

Samuel Johnson. *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, ed. Thomas Keymer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. xlv+157pp. US\$12.95; £7.99. ISBN 978-0-19-922997-0.

Rasselas has been well served by its editors and critics. Since its publication 250 years ago, it has never been out of print, and it has attracted some of the most thoughtful criticism of any of Samuel Johnson's works. Both scholarly and teaching editions of *Rasselas* have been particularly good. G.B. Hill's Clarendon Press edition of 1887 (reprinted many times), R.W. Chapman's Clarendon Press edition of 1927, and Gwin Kolb's Yale edition of 1990 all set high bibliographical standards. Among the many mass-market editions of *Rasselas*, J.P. Hardy's World's Classics edition (1966 and 1988) surpassed others in identifying its philosophical interests, and Jessica Richard's excellent Broadview edition (2008) has created a context for the tale in relation to British Orientalism.

Thomas Keymer's new World's Classics edition of *Rasselas* is the conscious beneficiary of earlier editions, while also developing its own modern focus. Like Chapman and Hardy, it prints the text of the second, corrected edition of 1759 and maintains first-edition readings in some cases of compositional error. It has a chronology, a useful (though obvious) bibliography, and a helpful glossary of unfamiliar words that draws on Johnson's *Dictionary*. Keymer's introduction is an excellent critical essay in its own right. Highlighting the enlightened nature of Johnson's text, he deftly describes several intersecting biographical, historical, and intellectual narratives. Especially interesting, Keymer associates Johnson's account of the pursuit of happiness with Thomas Jefferson's writings, suggesting that they "may have been closer to one another in their thinking about the pursuit of happiness, if not about equality or slavery" (x). Johnson, of course, was more liberal than the early Americans on the subject of slavery, as his parenting of Francis Barber and his advocacy of Joseph Knight indicate (in discussing Knight with Boswell [23 September 1777] Johnson states, "It is impossible not to conceive that men in their original state were equal ... [slavery] is injurious to the rights of mankind").

Keymer links these enlightened views with Johnson's critique of imperialism, directly argued in his *Introduction to the World Displayed* (1759) and deployed in *Rasselas* in his rewriting of the popular form of the oriental tale. Keymer's explanatory notes track Johnson's familiarity with contemporary historiography of Abyssinia and the Ottoman Empire, identifying extensive echoes in the text from Aaron Hill's *A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1709), Stephen Whatley's *A Complete System of Geography* (1747), *Familiar Letters from a Gentleman at Damascus to His Sister in London* (1750), and

other works. The notes are very helpful in suggesting the complexity of the tale's contexts.

Keymer goes further by arguing that Johnson uses "oriental" themes, images, and settings to criticize British colonialism: "Far from being an 'orientalist' in the Saidian sense, one for whom lush new worlds were alluring fair game, Johnson was notorious in the year of *Rasselas*—the 'Year of Victories,' in which the war turned decisively in Britain's favour—as a prophet against empire, doggedly resistant to the opportunities for domination of the globe from Asia to America that were suddenly opening up" (xxviii). Johnson taps the generic commonplaces of "orientalist" fiction in order to challenge the political and historicist views associated with that genre (xxiv–xxv).

Furthermore, Keymer argues that Johnson's critique of colonialism is supplemented in *Rasselas* by his interest in the contemporary debate about fiction and truth. Its ambiguous consideration in *Rambler* no. 4 (1750) is less about Fielding's "wicked characters" than the power of Richardson's realism (xxvi), which Johnson admires, but whose ideological and moral effects he doubts: "the power of [Richardsonian] example is so great, as to take possession of the memory by a kind of violence, and produce effects almost without the intervention of the will." In the right hands, realism can disable the memory, the seat of reason, and circumvent the moral capacity for choice. Because the "real" world of the Richardsonian novel can shape one's sense of reality while claiming simply to present life and the world as they are, Johnson deliberately resists those categories. It is precisely the tyranny of the real from which *Rasselas* seeks to escape: "Man has surely some latent sense for which this place affords no gratification" (11). Thus, as Keymer notes, Johnson works "hard as a practitioner of fiction to avoid the representational priorities and techniques that he elsewhere praises as a critic," deliberately flattening the characters and making them all speak the "same Johnsonian language" (xxvi). The journey on which they embark has the effect of distancing the subject from the objects rendered by the narrative, and reflects sceptically on the exotic scenes, customs, and characters usually associated with the "oriental." What Johnson gives us instead is "philosophical discourse" (xxvi), whose "pervasive aquacities of thought and language" (xxiii) run through the text like the Nile.

This underground current inspires the engagement with the possibilities and limitations of human life, and the investigation into mind, body, belief, sanity, identity, and time for which the tale is commonly admired. Keymer does well in identifying these appealing but notoriously difficult issues, and in noting the importance of the "negative dialectic that unfolds through the work as a whole" (xxxi) and that underpins the reticence of the tale's notorious ending and general

indeterminacy. Many readers have struggled to articulate their sense of the nuances of *Rasselas*—the ineffable combination of openness and purposefulness—so Keymer can be forgiven for sometimes emphasizing the inconclusiveness a little too firmly, and sometimes the teleology (can we really say that chapter 32 on the pyramids and chapter 10 on poetry “look forward to ... well-known moment[s] in Shelley” [139]?). But mostly Keymer presents the text with admirable sensitivity to its narrative niceties, noticing that its open-endedness counteracts the very teleology which it flaunts, and (like Montaigne and Cicero) registering emphatic warnings against its own method (xxx–xxxi).

J.D. Fleeman’s Johnsonian bibliography lists 527 editions of *Rasselas* down to 1984 and translations into 18 languages. *Rasselas*’s global popularity is unquestioned, something this new edition will maintain and enhance. I found only one error in the volume: James Clifford’s *Young Samuel Johnson* (1955) is attributed to George Sherburn (126).

Greg Clingham is professor of English and director of the University Press at Bucknell University (gregclingham.com).

Annette Upfal and Christine Alexander, eds. *Jane Austen’s “The History of England” & Cassandra’s Portraits*. Sydney: Juvenilia Press, 2009. lv+73pp. AUS\$15. ISBN 978-0-7334-2780-0.

This full-colour version of Jane Austen’s *History of England* for Juvenilia Press replaces the one edited by Jan Fergus in 1995 for the same publisher. Where Fergus suggested that a few of Cassandra’s portraits of historical figures could represent people whom she and Jane knew (iv), Annette Upfal and Christine Alexander believe that all of them might do so. Even when Cassandra copied other artists, it is said that she modified features to match the sitter. Drawing on the forensic expertise of Pamela Craig and Clifford Ogleby, who superimposed Cassandra’s images onto portraits of family members, friends, and sometimes siblings, the editors deduce that her sketches, together with Jane’s texts, reveal the sisters’ actual opinions about their subjects.

In the most intriguing result, Craig considers that “the portrait of ‘Mary Queen of Scots’ is that of Jane Austen.” In her opinion, the face shape and the nose provide the most striking similarities—Fergus perceived a likeness to Mary Tudor (iv). Craig also thinks it is “possible” that “Elizabeth I” represents Mrs Austen, and suggests of the attribution of “Henry VI” with Tom Fowle that “the similarities are such that it could be his brother if the two resembled each other.” Cassandra’s “James I,” she writes, “may represent” James Austen, while portraits of Edward Austen and “Edward VI” are “probably of the same person.” Although