholarship. And what, he asked in later years, should books teach but the art of living? Few men have left finer examples of the art of living than Samuel Johnson. (pp. 251-252)

Dr. Samuel Johnson, we salute you on the 251th anniversary of your *Dictionary of the English Language.*

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Endnotes

1 Bainbridge (2005) offers the following example: Bailey defined horse as "beast well-known". Johnson wrote five definitions for horse, including "joined to another substantive it signifies something large and coarse, as in horse-face".

2 A list of examples can be found in Henry Hitchings' (20050) article *A to Z, (without the X),* here cited, and additional information in his book, *Dr. Johnson's Dictionary: The Extraordinary Story of the Book that Defined the World* published by John Murray on April 11, 2005.

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