My Impossible Task?
Writing an Ethical Biopic of Samuel Johnson

Joanna Leigh

Practice-based PhD

University of the Arts London

October 2009

Abstract

My impossible task? Writing an ethical biopic of Samuel Johnson

This practice-based PhD comprises an original screenplay for a biopic of eighteenth-century lexicographer and writer Samuel Johnson, entitled *Sam J*, and a thesis which reflects upon the process of writing that film.

The research question asks whether it is possible to write a biopic which operates within the conventions of classic Hollywood screenwriting (following the paradigm of the three act structure to create a film that is both emotionally engaging and entertaining to a mass audience) and yet is also an 'ethical biopic', that is, one that gives a truthful portrayal of the subject and his life.

The thesis proposes a framework which may be of help to the writers of ethical biopics, and puts that framework to the test through the process of writing the film.

Chapter 1, 'Truth', identifies different types of truth in the biopic, which often conflict with each other, and concludes that the best way to incorporate them into a single vision is by means of the 'interpretative approach'. The writer's own interpretation of Samuel Johnson is then explained.

Chapter 2 'Structure', explores the ethical issues which arose during the process of adapting the story of Johnson's life into a three-act screenplay.

Chapter 3 'Character', explores the ethical issues which arose during the process of turning historical people into characters in the film.

The ethical framework is modified in the light of the research process, and a revised framework is presented in the conclusion.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the University of the Arts London for accepting me onto their PhD programme, for providing me with support, and for awarding me a studentship which made this project possible.

I am deeply grateful for the expert guidance offered by the supervisors of this PhD, Jon Cook and Phil Parker, who were unfailingly positive and supportive throughout. To Phil I owe a particular debt of gratitude for teaching me the craft of screenwriting, and for being my mentor for a decade.

I also wish to acknowledge the contribution made by other screenwriters who have given me invaluable feedback on my script: fellow PhD students Shirley Scott-Webb and Helen Jacey, and directors of 3witches Productions Louise Sanderson and Hester Schofield.

Finally, I wish to thank my partner Nick Win for sharing my intellectual journey, for watching hundreds of biopics, and for being both the greatest fan and most perceptive critic of everything I write.

Contents

1. Practice

Screenplay *Sam J*

Sam J

by

Joanna Leigh

1 INT. THE ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE - DAY 1

CAPTION: The Académie Française, Paris

A feather quill writes on thick paper: "ZOOTOMIE n.f. ..."

The quill is in the hand of a bewigged 18th century FRENCH LEXICOGRAPHER. Next to him is another, then another, then another... 40 LEXICOGRAPHERS working away, in a magnificently opulent library, lit by chandeliers. Suddenly, the Lexicographer shouts excitedly.

FRENCH LEXICOGRAPHER
Zootomie!

He jumps up, waving his paper about.

FRENCH LEXICOGRAPHER (CONT'D)
C'est fini!

There is an outburst of celebration.

2 EXT. THE STRAND, LONDON - AFTERNOON 2

A dung-splattered street teeming with PEOPLE and all manner of vehicles, as carts and sedan chairs nip in between wagons, hackney carriages, and a herd of pigs, all caught up the traffic jam trying to squeeze its way through Temple Bar, an arch built in the middle of the road, seemingly to create a ridiculous bottleneck.

Caught up in the chaos is a very fine coach.

3 EXT. FLEET STREET - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 3

CAPTION: Fleet Street, London, 1746

The other side of the arch. A row of shops - a chandler's, a chop house, a wig shop, a pawnbroker's, a pub called the Cheshire Cheese. Busiest of all is a seedy gin shop with a drunken RABBLE outside it.

4 EXT. THE STRAND - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 4

The fine coach crawls towards the arch.

5 INT. COACH - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 5

A foppishly dressed FRENCHMAN rides in the coach. He pulls back the plush drapery covering the window, and opens the window. His peace is immediately shattered by the babble of language.

FRENCHMAN
Mon Dieu!

He looks out at a scene of Hogarthian chaos.

With him in the carriage are two FOOTMEN, who each bear an identical object which is covered in a fine cloth.

6 EXT. FLEET STREET - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 6

Among the rabble outside the gin shop, three impoverished POETS are working, ragged quills in hand. PEYTON, a scrawny Englishman in his early twenties, reads over his work.

PEYTON
Mary, my love, each time we part,
Tis like discordful music in my heart.

He stops, unsure of something.

PEYTON (CONT'D)
Discordful - is that right?

SHIELS, an earnest Scottish poet in his late twenties, looks up from his manuscript.

SHIELS
I think it's discordsome. Or maybe discordal... No, discordy.

7 EXT. THE STRAND - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 7

The fine coach goes through the arch.

8 INT. COACH - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 8

Two small boxes on strings suddenly drop down in front of the Frenchman's window.

MACBEAN (O.C.)
Help a debtor, sir!

The Frenchman looks up, and sees the faces of two POETS, quills and manuscripts in hand, pressed up against the grille of a prison, which has been built into the arch. MACBEAN is a flame-haired Scot in his early thirties, and RICHARDS, a bright young Englishman.

RICHARDS
Spare a farthing for a poor poet!

Disgusted, the Frenchman puffs perfume over himself.

9 EXT. FLEET STREET - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 9

Outside the gin shop, the discussion continues.

PEYTON
Discordous?

SHIELS
Or discordive?

MAITLAND, a roguish, shirtless Scot in his late thirties, knocks back the last of his gin.

MAITLAND
It's discordish, you muttonhead.

A GIN DRINKER in the crowd takes offence.

GIN DRINKER
Who are you calling muttonhead!

Wham! A fist flies out. Maitland reels from the blow. Another DRINKER is jostled, and a fight ensues. Peyton sighs.

PEYTON
Poets that lasting marble seek,
Must carve in Latin or in Greek.
We write in sand.

10 INT. COACH - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 10

The Frenchman emerges from under the arch, and looks out of the coach window with the utmost displeasure.

The fight outside the gin shop has turned into a small riot.

He shuts the window of his carriage in disgust.

11 EXT. PATERNOSTER ROW - AFTERNOON, MOMENTS LATER 11

The Frenchman's coach turns into a street. The street sign on one side of the road says "Paternoster Row", and "Pater Nosta Row" on the other.

12 INT. COACH - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 12

The Frenchman gives a pained shake of his head. Then he sees the place that he has been looking for, and signals to the driver to stop. The coach comes to a halt. The Frenchman gets out.

13 EXT. LONGMAN BOOKSELLER'S - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 13

Someone has graffitied on the side of the coach - "Basturd".

The coach has stopped outside a bookseller's shop called "LONGMAN", with a distinctive sign of a ship in full sail. The Frenchman looks at the shop, and smiles a wicked smile.

14 INT. LONGMAN BOOKSELLER'S - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 14

A bookshop, where four solidly middle class BOOKSELLERS are working quietly.

EDWARD CAVE, mid fifties, from the Midlands, proud and finely dressed, is scrutinizing a copy of the "Gentleman's Magazine". ROBERT DODSLEY, early forties, from Nottinghamshire, clubbable but canny, is reading a handwritten manuscript. ANDREW MILLAR, early forties, a dour Scottish bean counter, is going through his accounts. THOMAS LONGMAN, late forties, an authority figure and southern English businessman with vision, presides behind the counter.

The Frenchman comes into the shop, followed by his Footmen, bearing the covered objects.

FRENCHMAN
Monsieur Longman?

Longman looks up.

LONGMAN
Yes, I am Thomas Longman.

FRENCHMAN
I 'ave come from Paris...

A smug smile plays on his lips.

FRENCHMAN (CONT'D)
I 'ave brought something to show you.

He beckons to his Footmen, who put the covered objects onto the counter. Everyone closes in to get a better look.

FRENCHMAN (CONT'D)
I present ze "Dictionnaire de l' Académie Française"!

The Frenchman whips away the cloths with a flourish. There is a truly splendid, two-volumed dictionary. The company are all impressed.

The Frenchman grins smugly.

FRENCHMAN (CONT'D)
But...

The Frenchman pretends to scan the bookshelves on either side of him, with theatrical exaggeration.

FRENCHMAN (CONT'D)
Where is ze "Dictionnaire de l' Académie Anglaise"?

The Booksellers are irked. The Frenchman is clearly enjoying himself.

FRENCHMAN (CONT'D)
Ze Spanish have a dictionary -

The Booksellers are rising to the bait.

FRENCHMAN (CONT'D)
Even ze Italians have a dictionary! But you English do not!

This insult has found its mark. Longman draws himself up.

LONGMAN
Shakespeare managed perfectly well without one.

FRENCHMAN
Pah! You cannot dine out on Shakespeare for all éternité!

The Booksellers glower.

FRENCHMAN (CONT'D)
Your language is barbarique!
Your grammaire is chaotique.
Your spelling is deranged!

The Frenchman delivers his killer blow.

FRENCHMAN (CONT'D)
Ecoutez et répétez: ze English language - c'est fini!

The Booksellers stand in stunned silence, as the full horror of this national crisis sinks in.

The Frenchman smiles triumphantly. Then he turns and flounces out, in a swish of silk and puff of wig powder, his Footmen following hastily. They leave the offending dictionary as a lingering badge of shame.

Dodsley is the first to recover.

DODSLEY
He's right - it's a national disgrace.

The others nod, still a little dazed.

LONGMAN
It's all very well for the French - they had massive state funding for their dictionary. England is too interested in trade, slaves, and colonies to care about the language.

DODSLEY
If an English dictionary is to be written, it will have to be a profitable business venture.

MILLAR
A risky one.

Cave is in agreement.

LONGMAN
But a prestigious one.

DODSLEY
I say we do it, as a consortium.

Cave is surprised.

CAVE
What, work together?

LONGMAN
Yes! For the honour of our country.

Millar does some calculations.

CAVE
Gentlemen, I feel that this venture is too ambitious for me, given my current commitments. But I am happy to be involved in an advisory capacity. And of course you can count on the support of the "Gentleman's Magazine" for advertisements and reviews.

LONGMAN
Thank you, Edward. Andrew?

Millar consults his figures for the answer. He looks up.

MILLAR
Yes.

The four Booksellers all shake hands. Dodsley's sharp mind gets to work immediately.

DODSLEY
Who will patronize it?

LONGMAN
And who will write it? Not a university department...

MILLAR
Heavens, no! We need someone cheap.

CAVE
Well, what about poets? London is full of the wretches.

15 INT. THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE - EVENING 15

DAVID GARRICK, early thirties, diminutive and dazzling megastar, strides out onto the stage.

WOMAN IN THE AUDIENCE
David Garrick!

Thud! She has fainted.

GARRICK
Good public now that you have seen
The fate of Mahomet and Irene,
Applaud the bard, who with his art
Has spoken true, and from the heart!

Garrick gestures upwards.

SAMUEL JOHNSON, late thirties, a massive hulk of a man, sits in a box dressed in fine evening wear. Although he is no oil painting, and is almost blind in one eye, he is a manly man with an air of great dignity.

The AUDIENCE bursts into rapturous applause. Sam beams and glows with a massive pride. Next to him his wife, TETTY JOHNSON, twenty years his senior, pretty and genteel, smiles adoringly at him. She is dripping with jewellery, and wearing a beautiful green silk gown.

TETTY (O.C.)
Sam!

16 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM, GRUB STREET - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 16

Sam's head bobs forward and... Zzzzzt! He singes the front of his wig on his candle.

TETTY (O.C.)
Sam!

Jolted out of his reverie, Sam pulls his head back. The wig is safe, but charred and frazzled. Sam is in fact an impoverished poet in a garret, his wife Tetty in bed beside him. He has a candle in one hand and a manuscript in the other. The cover page reads: "Mahomet and Irene by Samuel Johnson".

Tetty strokes her hand down his arm amorously. But Sam's attention is on his work. He reads aloud from it.

SAM
To state and pow'r I court thee,
Not to ruin.

17 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 17

The furniture and possessions are meagre and shabby, with the exception of a fine portrait of a young man in a sailor's uniform. There is a knock at the door. David Garrick, splendidly attired, and brimful of confidence, strides into the room, holding a manuscript. He hears Sam's voice.

SAM (O.C.)
Smile on my wishes...

18 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 18

Sam gets out of bed, play and candle still in hand, and makes his way around the room, still reading.

SAM
And command the globe.

He narrowly avoids tripping over a pile of dusty books.

19 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 19

Garrick is about to knock on the bedroom door, when he stops, and listens.

20 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 20

Tetty attempts to seduce Sam.

TETTY
Smile on my wishes... and come back to bed.

Sam puts the manuscript down on the bed, and absent-mindedly tucks a sheet into his britches. He picks the manuscript up again, then moves away, revealing Tetty's naked flesh.

21 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 21

Garrick is peeping through the keyhole, desperately trying not to laugh out loud.

22 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 22

Tetty yanks at the sheet and covers herself up again, pulling Sam so that he loses his balance, and falls back onto the bed. Tetty reaches out and puts her arms around him.

TETTY
Sam...

Sam finally gets the message. He turns and smiles tenderly at her. Awkwardly, Sam embraces Tetty, then clambers on top of her, squashing her.

23 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 23

Garrick is doubled up with laughter, tears streaming down his face. He gets a grip of himself, and knocks on the door.

GARRICK
Sam!

24 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 24

Sam, excited to hear his friend's voice, instantly forgets the matter in hand.

SAM
Davy!

Tetty sighs. This is nothing new.

SAM (CONT'D)
Sorry, my sweet, but it might be good news.

25 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 25

Sam scrambles out of the bedroom in great excitement. But Garrick's face is now serious. He holds up Sam's manuscript of "Mahomet and Irene".

GARRICK
I asked the manager at Drury Lane to take a look at it, but he won't even consider a play by a writer without a patron.

Sam is devastated. Tetty comes out of the bedroom, and joins Sam.

GARRICK (CONT'D)
Anytime you need cheering up, just let me know, and I'll get you into one of my plays. They are all sell-outs, but I will always find a seat for you.

Sam bristles.

GARRICK (CONT'D)
Sam, a word of advice...

Sam's face clouds over.

GARRICK (CONT'D)
Get a patron.

26 INT. OFFICE OF THE GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE - NEXT MORNING 26

Sam stands at the threshold of a room, dressed in a shabby long brown coat, paddling his feet in his customarily curious way. He takes a flying leap. Splat! Sam lands on a luxurious Persian carpet in the opulent office of the "Gentleman's Magazine".

Edward Cave turns round.

CAVE
Ah, Sam! Got a patron yet?

Sam shakes his head. Cave turns back to admiring a brand new portrait of himself, dressed in costly clothes. Dodsley is also in the room. He and Sam acknowledge one another.

CAVE (CONT'D)
My father was a humble cobbler, you know, but the headmaster of Rugby school saw that I had great promise and accepted me into his fold.

Sam has heard this a thousand times before, and yet he listens with genuine sympathy.

CAVE (CONT'D)
But one day his wife's favourite cock went missing, and the blame fell upon me. I was stigmatized as a cock murderer, and was forced to abandon my education and leave.

Dodsley tries not to smile. Sam listens sympathetically.

CAVE (CONT'D)
But I showed them! I remember the day I had the idea for the "Gentleman's Magazine" - a complete innovation. And I built it up from nothing, without any fortune behind me. Merit will out, Sam. Merit will out.

SAM
So, business is good then.

CAVE
Circulation has increased massively. Do you have that copy for me?

Dodsley pricks up his ears. Sam hands Cave some sheets of paper.

SAM
Well I'm glad if my efforts have contributed to the magazine's success.

CAVE
Oh yes, absolutely. Your contribution is...

Cave puts two minute coins into Sam's hand.

CAVE (CONT'D)
Invaluable.

Sam is disappointed, but not really surprised.

SAM
Mr Cave, sir, is there any way that I could have a small rise? I am in debt with the chandler.

CAVE
There's no more money in the budget for candles.

Sam sighs - it really is no use. Dodsley has had an idea.

DODSLEY
Sam, Edward and I are part of a consortium set up to publish a dictionary of English.

Sam listens with interest.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
We need someone to write it, and I think you might be just the person we are looking for.

Sam seems to catch at the idea. Cave is piqued to have Sam poached in this way. Sam gives the offer serious thought, seeming to warm to it. Dodsley looks pleased.

SAM
(abruptly)
I believe I shall not undertake it.

Dodsley is stung by Sam's manner. Now it is Cave's turn to smile. Dodsley looks decidedly annoyed.

27 INT. THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE - EVENING 27

David Garrick is on stage as Richard III.

GARRICK
A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!

Thud! Several WOMEN in the AUDIENCE faint. Tetty watches, captivated. She wears an outmoded dress that would have been impressive in its day, and a brooch with a miniature portrait of Sam on it, best described as an honest likeness. Jealous and irritable, and still in the same shabby clothes, Sam follows the text in a book.

28 INT. GREEN ROOM, DRURY LANE - LATER THAT EVENING 28

A fashionable and sophisticated crowd of ACTORS, LITERATI, and GLITTERATI has gathered in the green room. Garrick is at the centre of the throng, basking in adoration.

Homespun Sam and Tetty stand to one side, feeling awkward and completely out of place.

COLLEY CIBBER makes a grand entrance. Vain, affected, and dressed like someone a third his age, he is the ultimate septuagenarian fop.

Tetty has never seen Cibber's like before.

TETTY
Who's that!?

As he joins Garrick, people crowd around Colley Cibber affectionately. Cibber takes the hand of beautiful actress HANNAH PRITCHARD, fawning over her.

SAM
Colley Cibber.

Tetty is surprised.

TETTY
How did *he* get to be Poet Laureate?

SAM
"Yet father Britons, cast your eyes,
Behold a long succession rise.
See how the beauteous branches shine!
Sprung from the fertile genial bed
Of glorious King George and Queen Caroline."

Tetty winces. She and Sam laugh together.

Garrick spots Sam and Tetty and grins broadly, waving at them to join him. Sam and Tetty approach reluctantly.

Colley Cibber is entertaining the crowd. He rolls his eyes theatrically towards Hannah Pritchard's bosom.

COLLEY CIBBER
Stolen sweets are best.

The company chuckle appreciatively.

GARRICK
That's a good one, Colley!

Sam frowns, disapproving and jealous.

GARRICK
You should publish a collection of your quotations.

COLLEY CIBBER
Oh, perish the thought!

The company exclaim with delight - another gem. One particularly GLAMOROUS ACTRESS offers Cibber encouragement.

GLAMOROUS ACTRESS
But quotations are the height of fashion, Mr Cibber!

COLLEY CIBBER
Ah, well, one had as good be out of the world...

Colley Cibber notices Sam and Tetty's unacceptable attire with undisguised horror.

COLLEY CIBBER (CONT'D)
As out of the fashion.

Tetty is stung. Sam is enraged.

SAM
Sir, I am indeed out of the fashion...

Cibber listens smugly.

SAM (CONT'D)
Since it is currently for (bellowing) FOOTLICKERS!

Cibber is blown back by the force of this blast.

29 EXT. DRURY LANE THEATRE - NIGHT, MOMENTS LATER 29

Sam and Tetty are ejected from the theatre.

30 EXT. ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL - NIGHT, MOMENTS LATER 30

Sam lumbers along at Tetty's side, growling under his breath. The sound of a choir practising emanates from the cathedral. They are singing Handel, badly. Sam frowns with displeasure.

SAM
Ah, the ubiquitous Handel.

TETTY
This one's difficult, apparently.

SAM
Difficult? I wish it were impossible!

Sam's quip makes her smile.

TETTY
That's a good one, Sam!

Suddenly, driven by his obsessive compulsive disorder, Sam lurches towards a lamppost. As his fingers make contact with it, Sam tips his head back, and blows his breath out like a whale. PASSERS-BY turn and stare at him. Sam returns to Tetty's side. The two of them continue as if nothing had happened.

Suddenly, someone springs out of the shadows in front of them. Sam and Tetty gasp in shock. It is an angry CHANDLER.

SAM
Ah, Mr Chandler. I see that you are inflamed.

CHANDLER
Mr Johnson, your candle account is two guineas in the red.

Two mean-looking BAILIFFS suddenly appear.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)
These men are from the debtor's prison.

The Bailiffs brandish wooden clubs.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)
Arrest him!

The Bailiffs grab hold of Sam, who struggles violently, and puts up a good fight. Tetty watches in horror, as one of the Bailiffs raises his club above Sam's head.

SAM
Stop! Mr Chandler, I will have the money tomorrow.

The Chandler signals to the Bailiff, who lowers his club.

SAM (CONT'D)
Mr Dodsley the bookseller offered me a job today, writing a dictionary.

This means nothing to the Chandler. Tetty is surprised.

SAM (CONT'D)
An alphabetical list of words, with definitions.

The Chandler is none the wiser.

SAM (CONT'D)
I turned him down...

Tetty is shocked. The Chandler signals to the Bailiff, who raises his club once again.

SAM
But Mr Dodsley will be delighted that I have reconsidered his offer, and decided to accept.

The Chandler considers this.

CHANDLER
Very well. You have until midday tomorrow to pay up.

The Bailiffs let Sam go. Sam continues on his way, released from the grip of his assailants, but not from his searing sense of inadequacy. Tetty is totally exasperated.

TETTY
Why did you turn that job down?

Another lamppost, and Sam veers off to repeat his ritual. He returns to Tetty's side.

SAM
Because I'm a poet. I haven't come this far to give up my dream now.

Tetty grasps her portrait brooch.

TETTY
This, this is my very last piece of jewellery! Now I am going to have to pawn it!

Tetty looks at the brooch, her eyes filling with tears.

TETTY (CONT'D)
And I don't want to.

Sam looks at Tetty, full of guilt.

31 INT. BOOKSHOP - DAY 31

An OLD MAN's hand traces the words in a yellowed old book.

32 EXT. ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS 32

Sam comes out of his reverie. Tetty is close to despair.

TETTY
I can't live like this any more.

Sam stops suddenly. He turns to her with deep concern.

TETTY (CONT'D)
If I went back to Staffordshire, Henry's brother would take me in.

SAM
But, he disowned you when you married me.

Sam is hit by a horrible realisation. He pleads with her.

SAM (CONT'D)
Please don't leave me, Tetty. If you did, I know I would go mad.

33 EXT. LONGMAN BOOKSELLER'S - NEXT MORNING 33

Sam arrives at Longman's shop. A sign on the door says "closed".

34 INT. LONGMAN BOOKSELLER'S - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 34

Longman, Dodsley and Millar are having a meeting. The shop door bursts open. They look up astonished. Splat! Sam lands in the room. He removes his hat, and bows.

Millar and Longman take in Sam's dishevelled appearance. Dodsley's surprise has turned to displeasure.

DODSLEY
This is Mr Samuel Johnson, who yesterday turned down my offer of work on our dictionary - most decisively.

Millar and Longman look at Dodsley in astonishment.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
Sam, the sign on the door says closed. The shop opens in an hour.

SAM
Mr Dodsley, I have reconsidered your offer, and would like to accept.

DODSLEY
What has brought about this change of heart?

SAM
Dire financial need, sir.

Dodsley is in no mood for repartee.

SAM (CONT'D)
Why did you offer me the job, sir?

Longman and Millar are wondering the same thing.

DODSLEY
Because, Sam, of all the people I know, you are the most well-read.

SAM
Well I read an edition of "Richard III" last night, which makes me better read than when you asked me.

Longman gives a quiet chuckle, although Millar remains completely unmoved.

LONGMAN
Robert, how do you know Mr Johnson?

DODSLEY
I published his poem "London".

Dodsley is suddenly cheered.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
A bestseller!

LONGMAN
I always thought that was someone else.

Sam scowls.

DODSLEY
No. I was going to put someone else's name on it, but in the end I just left it without one.

Sam's arm gives a convulsive twitch. Longman and Millar look at Sam curiously.

MILLAR
So, an unknown Grub Street hack.

Sam's wayward arm twitches again, but he reigns it in.

LONGMAN
I'd like to ask Mr Johnson a few questions.

Longman indicates a seat, and Sam sits on it.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
Did you go to university?

SAM
Yes, Oxford.

The Booksellers are pleased - this is a good start.

SAM (CONT'D)
But I was forced to leave after one year.

The Booksellers' hopeful expressions fade.

LONGMAN
Why was that?

This memory is still extremely painful for Sam.

SAM
My parents couldn't keep up with the fees. I went back home to Lichfield.

LONGMAN
And what did you do after that?

SAM
I spent five years in a deep melancholy, just lying on my father's sofa staring out of the window, completely incapacitated, unable even to tell the time on the town clock.

The Booksellers' hopes fade yet further.

SAM (CONT'D)
I recovered when I met my wife, Tetty.

LONGMAN
And how did you support her?

SAM
I tried to get work as a schoolmaster, and was invited for several interviews. But the problem was always the same - they were impressed with my learning,...

Sam pauses, pained by this memory.

SAM (CONT'D)
But thought I might frighten the pupils - or worse, become an object of ridicule.

Longman and Millar can see why.

35 INT. PAWNBROKER'S - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 35

Tetty stands at the PAWNBROKER's counter, looking desperately uncomfortable.

TETTY
I have a miniature portrait brooch.

MAITLAND (O.C.)
How much for ma galligaskins?

Tetty turns to look at Maitland. He is naked except for his britches and the quill that is still tucked behind his ear, and is clutching a grubby blanket. Tetty recoils, revolted.

PAWNBROKER
What?

MAITLAND
Ma inexpressibles.

Tetty looks at him in horror - what could he possibly have to sell? The pawnbroker is losing patience now. Maitland tugs at the waistband of his britches.

MAITLAND (CONT'D)
Ma farting crackers!

Tetty is utterly disgusted.

36 INT. LONGMAN BOOKSELLER'S - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 36

Sam is still being interviewed by the Booksellers.

SAM
So Tetty and I set up a boarding school for young gentlemen, in Staffordshire.

The Booksellers' hopes are renewed.

SAM (CONT'D)
David Garrick was one of my pupils.

Sam's stock rises...

SAM (CONT'D)
So was his brother, Peter, and one other boy.

And just as swiftly falls.

SAM
It folded after one year, so Davy and I came to London to seek our fortune. That was nine years ago.

Longman indicates the "Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française".

LONGMAN
It took forty Frenchmen forty years to compile their dictionary. We are looking for someone who can complete ours alone, in three.

Sam is shocked - even by booksellers' standards, this is tight.

MILLAR
Do you have any experience of project management?

SAM
Yes, sir, I catalogued the Harleian library.

LONGMAN
Ah, for Thomas Osborne.

Sam's body is jolted by a sudden convulsion. Millar and Longman find this deeply disconcerting.

MILLAR
Did you complete the task on time and within budget?

SAM
No, sir. He sacked me.

The Booksellers despair.

DODSLEY
(wearily)
Why was that, Sam?

SAM
He accused me of idling, so I felled him with a folio.

37 INT. PAWNBROKER'S - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 37

Maitland whips his britches down. (Unfortunately, underpants haven't been invented yet.) Repulsed beyond endurance, Tetty thrusts her brooch across the counter.

PAWNBROKER
Miniature portrait brooches - two guineas.

The Pawnbroker takes a closer look, and recoils.

PAWNBROKER (CONT'D)
Tuppence.

Tetty's face burns with humiliation.

38 INT. LONGMAN BOOKSELLER'S - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 38

The Booksellers have heard enough.

LONGMAN
Well, thank you for your time, Mr Johnson.

Sam crumples in despair.

39 EXT. PAWNBROKER'S - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 39

Tetty leaves the pawnbroker's in tears, the brooch still in her hand.

40 INT. LONGMAN BOOKSELLER'S - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 40

Longman, Dodsley and Millar make to stand up.

SAM
Gentlemen, you have not asked me anything about matters of language.

Longman relents.

LONGMAN
One more question.

Millar looks at Longman as if he has gone mad.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
Mr Johnson, this dictionary needs to serve as an authority for our whole nation. How do you, an unknown poet, propose to do that?

Sam takes the enormity of this question in. Millar's patience is wearing thin. Longman and Dodsley are still listening. Sam racks his brains, desperate for inspiration. Millar exhales as his patience cracks. Sam has an idea.

SAM
Sirs, it took forty members of the Académie Française forty years to complete their dictionary...

The Booksellers listen.

SAM (CONT'D)
Forty times forty is sixteen hundred. Three to sixteen hundred - such is the power of an Englishman compared to a Frenchman!

Millar lets out a scornful guffaw. Longman and Dodsley are stony faced. Patriotism was Sam's last refuge, but he has failed, and knows it.

LONGMAN
Thank you, Mr Johnson.

Sam nods wearily, accepting his fate. The Booksellers all stand up, and walk away.

Sam sits slumped in his chair. He gazes ruefully at the books around him, illustrious names on their spines - Dryden, Milton, Addison. Sam hauls himself out of his chair. He trudges slowly across the shop, passing more shelves. More names jump out - Spenser, Swift. Sam reaches the door. More names jump out at him - Shakespeare, Pope. Suddenly, Sam is visited by a flash of inspiration.

SAM
Authorities!

The Booksellers look up sharply. Millar can't believe that Sam is still here. But Sam is truly inspired.

SAM (CONT'D)
AUTHORITIES!!!

Longman seriously doubts Sam's sanity.

LONGMAN
Mr Johnson?

SAM
Every definition will be backed up by an example, a quotation from the greatest authors - Dryden, Milton, Shakespeare, Pope! These will be the Authorities.

The Booksellers ponder this for a moment.

DODSLEY
Literary quotations - that's something the French don't have.

LONGMAN
A book that is more learned than its author. Nice concept.

Millar remains resolutely unconvinced. But Sam is on a roll.

SAM
The quotations will all be from writers who are dead.

Sam turns to Millar.

SAM (CONT'D)
So you pay only for one Grub Street hack, and get all these other great authors for free!

Millar's face lights up - he likes it! Longman and Dodsley are smiling too. The Booksellers look at each other - it seems that they have found their man.

LONGMAN
Mr Johnson, we would like to offer you the job.

A huge smile of relief spreads across Sam's face. Longman holds out a contract, along with a quill, already dipped.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
Just sign here.

SAM
I do have just one condition.

LONGMAN
What's that?

SAM
That you put my name on the title page.

Longman looks questioningly at Dodsley and Millar. They have no objection.

LONGMAN
I don't see why not.

Sam smiles.

SAM
And, er, sir, could I have a sum in advance - to buy paper, a few candles?

LONGMAN
Certainly.

MILLAR
The total budget for the compilation of the dictionary is £1,575. You must meet all your expenses out of it - paper, rental of premises, secretarial support et cetera.

Millar slaps a wad of large banknotes into Sam's hand.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
Here's £500. You will get the other two instalments annually.

Sam looks at the money in amazement - all of his Christmasses have come at once! He takes the quill from Longman, and signs his name.

41 EXT. GOUGH SQUARE - MORNING, SEVERAL WEEKS LATER 41

A glorious spring day. Sam stands with his hands over Tetty's eyes. The portrait brooch is pinned to her dress.

SAM
You can look now.

He removes his hands. Tetty's face lights up with delight.

TETTY
Oh Sam!

In front of them is an elegant townhouse. Number 17 Gough Square is a world away from Grub Street. Tetty hugs him.

42 INT. HALLWAY, HOUSE IN GOUGH SQUARE - MORNING, MOMENTS LATER 42

Sam and Tetty come in. She looks around, eyes shining.

TETTY
It's wonderful!

43 INT. LANDING, GOUGH SQUARE - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 43

They walk along the second floor landing, Tetty looking into different rooms, full of excitement. Sam looks at her, and sees that she is happy. He smiles - a great burden has been lifted from him.

TETTY
Now we'll be able to invite people round. We'll be able to make friends with polite people!

They climb the stairs to the top floor.

44 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 44

Sam and Tetty enter a large garret with a wooden floor, which is empty apart from a battered old desk and chair in one corner. Sam surveys it with satisfaction.

SAM
This will be my workshop.

The room has a row of windows down one side, with a fantastic view over the rooftops of London, the skyline punctuated by soaring church spires, and dominated by the magnificent dome of St Paul's.

SAM (CONT'D)
I'm just going out. There's something I have to do.

TETTY
(tactfully)
Maybe you could get a new wig, Sam?

45 EXT. GOUGH SQUARE - MORNING, MOMENTS LATER 45

Wearing a black tricorn hat and his brown coat, Sam crosses Gough Square, and walks down Hind Court, a short, narrow, alleyway running past the Cheshire Cheese pub.

46 EXT. FLEET STREET - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 46

Sam spills out onto clamorous Fleet Street, and heads for the wig shop.

47 INT. WIG SHOP - MORNING, MOMENTS LATER 47

Sam looks at the smart new wigs on display. Then he notices a box in the corner, with the sign "lucky dip 3d".

48 EXT. FLEET STREET - MORNING, MOMENTS LATER 48

Sam strides out towards Temple Bar, a big smile across his face, taking in his surroundings with delight. A WOMAN's voice calls out from above.

WOMAN (O.C.)
Gardyloo!

Something unspeakable splats onto the street right beside him. Sam looks up.

Above is a Woman, hanging out of a window, and holding an incriminating bucket.

Sam raises his hat gallantly, revealing a wig that resembles a squashed rat.

49 EXT. TEMPLE BAR - MORNING, MOMENTS LATER 49

Sam approaches a box on a string. He looks up.

Macbean is working at the grille above.

MACBEAN
In contemplation's scale I'll soar,
And be enraptur'd more and more...

Sam puts a coin into the box. Macbean looks down. He is delighted to see his friend.

MACBEAN (CONT'D)
Sam!

SAM
Morning, Macbean! Where's Richards?

Macbean suddenly looks very sad.

MACBEAN
Dead, Sam.

Sam is shocked.

MACBEAN (CONT'D)
Fever swept through the place.

Sam's eyes fill with tears.

50 INT. TETTY'S PARLOUR - THAT AFTERNOON 50

Tetty has already made this room her own. It is by no means luxurious, but it is spotlessly clean, the portrait of the young sailor hung in pride of place. As Tetty places a vase of tulips in the window, she notices a LADY of her own age and class coming out of one of the houses with her DAUGHTER. Tetty opens the window.

TETTY
Good afternoon! I'm your new neighbour - Elizabeth Johnson.

The Ladies look up, and smile at Tetty.

51 INT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 51

A ragbag rabble of Poets - Macbean, Peyton, Shiels and Maitland, naked apart from his blanket, sit in their usual corner, quills and manuscripts out on the table. Maitland ruffles Shiels' hair, and a cloud of sparkling grey dust flies out of it.

MAITLAND
Still at the same address, I see.

Sam makes an announcement.

SAM
A consortium of booksellers has hired me to write a dictionary of the English language. I'm looking for an assistant.

They suddenly all sit bolt upright, bright-eyed and keen as mustard.

MACBEAN
I worked for Ephraim Chambers, on his Cyclopedia.

SHIELS
I'm an expert on poetry.

MAITLAND
I know lots of vulgar expressions.

PEYTON
And I have a lot to learn.

They look at Sam, pleading.

SHIELS
How many assistants do you need?

The Poets tug at Sam's enormous heart strings. He gives in.

SAM
Four.

The Poets immediately drop their suppliant posture, and, grinning, relax back into their normal, slovenly demeanour.

52 INT. TETTY'S PARLOUR - AFTERNOON, A SHORT WHILE LATER 52

With natural decorum, Tetty pours tea from a smart service, with the requisite array of spoons, stands, tongs, etc.

TETTY
I haven't had chance to hire a maid yet.

MRS GRAINGER and her DAUGHTER, her two new neighbours, sit with her. Tetty looks happy and relaxed. These are her sort of people - polite and respectable.

MRS GRAINGER
Well, it's very nice to meet you, Mrs Johnson. We are always worried when a house in the square becomes vacant - you never know what sort of people are going to move in.

TETTY
Oh, absolutely, Mrs Grainger. I can quite understand your concern.

53 INT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 53

Sam and the Poets are still in the pub. Sam is in his element.

SAM
The tavern chair is the very throne of felicity!

MACBEAN
Wasn't it Sir John Falstaff who said that?

Sam sighs.

SAM
No, Alex, it was me.

The pub's acerbic LANDLADY appears at the table.

SAM (CONT'D)
Madam, two bottles of your finest port, and five steaks, please.

The Landlady gives Sam a sardonic look. Sam slaps a pile of coins on the table. The Landlady is incredulous.

SAM (CONT'D)
With mushrooms and ketchup.

The Poets can hardly believe their good fortune.

PEYTON
To the Dictionary of the English Language!

ALL
The Dictionary!

They all chink glasses, and smile.

54 INT. TETTY'S PARLOUR - LATER THAT AFTERNOON 54

The Graingers put down their tea cups, and prepare to leave.

MRS GRAINGER
Mrs Johnson, you must come to us next time.

Tetty smiles, delighted. BANG! Tetty jumps. The rumble of many footsteps clattering up the stairs. Tetty is scared.

TETTY
Sam?!

Sam pops his head around the door.

SAM
Don't worry, my sweet.

Tetty's face falls at the sight of Sam's new wig.

Sam holds open the door, and Shiels, Peyton and Macbean tumble in, beaming drunkenly. Tetty looks from them to her guests in dismay.

SAM (CONT'D)
My new assistants. I said they could stay here.

Sam smiles, oblivious to Tetty's feelings.

SAM (CONT'D)
(to the Poets)
This is Mrs Johnson.

Bringing up the rear is Maitland, clad in his blanket. Tetty recognizes him, and is horrified. The Graingers shrink back in disgust. Maitland bows very low to Tetty.

MAITLAND
Madam.

Recognition crosses his face.

MAITLAND (CONT'D)
I know you from somewhere.

Maitland struggles to remember.

MAITLAND (CONT'D)
No, don't tell me!

Tetty holds her breath in dread.

MAITLAND (CONT'D)
The pawnbrokers!

Tetty burns with shame. The Graingers are scandalized.

MAITLAND (CONT'D)
(to Sam)
I've had the pleasure of meeting your mother before.

The crushing of Tetty is complete. Mrs Grainger sweeps her daughter out. Tetty is devastated. Sam despairs.

55 INT. BOOKSHOP - DAY 55

The Old Man takes a dusty book, looks at it lovingly, and places it among other dusty books on a shelf.

56 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - NIGHT, SEVERAL DAYS LATER 56

Sam glances over at the Poets, who have crashed out on the floor, and are sleeping peacefully. He smiles paternally, before sitting down at his desk. His chair collapses beneath him - it only has three legs. Sam picks himself up, and shoves the chair against the wall. He sits down cautiously. The chair holds.

Sam picks up his quill with a purposeful air. On his desk is a blank and very large sheet of paper. Sam looks down at it. He dips the quill in ink, and writes: "A". Then he stops. His quill hovers above the paper. He thinks, and thinks, and thinks. But nothing comes.

Suddenly he is inspired. He lowers the quill, then stops, and changes his mind, raising it again.

LATER

Sam has written no more. He stands up, and wanders around the room. His eye lights on the "Dictionnaire de L'Académie Française", gracing a table in the middle of the room. Sam walks up to it, and looks at it intently. He cocks his head one way, then the other, examining it from all angles.

SAM
What are your secrets?

Sam circles the dictionary.

SAM (CONT'D)
How were you made?

But the dictionary is silent. Sam looks longingly at his manuscript of "Mahomet and Irene".

SAM (CONT'D)
The dreams of a poet, doomed to wake a lexicographer.

57 INT. COFFEEHOUSE - MORNING, SEVERAL MONTHS LATER 57

A bright summer's day. The atmosphere inside the coffeehouse is warm and convivial. Rows of black tricorn hats hang on pegs on the wall. The CLIENTELE, male and middle class, are either engaged in conversation or reading books or magazines. Longman, Dodsley, Millar and Cave are having a meeting, books and magazines spread out in front of them.

MILLAR
I have just acquired this novel.

Millar reads from a manuscript, in his dull monotone.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
"An illegitimate foundling falls in love with a beautiful young woman, but is banished by her father. He has thrilling adventures, liaisons with high society ladies, and almost sleeps with his own mother, before discovering the truth of his birth." It's called "Tom Jones".

The others smile at Millar's inappropriately dry delivery.

DODSLEY
How much did you pay?

MILLAR
£600 - for the sole copyright. But it does have a good many pages.

The others are amused by Millar's lack of awareness.

DODSLEY
Andrew, my guess is that you are about to become extremely rich.

Surprised and delighted, Millar beams.

Three tables away, a WAITER is carrying a tray of coffee. A DELIVERY MAN with a large basket of bread on his head passes him. Quick as a flash, a CHILD's arm shoots out of the basket and swipes the wig from the Waiter's head. The Waiter jumps. CRASH! Coffee goes flying all over the table. The Waiter looks around, astonished, but all sign of wig and Child have disappeared beneath the loaves. Chaos ensues.

The Booksellers continue as if nothing had happened.

LONGMAN
How is the Dictionary progressing?

DODSLEY
Mr Johnson is currently working on a plan.

MILLAR
He's been farting about for three months.

CAVE
(excited)
Well, I have made some progress. You are all invited to the Gentleman's Magazine for dinner tonight - in the company of a most distinguished guest...

Dodsley and Longman are intrigued. Cave puffs up with pride.

CAVE (CONT'D)
Lord Philip Dormer Stanhope, the Fourth Earl of Chesterfield, Secretary of State, and the politest man in all England!

Even Millar is impressed. And Dodsley is delighted.

CAVE (CONT'D)
I've told Sam he's got to be presentable.

Longman and Dodsley are completely confounded by this.

58 INT. DINING ROOM THE GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE - THAT EVENING 58

His usual ragged self, Sam sits at a small table, with a dinner setting for one. He is hidden by a screen.

Lord CHESTERFIELD, early fifties, sits with perfect poise and almost balletic grace. He wears his old Etonian superiority with total ease. Around the splendid dining table, Cave, Longman, Millar and Dodsley regard Chesterfield with reverence. SERVANTS bring in a lavish feast.

LATER

The remains of the feast are cleared away. Dodsley, a consummate networker, gets to work immediately.

DODSLEY
Renowned as you are, my Lord, as the most elegant speaker of our tongue, I was wondering what your Lordship felt about the current state of the language.

From his hiding place, Sam peers at Chesterfield through a gap in the screen.

CHESTERFIELD
It must be owned that our language is at present in a state of anarchy.

Longman, Dodsley, and Cave concur.

Sam nods in regretful agreement. But then his eyes light up, as a generous roast dinner is placed before him.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
I was writing to my son of such matters only today.

DODSLEY
And what advice did you give him, your Lordship?

Behind the screen, Sam eats ravenously and messily.

Chesterfield has produced a letter, and reads aloud from it.

CHESTERFIELD
Dear Boy, I wish to impress upon you the importance of good breeding, and the necessary qualification to it - manners.

Longman, Dodsley, and Cave listen attentively, Millar trying his best to look animated, with unimpressive results.

Sam pauses to listen.

Chesterfield continues.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
A well-bred gentleman has une belle tournure, totally free from awkwardness. When an awkward fellow first comes into the room, it is highly probable that he will stumble. He is slovenly of dress, and goes about in a brown coat, his hat uncocked, his wig unpowdered.

Dodsley and Cave permit themselves small smiles.

Oblivious to any irony and unimpressed, Sam turns his full attention to his dinner.

Chesterfield continues.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
At dinner, his awkwardness distinguishes itself particularly, as he holds his knife and fork differently from other people, and daubs himself with soup and grease.

Cheerfully oblivious, Sam shovels up his food.

Chesterfield continues.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
All this, I own, is not in any degree criminal, but those who do not know him will take him for a natural fool.

The Booksellers listen attentively.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
There is, even more importantly, an awkwardness of expression most carefully to be avoided.

Sam pricks up his ears.

Chesterfield continues.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
It is essential to acquire le ton de la bonne compagnie, if you are to cut a figure in the beau monde. Words are the dress of thoughts, and should no more be presented in rags, tatters and dirt than your person should.

Sam bristles.

Chesterfield continues.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
I know of one gentleman who, unsure whether the "h" in "honourable" was silent, chose to pronounce it, and was never received in polite company again.

Sam's arm gives an involuntary twitch of disgust.

Chesterfield concludes his letter.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
And, finally, remember that in order to cultivate an extérieur brillant, you must pay full attention to your dancing-master. Adieu!

Sam's arm flies out in a spasm, splattering him with gravy.

Dodsley continues to work his magic.

DODSLEY
Such pearls of wisdom...

Clearly pleased at this praise, Chesterfield shrugs modestly.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
And so well-expressed. Clarity is such a rarity these days, don't you think, your Lordship?

CHESTERFIELD
Indeed.

DODSLEY
Which is why we have a plan to publish a dictionary of English, to ennoble our great language for the benefit of the nation.

Chesterfield's imagination is clearly caught by this idea.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
Your Lordship is such an acknowledged expert on such matters. If you were to act as an advisor, we would be much obl...

Dodsley stops.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
Should one say "obliged" or "obleeged"?

CHESTERFIELD
Most definitely "obliged".

Sam nods in agreement.

Chesterfield explains.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
Those who pronounce it "obleeged" do so solely in order to draw attention to their knowledge of French - a most pretentious habit.

Thump! The screen tips forward dangerously. Chesterfield looks at it in surprise. Dodsley and Longman fear the worst. But Cave manages to steady the screen. Sam remains unseen.

CAVE
Clumsy servants.

DODSLEY
Who could no doubt benefit from your Lordship's advice.

Dodsley glances around the screen.

Sam is fuming.

Chesterfield remains happily oblivious.

CHESTERFIELD
Gentlemen, your venture is a worthy one. If you send me a plan, I will be happy to read it.

Dodsley is quietly triumphant.

59 INT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - AFTERNOON, NEXT DAY 59

The Poets are in their usual corner, employment having done nothing to enhance their appearance, except that Maitland is enveloped by Sam's enormous brown coat. Sam, dressed in another shabby brown coat, reads aloud from a manuscript.

SAM
"To the Right Honourable Philip Dormer, Earl of Chesterfield..."

The Poets are clearly impressed by such an illustrious name.

SAM (CONT'D)
"My Lord"...

PEYTON
(interrupting)
What's he like?

SAM
I thought he would be a lord amongst wits, but I found he is only a wit among lords.

The Poets laugh appreciatively.

SHIELS
Wasn't it Pope who said that?

SAM
(slightly testy)
No, Shiels, it was me.

Sam continues to read aloud.

SAM (CONT'D)
"I humbly present my Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language."

At a nearby table, hidden from view, a STRANGER is eavesdropping on their conversation, notebook in hand.

Sam continues to read aloud.

SAM (CONT'D)
"Each word to be defined will be followed by its grammar, its etymology..."

PEYTON
Ety what?

SAM
Where it originates, whether from Latin, Saxon, German et cetera.

Peyton nods slowly.

SAM (CONT'D)
"Each word will be divided into its various senses. Each sense will have its own definition, and each definition will be followed by illustrative quotations."

The Poets are all lost. They look questioningly at Sam.

SAM (CONT'D)
(patiently)
Many words have more than one meaning. For example...

Sam thinks for a moment, looking around the room for inspiration. On the other side of the pub, an ANGRY MAN draws his sword.

SAM (CONT'D)
Let's take "keen", the adjective. It has three senses. First, a keen blade - a sharp one,...

The Poets nod.

SAM (CONT'D)
Second, a keen wind - a cold piercing one,...

The Poets listen attentively.

SAM (CONT'D)
And third a keen student - an eager one. As you are, gentlemen.

The Poets smile, enlightened.

MACBEAN
I never thought of it like that before!

SAM
What, do you think, is the maximum number of senses that a word can have?

SHIELS
I think three.

MAITLAND
Yes, I think three.

PEYTON
I think four.

MACBEAN
Four.

SAM
It's seven.

General surprise.

SAM (CONT'D)
I have discovered that a word can potentially have seven senses - the primitive, the consequential, the metaphorical, the poetical, the familiar, the burlesque, and finally, seventh, the peculiar, creative sense used by a great author.

The Poets look at Sam in awe.

The Stranger is taking furious notes.

SAM (CONT'D)
Using this method, I shall tame the language.

MACBEAN
Do you think you can do it, Sam? Tame the language?

SAM
Yes I do. (beat) Provided I manage to stay sane.

60 INT. BOOKSHOP - DAY 60

The Old Man sees that a book is in the wrong place on the shelf. He frowns, then removes it, and puts it in its correct place.

61 INT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 61

Sam snaps out of his reverie. A sword fight has kicked off at the other side of the pub. In the commotion, the mysterious Stranger steals away, tucking his precious notebook in his pocket.

Sam continues to read aloud.

SAM
"My Lord, when I survey the plan which I have laid before you, I cannot but confess that I am frightened at its extent,..."

62 INT. LONGMAN BOOKSELLER'S - DAY 62

The manuscript of Sam's plan is being scrutinized by Longman.

SAM (V.O. CONT'D)
"And like the soldiers of Caesar, look on Britain as a new world, which it is almost madness to invade."

He finishes reading it and looks up at Dodsley and Millar, nodding his approval.

63 INT. CHESTERFIELD'S HOUSE - DAY 63

Chesterfield is reading a printed pamphlet of Sam's plan.

SAM (V.O. CONT'D)
"But I am aware that I have been charged with the task of civilizing the inhabitants, of reducing them to subjection, and settling them under laws."

64 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - DAY 64

Sam opens an envelope and pulls out a letter.

SAM (V.O. CONT'D)
"My Lord, your Lordship's most obedient, most humble servant,...

As Sam pulls a letter from the envelope, a large banknote flutters to the floor.

SAM (V.O. CONT'D)
Sam Johnson."

Sam picks up the note, and examines it. It is for ten pounds. Sam is pleased.

SAM
Perhaps I have misjudged your Lordship.

Sam turns to the Poets grimly.

SAM (CONT'D)
Well, that's the fun part over - Now, there's just years of hard slog.

65 INT. MARTIN'S GARRET - DAY 65

An attic workshop very similar to Sam's, except that it is spotlessly clean and well-equipped. Four more POETS, as reasonably groomed as it is possible for Poets to be, sit in a row at a large table, quills in hand, bright-eyed and fully attentive. The Stranger from the pub, BENJAMIN MARTIN, is holding a meeting.

MARTIN
Gentlemen, you will be pleased to hear that the Dictionary is ahead of schedule!

The Poets beam.

66 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - EVENING 66

MONTAGE

1. Sam sits at his desk. Stacked up on the floor, is a mountain of books. Sam grabs one with his huge hands, rends it open in the middle, and reads it as if tearing out its heart, holding it close to his short-sighted eyes. He grabs a pencil, and makes some marks on the page. Sam discards the book onto the smaller, sorrier "done" pile, on the floor.

2. The Poets all sit at a row of trestle tables, a battered book in front of each of them, copying sentences out onto sheets of paper. Each Poet has a bin next to his chair.

3. Sam drops another battered book onto the "done" pile, which has grown.

4. Macbean has a sheet full of quotations, which he is cutting into strips with a pair of scissors.

5. Peyton deposits a handful of quotation slips into his bin.

6. Sam grabs another book from the "to do" pile.

7. Shiels drops a quotation slip into his bin, sees that it is full, and so empties its contents onto the desk.

8. Sam deposits another sad specimen on the battered "done" book pile, which has grown even more. With a sigh, he gets up and walks towards the door.

The Poets work at their trestle tables, nose deep in a chaotic mass of quotation slips. As soon as Sam is out of the door, however, Maitland delves into the mass and pulls out a bottle of gin. Macbean and Shiels start eagerly moonlighting, Shiels on his "Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland to the Time of Dean Swift", and Peyton becomes engrossed in "Tom Jones".

9. But Sam is no better - he is ensconced in the Cheshire Cheese working on "Mahomet and Irene".

67 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - DAY 67

Sam is at his desk, holding a list headed "words to include" up to his short-sighted eyes.

The Poets are barely visible behind the even larger mass of quotation slips.

Sam reads from his inclusion list, muttering to himself.

SAM
Abandon, abandoned, abandoning...

Sam becomes uneasy.

SAM (CONT'D)
Abase, abasement...

Negative words start to float off the page. Sam reacts with fear.

SAM (CONT'D)
Abhor, abhorrence, abhorrent,
abhorrer, abhorring, abject...

The words float in the air, and begin to crowd menacingly around Sam.

SAM (CONT'D)
Abominable, abominableness,
abominate, abomination.

More words crowd around him, filling him with terror.

SAM (CONT'D)
Abort, abortion, abortive...

Bam! Sam's chair crashes to the ground as he stands up, in a sudden, decisive action. He grips his desk.

SAM (CONT'D)
Let's go to the pub.

In an instant, the floating negative words disappear.

The Poets are already heading out of the door.

68 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM, GOUGH SQUARE - MIDDAY, SEVERAL MONTHS LATER 68

Tetty comes into the room and frowns. Sam is still in bed, curtains drawn. The clock on the wall says twelve o'clock.

69 INT. COFFEEHOUSE - MIDDAY, CONTINUOUS 69

A bright spring day. Almost every CUSTOMER is engrossed in "Tom Jones". Dodsley, Longman, Cave and Millar are in their usual place.

CAVE
Congratulations, Andrew, the best-selling novel of our time!

Millar looks very pleased with himself, but is otherwise unaltered by his vast fortune, and still in the same plain dress. Dodsley presents a book.

DODSLEY
Gentlemen, I present - the "Oeconomy of Human Life".

The others are intrigued.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
A complete ethics, a moral guide to life, with advice on everything from the appropriate way to mourn to how to choose a wife.

The others are amused by the eccentricity of this idea.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
Translated from an Indian manuscript, written by an ancient Brahmin, and discovered in the possession of the Grand Lama of Tibet.

CAVE
I take it that this "ancient Brahmin" lives in Grub Street somewhere.

Dodsley smiles enigmatically.

LONGMAN
And who are we supposed to believe discovered and translated these divine revelations?

DODSLEY
Well, I heard a rumour that it was Lord Chesterfield.

Longman and Cave chuckle.

LONGMAN
You cunning old fox, Robert Dodsley.

Dodsley smiles.

The Waiter is two tables away, a full tray of coffee balanced on one hand, "Tom Jones" in the other, which he reads, enthralled.

WAITER
His own mother!!!

CRASH! Coffee goes flying over the table. Chaos ensues.

The Booksellers continue as if nothing had happened. Dodsley looks at his empty cup.

DODSLEY
Isn't it your round, Andrew?

Millar drains his cup, and stands up.

MILLAR
We don't want to keep Mr Johnson waiting.

The others smile.

As they walk out, they pass Customers reading "Tom Jones". Millar spots that one of the copies is very shoddily bound. Furious, he whips it out of the astonished CUSTOMER'S hand.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
Blasted pirates!

70 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM, GOUGH SQUARE - MIDDAY, MOMENTS LATER 70

Tetty opens the curtains and sees Longman, Dodsley and Millar striding towards the house, coats flapping in the wind.

71 INT. STAIRWAY GOUGH SQUARE - MIDDAY, MOMENTS LATER 71

Sam goes flying up the stairs in a panic.

72 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - MIDDAY, CONTINUOUS 72

Sam bursts in. There are piles of dusty, battered books all over the floor, and a mountain of quotation slips on the trestle tables. The Poets are all asleep on the floor, empty gin bottles strewn around. Poets' corner even has a washing line with clothes pegged up on it.

73 INT. HALLWAY - MIDDAY, CONTINUOUS 73

ELIZABETH, the maid, lets the Booksellers into the house.

74 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - MIDDAY, CONTINUOUS 74

The Poets stir, groaning. They are not a pretty sight, Maitland looking particularly green about the gills.

SAM
Wake up! The booksellers are here!

Maitland groans, leans over one of the bins, and pukes.

Sam looks around him in dismay.

Peyton wafts his hand in disgust at the smell. He goes towards a window, and opens it.

Longman, Millar and Dodsley come in, and are immediately blasted by a ticker-tape shower of quotations. They survey the scene in total disbelief. Sam stands helplessly in the middle of the room.

LATER

The Booksellers sit at one side of the room. They look very serious, especially Millar, who has a stand rather like an artist's easel next to him, with a black cloth draped over it. Sam and the Poets sit and listen attentively.

Millar whips off the cloth to reveal a sign which says: "Dictionary of the English Language budget and schedule review June 1747".

Sam and the Poets peer at it.

MILLAR
We are now one year into the project, and have two years remaining. So first the budget.

Millar removes the sign to reveal a chart.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
The total budget for the compilation of the Dictionary is £1,575. The amount you have used up so far is £500, which makes us within budget.

The Poets let out a cheer. Millar gives them a funny look - he finds their behaviour most inappropriate.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
And now the schedule...

Millar whips that chart away to reveal another one.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
You have now been compiling for nine months, which means that you should be a fifth of your way through the alphabet.

Sam and the Poets look at the chart with great unease.

LONGMAN
Mr Johnson, how much of the alphabet have you completed?

SAM
Er, none.

The Booksellers are taken aback.

LONGMAN
None.

The Booksellers are not happy.

MILLAR
Mr Johnson, I have always had my doubts about your ability to carry out this task.

Sam is affronted. So are the Poets. Longman and Dodsley look extremely grave.

LONGMAN
Mr Johnson, it is very difficult to see how this...

He points to the pile of strips.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
Is going to come together as a dictionary.

SAM
Gentlemen, allow me to explain. We agreed, did we not, that the Dictionary should contain quotations from the best authors, to give it the necessary authority to rival the dictionaries of the academies of Europe?

DODSLEY
(cautiously)
Yes.

SAM
So, let's pick a word, any word.

MILLAR
(sardonically)
Chaos.

Sam battles bravely on.

SAM
So, where would you find a quotation to illustrate "chaos"?

DODSLEY
I think I remember it being in "Paradise Lost".

LONGMAN
I think it's somewhere in "King Lear".

Sam rummages about in one of his piles of books. Millar's patience is severely tried. Sam hands a copy of "Paradise Lost" to Dodsley, and a copy of "King Lear" to Longman.

SAM
See if you can find it.

Longman and Dodsley open the books and look through them. Millar huffs with impatience.

DODSLEY
I could have sworn it was here.

Millar's patience snaps.

MILLAR
Your point, Mr Johnson?

SAM
If I came up with a list of words to include in the Dictionary, and then tried to find the examples to illustrate them, it would take a lifetime.

Millar shudders at this thought.

SAM (CONT'D)
So I decided to collect all the illustrative quotations first. I have been going through these great works...

Sam indicates the piles of books.

SAM (CONT'D)
Looking for suitable quotations. When I find one, I mark it in pencil, and my assistants copy it out onto strips.

Trying to be helpful, Peyton points to the mountain of strips of paper.

PEYTON
You can see how many we've got.

SAM
But we need a good many more.

The Booksellers listen, Longman and Dodsley concerned, Millar still unimpressed.

DODSLEY
Sam, I suggest you concentrate your efforts on preparing some copy that we can actually read.

SAM
Ah!

Sam puts his arm into the cloud of quotation slips and hunts around. He pulls out the inclusion list.

SAM (CONT'D)
I have made a list of all the words to be included in the Dictionary, based on other reference books, and on the words I have found in the quotations we have collected so far. When we have finished, I will turn my attention to assembling the actual text in...

Sam reaches for a large, folio-sized notebook.

SAM (CONT'D)
Blank notebooks such as this one.

The Booksellers look at each other, silently conferring. Sam anxiously awaits their verdict.

LONGMAN
Well, despite appearances, it seems that you are on top of the Dictionary after all, Mr Johnson.

SAM
Yes, sir, I am.

MILLAR
And will you still be able to complete on time?

SAM
Absolutely.

Shiels takes the opportunity to approach Dodsley with his manuscript.

SHIELS
Mr Dodsley, sir, my name is Robert Shiels. I wonder if you would be interested in reading a chapter of my latest work - the "Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland to the Time of Dean Swift"?

DODSLEY
Maybe some other time.

Shiels is crestfallen.

Millar puts a wad of cash down onto the table.

MILLAR
£500, your second instalment.

The Poets' jaws drop. To them, this is an inconceivable sum. Sam lets out a sigh of relief.

75 INT. TETTY'S PARLOUR - MORNING, SIX MONTHS LATER 75

A bright winter's day. Tetty is sweeping the floor with a besom. Elizabeth is dusting the furniture. Sam comes bursting in, leaving a trail of destruction in his wake.

SAM
Tetty! It's snowing!

Sam points to the window. Snow is falling outside.

SAM (CONT'D)
Let's go for a walk!

But Tetty is looking at the mess Sam has made. Exasperated, Tetty brushes in Sam's direction, as if to sweep him away.

TETTY
Oh Sam, get out!

Sam is deeply hurt.

SAM
But I'm your husband. You can't sweep me out of the house as dirt and useless lumber!

Tetty relents.

TETTY
A walk would be nice.

Sam smiles tenderly.

76 EXT. FROST FAIR - LATER THAT DAY 76

A dazzling scene - the Thames has frozen over, and a fair has sprung up on the ice at London Bridge. LONDONERS are in holiday mood - skating, laughing, eating and shopping. An ox is being roasted, and there are attractive stalls selling fruit and trinkets, and, inevitably, gin.

Sam and Tetty walk along the ice, happy together. Tetty walks a little cautiously, but has her hand firmly clasped in Sam's. Sam strides out, stretching his limbs, enjoying the sense of mental and physical freedom. Tetty smiles at him lovingly. But the smile is suddenly wiped off her face.

At one of the stalls, which has a portable printing press, Peyton, Maitland, Shiels and Macbean are gathered. They wave at Sam enthusiastically.

Sam's face lights up when he sees them. Tetty sighs bitterly. They come to a halt by the Poets. Maitland scans the horizon in search of something.

MAITLAND
Where's the house of commons?

Sam points towards Westminster.

MAITLAND (CONT'D)
No! The cacatorium.

Sam looks blank.

MAITLAND (CONT'D)
The necessary house!

Ah! Sam gets it now. Tetty recoils. Sam shrugs - he doesn't know. Peyton has some sheets of paper in his hand.

PEYTON
Brothers of the quill, a gift for each of you.

He hands one to Sam.

SAM
What's this?

Sam peers at his gift - a personalized printed souvenir drawing of the Frost Fair, with the words "Frost Fair London" printed on the top, and "Samuel Johnson stood on the Thames on January 5, 1747" printed on the bottom.

PEYTON
At least this way, once in our lives, we get to see our names in print.

Sam is absolutely delighted with it. Peyton holds one out to Shiels, but he refuses.

SHIELS
A fine sentiment, Peyton, but I don't need one.

Shiels holds up his ever-present manuscript.

SHIELS (CONT'D)
My "Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland to the Time of Dean Swift" will be published, and have my name on the title page.

The name 'Robert Shiels' is written on the title page. Sam claps Shiels fondly on the shoulder. Maitland takes his souvenir print.

MAITLAND
Perfect! Bumfodder!

Peyton flies at him. This is the final straw for Tetty.

TETTY
I'll see you at home, Sam.

Tetty lets go of Sam's hand, but turning to leave, she slips and falls awkwardly.

Crying out in shock and pain, she clutches her ankle. Alarmed, Sam drops down onto the ice to help her.

In the background, a fight breaks out outside the gin stall, a scene of Hogarthian chaos on ice.

77 INT. TETTY'S PARLOUR - THAT EVENING 77

In a state of distress, Tetty sits in a chair, with a doddery old DOCTOR tending to her ankle. Sam looks on anxiously.

DR LEVET
It's just a sprain. Rest and it will heal in time.

Tetty winces. The Doctor hands her a bottle. It is labelled "laudanum".

DR LEVET (CONT'D)
Here, take this for the pain.

Tetty takes the bottle. Sam sees the label, and his anxiety grows. DR LEVET picks up his battered bag.

SAM
How much do I owe you, Doctor?

DR LEVET
Do you have any gin?

Tetty looks up sharply.

DR LEVET (CONT'D)
And maybe a room?

Tetty glowers at Sam.

DR LEVET (CONT'D)
Just for one night. I'm, er, between lodgings.

Sam looks at Tetty and makes a helpless gesture.

78 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT EVENING 78

Tetty is in bed, the curtains drawn, and the laudanum on a table beside her. Splat! Sam lands in the room.

SAM
Tetty?

She ignores him, pulling her covers protectively around her.

SAM (CONT'D)
Tetty?

Tetty turns angrily to Sam.

TETTY
Sam, for once we have a nice home. Why do you always have to fill it with people who are so ill-bred?

SAM
The difference between a well-bred and an ill-bred man is that you love one till you find reason to hate him, and you hate the other till you find reason to love him.

But Tetty is having none of Sam's philosophy today.

TETTY
But why do they have to live here?

SAM
Because otherwise they'd be homeless, or in prison, or worse.

Tetty gives him an infuriated look.

SAM (CONT'D)
Besides, I need them. The Dictionary is a very solitary occupation, and solitude is dangerous to reason.

TETTY
I'm always alone.

Sam is deeply pained. Tetty reaches for her medicine.

SAM
Tetty, are you sure you need that?

Tetty scowls, pours some defiantly into a glass, and drinks it. Sam leaves the room. Tetty closes her eyes, as the laudanum brings her treacherous relief.

79 INT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - THAT NIGHT 79

The Poets are in their corner in the pub. From behind the bar, the Landlady eyes them with her usual disdain.

A YOUNG MAN of the professional class, accompanied by a black SLAVE BOY aged 8, enters the pub. Then the splendid figure of David Garrick appears in the doorway.

The Landlady is bedazzled. Thud! She has disappeared behind the bar.

80 EXT. GOUGH SQUARE - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS 80

Sam leaves his house, and shambles across the square in the direction of the pub.

81 INT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS 81

The whole PUB is watching, convulsed in hysterical laughter, as Garrick does a cruelly accurate impersonation of Sam, mimicking his nervous tics and gestures.

82 EXT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS 82

Sam paddles his feet in the doorway of the pub.

83 INT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS 83

Splat! Sam leaps into the pub, landing behind Garrick. At that moment, Garrick himself does a final paddle and a twitch, before leaping across the room - splat!

Sam recognizes himself in this merciless performance. In turn the CLIENTELE recognize Sam, and point at him, laughing. The Poets follow the general gaze, and their smiles die on their lips.

Finally, Garrick turns around to see Sam.

GARRICK
Sam! It was only a joke...

Sam spins on his heels and leaves.

84 INT. LANDING GOUGH SQUARE - NIGHT, MOMENTS LATER 84

Sam stomps along the landing. He passes Dr Levet, whose door is ajar, and who raises his glass in greeting.

85 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - NIGHT, MOMENTS LATER 85

Sam stumps into his garret, where he is confronted by the mass of quotation slips. He sighs deeply. Somehow, this has to be sorted out. Sam looks around the room for inspiration.

His gaze falls upon the washing line in poets' corner, and he has an idea. Sam goes over to the washing line. He removes some of the clothes pegs, and picks up the ball of string, which is still attached to the washing line. Then Sam unwinds the ball as he walks across the room, and loops the string around a nail on the far side.

Sam goes over to the trestle table, and picks up a quotation slip, holds it close to his eyes, and reads it.

SAM
"I was made a wonder and a pointingstock to every idle rascal follower." Shakespeare Henry VI

Sam grimaces at the irony of the quotation.

SAM (CONT'D)
"Pointingstock" noun - someone made the object of ridicule.

He reaches up, and pegs the quotation slip to the string.

86 INT. BOOKSHOP - DAY 86

The Old Man sits alone at his desk in a dusty, untidy bookshop.

87 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS 87

Sam looks up at the quotation slip, which hangs there, like a lone leaf on a branch.

He is disturbed from his reverie by the Slave Boy, who has come into the room, and is holding a pile of books. Sam immediately cheers up.

SAM
Hello! What's your name?

FRANK
Frank Barber, Sir.

FRANK comes over to Sam at the trestle table, and Sam takes the books. There is a letter and a note on top of them. Sam reads the note.

SAM
To help with your great venture.
Your friend, Davy.

Sam smiles warmly. Garrick is forgiven.

SAM (CONT'D)
Thank you, Frank.

Sam holds out a penny. Frank takes it, delighted, and scoots off. Sam opens the letter. He reads it with mounting surprise. He calls out.

SAM (CONT'D)
Frank!

Frank comes back into the room.

SAM (CONT'D)
It seems your master has fallen upon hard times and can no longer afford to keep you. He has made you a free man...

Frank is astounded.

SAM (CONT'D)
And asks if I can accept you into my household.

Frank stares at Sam, eyes wide with uncertainty. Sam looks around the room.

SAM (CONT'D)
I suppose we had better find somewhere for you to sleep.

Frank looks at him, still in a state of shock.

88 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - NIGHT, SIX MONTHS LATER 88

Sam's overhead filing system has grown. There are many more strings, and many more quotations pegged to them.

Frank is busy tidying Sam's books, which are in much better order than before. Macbean is working in a folio notebook. He turns the page, and sees the entry for "scale". Macbean glances furtively over at Sam.

Sam is at his desk compiling.

Macbean grins mischievously, as he scribbles in the notebook: "In contemplation's scale I'll soar...".

Sam stops writing, puzzled by something. He looks up.

SAM
Do any of you know what a tarantula is?

PEYTON
Is it a kind of dance?

Frank stops tidying, and listens.

Macbean hastily closes the notebook.

MACBEAN
I know this! When I worked on Chambers' Cyclopedia, I specialized in natural history. It's an insect. It has a nasty bite, that can only be cured by music.

SAM
Oh!

With satisfaction, Sam writes in the notebook.

SAM (CONT'D)
In that case, Mr MacBean, I have a few more you can help me with. What about the beaver?

MACBEAN
An amphibious, furry animal that builds its own home across rivers.

SAM
Incredible!

MACBEAN
When pursued, he bites off his own baubles, because that's the only part of him that's edible.

Maitland is particularly delighted by this. Sam takes notes.

SAM
And what's a boramez?

MACBEAN
Ah, that's a plant-animal found in Tartary - a vegetable lamb, that is the favourite food of wolves.

The other Poets and Frank are all fascinated. Sam smiles at Macbean, impressed.

SAM
Much may be made of a Scotchman - if he be caught young.

Cries of protest from Maitland, Shiels, and Macbean.

89 INT. LANDING - LATER THAT NIGHT 89

Sam reaches for his bedroom door handle, but the door opens, and Elizabeth comes out, preventing him from entering.

ELIZABETH
Mr Johnson,...

Her tone is grave, and Sam is worried.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Mrs Johnson has asked me to make a bed up for you in the dictionary garret, sir.

SAM
What!

ELIZABETH
She says she can no longer bear a bed-fellow.

Sam pushes the bedroom door open. Tetty is propped up in bed. She has a novel open in front of her, but is staring glassy-eyed into space. She has put on a lot of weight, and her face has become puffy and flushed. There is a laudanum bottle on her bedside table.

Sam looks at her, filled with pain, helplessness, and guilt.

90 INT. BOOKSHOP - DAY 90

The Old Man in the bookshop wakes up. He has fallen asleep at his desk.

91 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - NIGHT, A SHORT WHILE LATER 91

Sam lies in his makeshift bed on the garret floor, feeling unhappy and rejected.

The Poets and Frank sleep peacefully in their corner.

Sam looks up at the quotation system above. Suddenly, the quotations begin to shake. Then the whole room shakes. Thud! Thud! Books fly off the shelves. Sam sits up, scared. His house is being hit by an earthquake. The shaking stops as suddenly as it began. All is calm again.

Sam looks at Frank, but he is still asleep. Bonk! A large tome lands in the midst of the Poets. Sam looks at them anxiously, but they do not stir. Sam smiles paternally.

92 INT. LANDING - NIGHT, MOMENTS LATER 92

Sam pushes Tetty's bedroom door open. Tetty is unharmed and sleeping peacefully, much to Sam's relief.

93 EXT. COFFEEHOUSE - MORNING, A FEW DAYS LATER 93

A bright spring morning. "Tom Jones" is still in evidence, and "The Oeconomy of Human Life" is a big success. Longman, Dodsley, Millar and Cave are in their usual spot.

CAVE
Congratulations Robert, the best-selling reference book of our time!

Dodsley smiles, his sartorial elegance reflecting his increased wealth.

DODSLEY
That earthquake was odd, wasn't it?

LONGMAN
Indeed.

CAVE
There is, of course, a full report of the damage in the "Gentleman's Magazine".

Cave proudly hands an open copy to Dodsley, who reads it.

Earthquake damage is also in evidence in the ominous crack across the coffeehouse ceiling.

Dodsley reads something funny, and laughs out loud.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
According to the Bishop of London, the earthquake was caused by God's wrath at the popularity of "Tom Jones"!

Longman, Dodsley, and Cave chuckle. Millar frowns.

CAVE
(teasing)
Does that make Andrew liable for the damage?

Longman, Dodsley, and Cave crack up laughing. Millar scowls.

One table away, the Waiter has a tray of coffee. CRASH! Part of the ceiling collapses just above him. Coffee goes flying over the table. Chaos ensues.

The Booksellers continue as if nothing had happened.

CAVE
So when can I have my best hack back?

Longman, Dodsley, and Millar make to get up.

LONGMAN
We're about to find out now.

94 INT. STAIRWAY GOUGH SQUARE - MORNING, A SHORT WHILE LATER 94

Longman, Dodsley and Millar, who is holding his chart, stand outside the closed door of Sam's dictionary garret. Some wag has pinned up a sign: "Quiet, Genius at Work". Sam opens the door. This time he is ready for them.

SAM
Good morning, gentlemen.

95 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 95

Hanging from the ceiling is a huge cat's cradle of string, with thousands of quotation slips attached to it.

The Booksellers regard it with astonishment.

The Poets stand in a row, looking as neat and respectable as they can. Frank is ready with a tray of tea.

Millar points up at the quotation system.

MILLAR
(sternly)
Mr Johnson, what is this?

Sam enlightens him.

SAM
My Authorities, Mr Millar.

This answer does not impress Millar.

MOMENTS LATER

Tea has been served to the Booksellers.

Millar pulls off the cloth to reveal a sign which says: "Dictionary of the English Language budget and schedule review June 1748".

Sam and the Poets look at it, more confidently than last time. Frank watches from behind the tea service.

MILLAR
So first the budget.

Millar removes the sign to reveal a chart.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
The total budget for the compilation of the Dictionary is £1,575. The amount you have received so far is £1,000, which leaves £575, and makes us within budget.

Sam looks pleased, and the Poets let out a cheer, trying Millar's patience in the process.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
And now the schedule...

Millar whips that chart away to reveal another one.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
You have been compiling for eighteen months, which means that you should be four-fifths of your way through the alphabet.

LONGMAN
So, how much of the compiling have you completed?

SAM
Oh, a lot.

MILLAR
Where are you up to in the alphabet?

SAM
Difficult to say.

The Booksellers look puzzled.

SAM (CONT'D)
That's because we're not working alphabetically.

The Booksellers struggle to comprehend.

MILLAR
Not going from A to Z?

SAM
No.

MILLAR
Which way are you going, from Z to A?

SAM
No.

LONGMAN
You mean you jump around the alphabet?

SAM
Yes.

Millar is now totally at sea. Sam picks up the inclusion list.

SAM (CONT'D)
I have taken the words in this list, and written them into these blank notebooks here...

The Poets each "model" a notebook - Peyton is A-ABYSS, Shiels is ACACIA-AGONIZE, and Maitland AGONY-AMBROSIAL. Macbean gestures elegantly towards 77 further notebooks all in a row.

Sam takes one and opens it. Some of the entries have been compiled, but there are gaps where others have not.

SAM (CONT'D)
Leaving space for the entries to be filled in. I compile the entries as the quotations are found.

MILLAR
I think we'd better have a closer look.

LATER

Millar has one of Sam's notebooks open, and is measuring a stretch of text with a ruler.

LATER

Millar measures a section of the overhead quotation system with the ruler.

LATER

Millar counts the quotation slips within that section.

LATER

Millar uses an abacus.

LATER

Millar adds to a column of very neatly written numbers.

LATER

Millar puts his quill down.

MILLAR
Well, my calculations are complete.

Everyone listens. Sam looks extremely nervous. Millar is still thinking, a sceptical furrow in his brow.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
There is one thing that puzzles me. How do you know how much space to leave between each entry?

SAM
Ah! I just leave enough for the maximum possible number of meanings that a word can have.

LONGMAN
And what's that?

SAM
Seven. The primitive sense, the consequential sense...

MILLAR
Very well, Mr Johnson, we are happy to leave the technical details to you.

Millar consults his calculations. Everyone listens with bated breath.

SAM
It seems that in following your "system", Mr Johnson, you have indeed compiled four-fifths of the alphabet, and I am therefore satisfied that the project is on schedule.

Sam beams, delighted. Longman and Dodsley's faces light up. The Poets and Frank cheer. But Millar hasn't finished yet.

MILLAR
However...

Sam's grin vanishes.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
I don't think we should allow you to jump around the alphabet as you see fit. I propose that you continue to fill in your notebooks, but that you work from A-Z.

Sam is offended. Dodsley is quick to smooth things over.

DODSLEY
Sam, one of William Strahan's presses is currently vacant. We need to start printing.

LONGMAN
It is vital that the copy is neat, or the typesetters will reject it.

Sam is pacified.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
Now, are you confident that the Dictionary will be ready on time?

SAM
Yes, it will be.

Longman looks questioningly at Millar. Millar produces a bundle of banknotes and hands it to Sam.

MILLAR
Your final instalment, Mr Johnson.

Longman and Dodsley smile.

DODSLEY
I'll put announcements in the press, saying that the Dictionary is due to be published next year.

Sam has survived another crisis. His relief is palpable. Bang! Pop! The sound of fireworks.

96 EXT. BANK OF THE THAMES - THAT EVENING 96

A fireworks display from a barge on the river Thames, to the music of Handel.

Sam, the Poets, Frank and the Booksellers stand on the banks of the Thames watching the display.

Galleries have been erected for the gentry, and a small market has sprung up, a rowdy bunch around the inevitable gin stalls.

A flourish in the music, and David Garrick appears. Thud! A GENTLEWOMAN in the gallery has fallen off her seat. Sam lights up at the sight of his friend.

SAM
Davy! How goes it, my friend!

GARRICK
Very well! Drury Lane has a new owner manager, who intends to ennoble minds, to civilize the mob, and elevate the art of theatre to the status it deserves.

SAM
Do you think he will read "Mahomet and Irene"?

GARRICK
He already has.

SAM
Did he like it?

GARRICK
With certain reservations, yes.

SAM
Do you think he will put it on?

Garrick's eyes twinkle.

GARRICK
Yes, I think I will!

An explosion of sound and light, as the barge blows up.

Sam is overcome with joy. He grabs the tiny Davy, and lifts him into the air.

A scene of chaos on the Thames, as people leap from the burning barge.

But nothing can dampen Sam's spirits. He pumps his friend up and down in the air, grinning from ear to ear.

97 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT 97

Sam stands by Tetty's bedside, a massive grin on his face, a manuscript of "Mahomet and Irene" in one hand, and the other hand behind his back.

SAM
Soon the Dictionary will be behind me, and I will be known as a poet!

Tetty smiles, but cannot be as unreservedly happy as Sam. There is a bottle of laudanum by her bed.

SAM (CONT'D)
At last after all these years, our dream is coming true! I will be able to repay you everything, and you will sit beside me in the theatre on the opening night, in a beautiful silk gown.

Sam brings his hand from behind his back, and presents a roll of green silk. Tetty's face lights up. She takes the silk.

Sam tentatively fingers the corner of the bed covers. Tetty pulls back the covers to let him get in. Sam beams with relief. He gets into bed, opens his manuscript of "Mahomet and Irene", and starts work.

98 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON, ONE YEAR LATER 98

The green silk has become a beautiful dress, which Tetty is about to put on. Sam watches, proudly.

TETTY
Where's Elizabeth?

99 INT. HALLWAY, GOUGH SQUARE - LATE AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 99

There is a knock at Sam's front door. Elizabeth opens it, to reveal Garrick. Thud! She has fallen down in a dead faint.

100 INT. TETTY'S PARLOUR - LATE AFTERNOON, MOMENTS LATER 100

Elizabeth is still out cold, and is being fanned by Maitland.

The Poets have all gathered in Tetty's parlour. They have managed to acquire a splendid evening outfit. Just the one, which they have had to share out between them, somewhat reducing its effect. They are all watching as Garrick does an impromptu performance. He mimes being in bed. With a flow of his hands he indicates that he has an ample bosom. He puts on a cruelly exaggerated amorous Tetty voice.

GARRICK
Sam, darling!

The Poets howl with laughter.

101 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 101

Sam is resplendent in a brand new outfit, a bright red jacket trimmed with gold lace, and a matching hat. Tetty is wearing her new dress, her portrait brooch pinned to it, and her face lit up with a beautiful smile. Sam smiles, a huge sense of relief and redemption flooding through him. He stands still, just for a few seconds, and enjoys the feeling.

TETTY
After Henry died, I never thought
I would find love again.

SAM
Before I met you, I didn't think
I would find love at all.

Tetty smiles tenderly. Sam offers her his arm.

SAM (CONT'D)
Are you ready for the theatre,
Mrs Johnson?

Tetty takes it, full of love and pride.

102 INT. TETTY'S PARLOUR - LATE AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 102

Garrick is still in character as Tetty.

GARRICK
Smile on my wishes...

Unseen by Garrick, Sam and Tetty come into the room.

Garrick, as Tetty, reaches his arms out imploringly.

The Poets are helpless with laughter, tears running down their cheeks. Suddenly they notice Sam and Tetty, and sober up immediately.

But Garrick has his back to them, and is so into his part that he doesn't notice.

GARRICK (CONT'D)
And come back to bed!

Tetty looks at Garrick, frozen in horror.

Garrick mimes the covers being whipped away from over him. He squeals, wobbles his imaginary breasts, and yanks the covers back over himself.

Totally humiliated, Tetty turns and runs out of the room. Sam stands rooted to the spot, not knowing what to do. Garrick turns and sees Tetty. He immediately comes out of character.

103 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON, MOMENTS LATER 103

Tetty flings herself on her bed, sobbing.

104 INT. LANDING, GOUGH SQUARE - LATE AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 104

Sam turns the bedroom door handle, and is surprised to find it locked.

SAM
Tetty!

No sound from Tetty.

SAM (CONT'D)
Tetty! Come on, we can't be late!

TETTY (O.C.)
I'm not coming, Sam.

SAM
What!?

Silence from Tetty.

SAM (CONT'D)
But, but this is our dream!

Silence from Tetty.

SAM (CONT'D)
Tetty!

Silence.

SAM (CONT'D)
Tetty, please!

Silence. Sam is devastated.

105 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 105

Tetty sits on the bed in a state of disarray. She takes a deep slug from her laudanum bottle.

106 EXT. GOUGH SQUARE - LATE AFTERNOON, MOMENTS LATER 106

Sam and Garrick walk across the square, body language indicating a rift between the two friends. They are followed by the Poets and Frank, who has commandeered their fancy hat.

A YOUNG SAILOR skulks in the shadows, watching them.

107 INT. THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE - THAT EVENING 107

No expense has been spared on the lavish scenery, which gives the effect of a Turkish palace and gardens.

Sam, dressed in all his finery, sits alone in one of the boxes, watching anxiously. He glances sadly at the empty space beside him.

The house is packed and lively.

The Booksellers and Cave watch from another box.

Chesterfield watches from his box on the stage.

The Poets and Frank watch from the pit.

Garrick strides confidently onto the stage. The AUDIENCE is immediately silenced. Garrick waits for the thud, but none comes. He smiles at a WOMAN in the audience - Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! - and takes out an entire row.

GARRICK
Gentle public, here a moment
spare,
From grov'ling business and
superfluous care.
Our daring bard...

Garrick gestures up at Sam, and the gaze of the Audience follows him.

GARRICK (CONT'D)
With spirit unconfin'd,

Unaccustomed to the limelight, Sam fiddles awkwardly with his gold lace.

GARRICK (CONT'D)
Spreads wide the mighty moral for mankind.

Sam sits up straight and composes his features, in an attempt to project the requisite gravitas.

GARRICK (CONT'D)
In reason, nature, truth he dares to trust:
Ye fops be silent! And ye wits be just.

LATER

SPRANGER BARRY plays Mahomet, the Emperor of the Turks. HANNAH PRITCHARD plays Irene, a Greek noblewoman. Barry lives up to his nickname: "Silver-toned".

SPRANGER BARRY
To state and pow'r I court thee, not to ruin -
Smile on my wishes, and command the globe.

Sam watches the performance. His anxiety has changed to pleasure.

LATER

The Audience is mesmerized, wrapped up in Irene's plight.

HANNAH PRITCHARD
Unutterable anguish!
Guilt and despair! Pale spectres grin around me,
And stun me with the yellings of damnation!

Sam watches from his box, delighting in Pritchard's wonderful performance.

Garrick watches from the wings, with proprietorial pride.

The character of the MUTE takes out a bowstring, and whips it around Irene's neck.

The Audience gasps in horror - they have never seen anything this violent on stage before. There are murmers of dissent.

Sam watches the Audience, unnerved.

Garrick's theatrical instinct tells him the atmosphere is volatile. He motions to the actors to take it easy.

But several Audience members are already on their feet.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS
Murder! Murder!

A scuffle breaks out in the pit.

Sam grips the side of his box.

HANNAH PRITCHARD
O, hear my pray'rs! Accept, all-pitying heaven,
These tears, these pangs, these last remains of....

Strangulated noises come from Hannah's throat. She gesticulates wildly - her fellow actor is actually strangling her, and she can't get out her lines.

Sam leans forward, panic rising within him.

Garrick knows it is all up. He puts his head in his hands.

The Mute relaxes his grip, and Pritchard struggles on.

HANNAH PRITCHARD (CONT'D)
Nor let the crimes of this detested day
Be charged upon my Soul.
Oh mercy! Mercy!

But the spell has been broken. The Audience is in mocking agreement.

AUDIENCE
Mercy! Mercy!

The stage is pelted with missiles.

A riot in the pit envelops the Poets, who join in with gusto, Maitland pausing to lift a fist-waving Frank onto his shoulders, out of harm's way.

In search of a scapegoat, the Audience turns its attention to Sam, pointing and jeering at him. Sam sits stock still, burning with shame.

Chesterfield shrugs nonchalantly, gets up and leaves.

A missile flies up towards the Booksellers' box, and they calmly make an exit.

Garrick watches in dismay, as his beloved theatre is trashed. He glances up at Sam's box, where the huge figure still broods.

108 EXT. BOOKSHOP - DUSK 108

The Old Man picks up his coat, and makes his way to the door. Water drips onto books as he walks past them.

109 INT. THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 109

Sam's cherished dream has turned into a mockery. Something soft, flung from below, bursts on the box front.

110 INT. MARTIN'S GARRET - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 110

Benjamin Martin and his Poets are working diligently. Suddenly, one of them shouts excitedly.

RED-HAIRED POET
Zootomy!

He jumps up, waving his paper about.

RED-HAIRED POET (CONT'D)
It's finished!

There is an outburst of celebration.

111 INT. HALLWAY GOUGH SQUARE - NIGHT, A SHORT WHILE LATER 111

Sam comes into his house alone, and trudges up the stairs.

112 INT. LANDING - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS 112

Sam reaches for his bedroom door handle, but the door opens, and Elizabeth comes out, preventing him from going into the bedroom. She is in a distressed state.

ELIZABETH
Mr Johnson! Mrs Johnson is very upset.

Sam is filled with anxiety.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
We had a visitor. There was a knock at the door and I went down to answer it. There was a young man in a sailor's uniform outside, said he was Mrs Johnson's son.

Sam is astonished.

SAM
Jervis! But he disowned Tetty when she married me. She hasn't seen him since then!

ELIZABETH
Nor did she see him tonight, sir, for I ran upstairs to get her, but by the time she came down, he was gone.

Sam takes this in, aware of how cruel a blow this must be to Tetty. He leaps past Elizabeth into the bedroom.

113 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS 113

Tetty is in bed, staring at the portrait of Jervis, her heart broken. Sam stands awkwardly in the room.

TETTY
He offered me an annuity, you know, not to marry you.

SAM
Who did?

TETTY
Henry's brother.

Sam is stung, but not surprised.

TETTY (CONT'D)
He said that most widows my age would be perfectly happy to live out their days in quiet and comfort, in the country.

Sam is uncertain where this is leading.

TETTY (CONT'D)
But I told him that I wasn't most widows... that I was braver, more adventurous, and that even though the risk was great, I was prepared to take that risk to be with the man I loved.

Sam takes this in, in silence.

TETTY (CONT'D)
Little did I know what it would cost me.

Sam blanches.

TETTY (CONT'D)
My fortune...

Sam listens.

TETTY (CONT'D)
My social life....

Sam listens.

TETTY (CONT'D)
My status...

Sam listens.

TETTY (CONT'D)
My health...

Sam listens.

TETTY (CONT'D)
My dignity...

Sam listens.

TETTY (CONT'D)
My sanity...

Sam listens.

TETTY (CONT'D)
And finally - my son!

Sam reels from the force of this blast.

SAM
Tetty, I'm so sorry!

Tetty looks up.

TETTY
You are sorry! What does that mean?

SAM
Sense one: Grieved for something past, used of slight miscarriages or vexations and also greater things.

Tetty is not mollified.

SAM (CONT'D)
Sense two: Vile, worthless, vexatious.

The cap seems to fit, so Sam wears it. Hanging his head in shame, he turns and leaves.

114 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - NIGHT, MOMENTS LATER 114

Sam comes into his empty garret. He goes over to an open notebook at the trestle table, lights a candle, dips his quill, and runs his finger down the page. His finger stops at the entry for "to break".

SAM
To break...

It has not been compiled at all. A blank space of a third of a page has been left for it to go in. Sam looks up at the quotations, running through them with his fingers, his short-sighted eyes peering at them. He reads one.

SAM (CONT'D)
"Moses tells us, that the fountains of the earth were broke open, or clove asunder."

Sam thinks for a moment.

SAM (CONT'D)
Sense one. To burst, or open by force.

Sam reaches up to the next quotation slip, and reads it.

SAM (CONT'D)
"Your hopes without are vanished into smoke
Your captains taken, and your armies broke." Dryden.

A moment's thought.

SAM (CONT'D)
Sense two. To crush, to disable, to incapacitate.

In a weary daze, Sam looks at the next quotation slip.

SAM (CONT'D)
"What boots it to break a colt, and to let him straight run loose at random?" Spenser.

Sam thinks for a moment.

SAM (CONT'D)
Sense three. To tame, to train to obedience.

MOMENTS LATER

Sam writes in his notebook. Then he looks at another quotation slip with an air of weary finality.

SAM (CONT'D)
Last one.

Sam reads the quotation.

SAM (CONT'D)
"An old man broken with the storms of state
Is come to lay his weary bones among ye." Shakespeare, Henry VIII.

A moment's thought.

SAM (CONT'D)
Sense seven. To crush or destroy the strength of the body.

Sam sighs with exhausted relief.

SAM (CONT'D)
Done.

Sam just checks the next slip.

SAM (CONT'D)
"Pardon this fault, and, by my soul I swear,
I never more will break an oath with thee."

Sam is shocked. A curious low rumbling sound emanates from some distant source. But Sam doesn't hear it.

SAM (CONT'D)
Sense eight. To violate a contract or promise.

Sam consults the next quotation slip overhead. He is perturbed.

SAM (CONT'D)
"Short shall be my sleep,
Broke by the melancholy midnight bell."

The rumble happens again, accompanied by a slight tremor, but Sam remains oblivious, staring in shock at the quotation slip.

SAM (CONT'D)
Sense nine. To interrupt.

Sam flips frantically through the slips. ROOOOAAAARRRRR! A massive tremor shakes the building. Sam looks around him, scared. But the roaring and vibrating ceases. Relieved, Sam moves on to the next quotation.

SAM (CONT'D)
Break someone's heart.

Sam stares at the quotation, completely stunned. He grabs another quotation slip.

SAM (CONT'D)
Dawn breaks

He grabs another quotation slip.

SAM (CONT'D)
Break up.

He grabs another.

SAM (CONT'D)
Break off.

He grabs another.

SAM (CONT'D)
Break out.

He grabs another.

SAM (CONT'D)
Break your neck.

ROAAAARRRRR! The room is shaken again. Sam is hurled onto the floor, on his back. The notebook is thrown from his hands. Books are dislodged from the shelves. Papers fly around the room.

The tremor ceases. Sam catches his breath, totally bewildered.

A single quotation strip flutters down in front of his face. He catches it and reads it.

SAM (CONT'D)
Break down.

Smash! A final jolt blasts out a window. Wind whips through the room.

Sam looks up at the quotations.

Thousands and thousands of white strips flutter above him, bathed in ethereal moonlight, like leaves in a tree caught in a wild wind.

Sam is completely overwhelmed. Thump! The notebook lands on his chest.

115 INT. STRAHAN'S PRINTWORKS - NEXT MORNING 115

The Booksellers and Cave are at Strahan's printworks, standing waiting for something.

DODSLEY
That earthquake was a bit of a shock last night.

LONGMAN
Yes! Lucky it didn't affect us.

116 EXT. SHOE LANE - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 116

Sam's feet hurry along a street. They swerve with uncharacteristic nimbleness to avoid a pile of rubble.

117 INT. STRAHAN'S PRINTWORKS - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 117

WILLIAM STRAHAN, a confident, cheery and exceedingly wealthy Scottish printer in his early thirties, hands the Booksellers a page of printed copy.

STRAHAN
Gentlemen.

The Booksellers examine it.

LONGMAN
The first page of the "Dictionary of the English Language"!

DODSLEY
And in three years! That'll show those garlic eaters!

Even Millar looks pleased.

118 EXT. SHOE LANE - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 118

Sam turns into Little New Street.

119 INT. STRAHAN'S PRINTWORKS - MORNING, MOMENTS LATER 119

Splat! Sam lands in the printworks. Longman, Dodsley, Millar, Cave and Strahan turn to look at him.

DODSLEY
Ah, Sam!

Dodsley holds out the printed page.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
Take a look at this!

Sam takes the sheet.

LONGMAN
Do you have another notebook for us?

SAM
Gentlemen I have achieved enlightenment!

Sam slaps his notebook on the table, and opens it at the entry for the verb "to break". It is an unholy mess of crammed in senses, asterisks, arrows, and illegibly small writing running in all directions.

Millar, Longman, Dodsley and Cave reel back, and stare at the text in horrified disbelief.

SAM
The language cannot be tamed!

Strahan peers over at it.

STRAHAN
(matter-of-fact)
There's no way my typesetters can work with copy like that.

The Booksellers look daggers at Sam, who has his face right up against the printed sheet. Sam suddenly looks completely baffled.

SAM
This isn't mine.

LONGMAN
What!?

Sam holds it out to show them.

SAM
This text! It isn't mine!

The Booksellers are dumbfounded. Strahan looks at it.

STRAHAN
Oh no. Sorry. That's not yours. That's Mr Martin's dictionary.

SAM
What!!!!!

BOOKSELLERS
What!!!!!

STRAHAN
(cheerfully)
I'm printing another dictionary, for a Mr Benjamin Martin.

Sam and the Booksellers are frozen in shock. Dodsley turns angrily to Strahan. But Strahan shrugs, unrepentant.

Sam has discovered something else in Martin's text.

SAM
"A unique seven-sense defining system!"

The Booksellers, still angry, look questioningly at Sam.

SAM (CONT'D)
The scoundrel has stolen my idea!

But Sam recovers from his anger.

SAM (CONT'D)
No, wait. Martin may have stolen my idea, but that is no matter - because my idea was wrong in the first place.

Dodsley and Longman are baffled.

DODSLEY
What do you mean, Sam?

SAM
I thought that the job of a dictionary was to tame the language, but it is not! The language cannot be tamed. But it can be illuminated!

The Booksellers do not respond.

SAM (CONT'D)
How many meanings do you think the verb "to break" has?

Silence.

SAM (CONT'D)
Guess!

LONGMAN
Three. Four?

DODSLEY
I think four.

CAVE
Yes, four.

MILLAR
Don't tell me, all seven.

Sam proudly slaps some handwritten copy on the table.

SAM
Sixty-five!

Longman and Dodsley are astonished. Millar's face remains totally grim.

SAM (CONT'D)
Look! The verb "to break" has sixty-five senses. Break bread is a different sense from break a heart, which is a different sense from break your leg, which is a different sense from break down... and so on! There they are, all backed up by quotations from the best authors.

Dodsley and Longman peer at Sam's text. There, in uncharacteristically neat handwriting, is the verb "to break" laid out for the first time in all its true glory.

SAM (CONT'D)
I know this because of my authorities. I read them, and they tell me what the meanings of the words are.

DODSLEY
How come you didn't have this amazing revelation before?

SAM
Because I hadn't collected enough quotations. (beat) And because I wasn't thinking creatively enough.

Millar can hardly believe this!

SAM (CONT'D)
Our language is much richer, and much more complex than any of us ever imagined.

LONGMAN
But what does this mean for our Dictionary?

SAM
The whole thing will have to be thrown away, and started again from scratch.

The Booksellers react with horror.

LONGMAN
Mr Johnson, the budget has almost been spent!

SAM
But out of the ashes a new dictionary will be born - a truly ground-breaking book, a landmark in literary history. It could make us famous.

MILLAR
Or bankrupt.

LONGMAN
Regrettably, Mr Johnson, you have made your discovery too late. I think you should just finish off the Dictionary the way you have been doing it.

SAM
But that would be wrong.

LONGMAN
Mr Johnson, I can see that you are a man of principle.

SAM
Sir, I try to be.

LONGMAN
Which is not what the Dictionary needs right now...

Alarm bells ring for Sam.

SAM
But...

Sam looks at Dodsley for support.

DODSLEY
There is a rival dictionary. We can't afford any delay.

MILLAR
Allow me to make your dilemma a little easier, Mr Johnson. If you do not keep to the schedule, you're sacked.

Sam is stunned.

CAVE
(gently)
There's no more money, Sam.

120 EXT. BOOKSHOP - DUSK 120

In misty rain, the Old Man's hands close the front door of the bookshop. He takes out a bunch of keys, selects one, puts it in a keyhole, and turns it. He selects a different key, puts it in a different keyhole, and locks that one. The Old Man selects a third key, puts it in a third keyhole, and locks that one.

121 EXT. CHESTERFIELD HOUSE, MAYFAIR - LATER THAT MORNING 121

A brand new Georgian palace, situated in an elegant square, with magnificent colonnaded buildings on either side. Sam strides determinedly towards it, manuscript in hand.

122 INT. ANTEROOM, CHESTERFIELD HOUSE - MORNING, CONTINUOUS 122

An extravagantly decorated waiting room, full of assorted POSEURS and SYCOPHANTS. MR NEVEROUT, a ridiculously vapid fop, talks to LADY SMART, who is accompanied by her black PAGE BOY and pooch, both dressed in identical livery.

MR NEVEROUT
Madam, one should always serve coocumber. The most fashionable tables always have coocumber.

Guided by a FOOTMAN, Sam appears in the doorway and paddles his feet. The people in the room look at him with pity, assuming him to be an idiot.

Lady Smart is puzzled by Mr Neverout's assertion.

LADY SMART
You say coocumber, but I have heard some of the politest people say cowcumber. Which should it be?

Splat! Sam lands in the room.

SAM
Madam, the correct form is cucumber.

Lady Smart stares at him in surprise.

SAM (CONT'D)
From the Latin "cucumis".

The company is surprised by Sam's eloquence. Lady Smart turns back to Mr Neverout.

LADY SMART
And how should one serve it?

Once again, Sam provides the answer.

SAM
Cucumber should be well sliced, dressed with pepper and vinegar, and then thrown out, as good for nothing.

The company is shocked by such boldness. But Lady Smart is delighted by Sam's bon mot.

LADY SMART
Who was it who said that?

Sam's face clouds over. Lady Smart racks her brains.

An officious SERVANT comes in, and makes an announcement to the group.

SERVANT
Lord Chesterfield will be receiving visitors soon.

LADY SMART
Wasn't it Walpole?

Sam sighs, and slumps into a chair.

LATER

The Servant approaches Sam.

SERVANT
Mr...

He consults his open notebook.

SERVANT (CONT'D)
Johnson, what is the purpose of your visit?

SAM
I am the author of the Dictionary of the English Language, an endeavour in which his Lordship has shown considerable interest, and in which there have recently been some very exciting developments.

Sam holds out his clean version of "to break".

SAM (CONT'D)
Would you give this to him?

The Servant takes the manuscript.

MIDDAY

Sam sits waiting, restless and fretful. The Servant comes in and makes an announcement. Everyone looks up hopefully.

SERVANT
Mr Neverout!

Mr Neverout leaps up and minces out. Sam sinks back in his seat.

AFTERNOON

Sam sits waiting, slumped, irritable. The waiting room is much emptier now. The Servant comes in and makes an announcement. Sam looks up hopefully.

SERVANT
Lady Smart!

Lady Smart leaps up. Her page boy and dog follow her out. Sam fumes.

EVENING

There are just a handful of people left now, Sam among them, almost asleep in his seat. The Servant comes in, holding Sam's manuscript. Sam's hopes are raised again.

SERVANT
His Lordship will not be receiving any more supplicants today.

Sam leaps up, and points at the manuscript.

SAM
Did you show him that?

SERVANT
Yes.

SAM
Did he read it?

The Servant shrugs - he doesn't know, and he doesn't much care. Enraged, Sam snatches the manuscript out of the Servant's hand, and storms out.

123 INT. ENTRANCE HALL, CHESTERFIELD HOUSE - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 123

As Sam leaves Chesterfield House, which has a truly splendid marble staircase, he notices that one of the doors is ajar. Sam hears Chesterfield's voice coming out of that room.

CHESTERFIELD (O.C.)
My dear boy...

Sam moves towards the door, and peeps inside.

Chesterfield is reading a letter out loud to someone we cannot see.

Sam looks at his manuscript, and then looks at Chesterfield. He hovers, wondering whether to take a chance and go inside.

Chesterfield can be glimpsed through the doorway.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
There is nothing that I wish you to know more than the true value of literature.

Sam is encouraged by this.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
Read as much as time will allow.

Sam moves his hand towards the door, as if to push it open.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
I knew a gentleman who went through all the Latin poets in those moments he was obliged to spend in the necessary house.

Sam is discouraged by this, and draws his hand back.

CHESTERFIELD (CONT'D)
He kept a common edition of Horace, and would tear off a couple of pages, read them, and then send them down as a sacrifice to Cloacina, the Roman goddess of excrement.

Sycophantic simpering from the unseen person.

Sam is not amused. But he is desperate. He reaches out to the door again, and pushes it.

124 INT. DRAWING ROOM, CHESTERFIELD HOUSE - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 124

Chesterfield reads his letter out to Colley Cibber, ridiculously attired and in full fawning mode.

CHESTERFIELD
If anything is worth doing, it is worth doing well!

COLLEY CIBBER
That's a good one, your Lordship!

125 INT. ENTRANCE HALL, CHESTERFIELD HOUSE - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 125

For Sam, all hope is gone.

126 EXT. BOOKSHOP - DUSK 126

The Old Man has wrapped a thick chain across the front door of the bookshop. He takes a huge padlock, and snaps it shut around the chain. The Old Man tugs it, to make sure that it is secure.

127 EXT. CHESTERFIELD HOUSE - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 127

Sam stands outside Chesterfield House, totally bereft.

128 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - EVENING, A SHORT WHILE LATER 128

Incredibly, an atmosphere of diligence. The Poets are busy, Maitland and Peyton clearing up the earthquake damage, and Macbean and Shiels busy with quotation slips.

Frank is sat at one of the trestle tables, studiously practising writing on a sheet of discarded Dictionary text: "England, England. Frank Barber".

Sam stomps in, ignoring everyone, marches straight to his desk, sits down, and buries his face in a book. Frank goes over to him.

FRANK
Sir,...

Sam does not look up, but Frank still hovers.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Sir, would you teach me to read and write?

Sam is surprised. He considers the idea.

FRANK (CONT'D)
I want to be a poet.

Sam suddenly explodes.

SAM
A poet! A poet! What,...

Sam points to Maitland.

SAM (CONT'D)
Like this pickelherring,...

Maitland is astonished.

SAM (CONT'D)
This addlepate,...

He points to Macbean, who is shocked and hurt.

SAM (CONT'D)
This codshead,...

Sam points to Peyton, who is stung.

SAM (CONT'D)
This moon-calf,...

Sam points to Shiels, who is deeply hurt.

SAM (CONT'D)
Or this harmless drudge?!

He points to himself. Sam turns back to Frank.

SAM (CONT'D)
Be a lawyer, be a tailor, be a carpenter, be a grave digger, be anything but a poet! Stem all creative desires, young man, for otherwise the hunger of the imagination will crush your bones and spirit to dust!

The Poets and Frank look at Sam in stunned silence.

129 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - AFTERNOON, EIGHT MONTHS LATER 129

Sam is in his makeshift bed, alone in the Dictionary garret. His reading material, Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy", betrays his mood. Cave comes in.

CAVE
Sam! How's the Dictionary coming along? You must be almost finished by now.

SAM
(evasively)
Not quite.

CAVE
So, when will you be able to come back to the "Gentleman's Magazine"?

SAM
Actually, I had something else in mind - a new publication, a bi-weekly periodical of essays.

The idea catches Cave's interest.

CAVE
But what about the Dictionary? That's more than a full-time job, isn't it?

SAM
My wife is sick. I can't meet her medical expenses.

Cave nods sympathetically, genuinely moved by Sam's plight.

SAM (CONT'D)
I thought about calling it the "Rambler".

CAVE
Ah. A rival to the "Spectator".

Cave's business instinct senses success.

CAVE (CONT'D)
Yes.

Sam smiles.

CAVE (CONT'D)
Same rate as before.

Sam has no choice but to accept.

CAVE (CONT'D)
And I think the author should remain anonymous.

Unsurprised, Sam accepts this, too, with a weary nod.

130 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - DAY 130

Sam is in his bed on the garret floor, praying fervently, a Dictionary notebook open on his knee, quill in hand.

SAM
Almighty God, look down with mercy upon me. Grant me the resolution to face the task that I have been given...

131 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - EVENING 131

An ink-smeared MESSENGER BOY appears at the end of Sam's bed, and holds out his hand, demanding something. Sam throws the Dictionary notebook aside, grabs a sheet of paper and starts writing furiously: "The Rambler No. 1."

132 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - EVENING, ONE HOUR LATER 132

Sam thrusts the "Rambler" copy into the hand of the Messenger Boy, who grabs it and hurtles off.

133 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - DAY 133

The garret is tidy, and Frank sits with his chin resting on his hands, bored and inactive. The Poets look at the trestle tables in dismay. They are completely clear of paper, save one last quotation slip.

SAM (V.O. CONT'D)
That my life may not be languished away in the gloom of anxiety.

Sam lies in bed, the "Anatomy of Melancholy" still on his knee.

Macbean picks the slip up, and pegs it to the line above.

134 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - DAY 134

The Poets crowd around Sam, still in bed, their meagre possessions in their hands. Sam looks at them, full of guilt and helplessness. He bids each one an emotional goodbye.

SAM (V.O. CONT'D)
My terrors and perplexities have so increased, that I am under great depression and discouragement,...

The Poets turn to Frank, still inactive, who looks at them mournfully.

SAM (V.O. CONT'D)
And feel the pungency of deep remorse.

The Poets leave.

135 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - DAY 135

Sam is in bed with the Dictionary notebook open.

SAM (V.O. CONT'D)
I vow to begin today anew with diligence and resolve,...

He brings his quill purposefully to the page.

SAM (V.O. CONT'D)
For the sake of Jesus Christ, Amen.

CRASH! He falls back onto the pillow.

136 INT. COFFEEHOUSE - MORNING, MANY MONTHS LATER 136

SLAM! Millar's fist hits the table, making cups and saucers jump.

MILLAR
Two years! That bedpresser has done nothing in two years!

Longman shakes his head in despair. Dodsley looks up despondently from a copy of the "Rambler", while Cave looks sympathetic.

LONGMAN
It is a very sorry state of affairs.

MILLAR
I say we take the scoundrel to court, and sue his breeches off!

LONGMAN
There would be no point, Andrew. I doubt he has any money.

MILLAR
Then let's have him hung and anatomized, and put on display in your shop!

Longman retreats into his copy of the "Gentleman's Magazine", and Dodsley into his "Rambler". Longman laughs. He has found some light relief and reads it aloud.

LONGMAN
"Several locusts were found in St James's Park, and more disasters are predicted" - plague, pestilence and so on. "But John Wesley hopes that, by general repentance, further manifestations of divine displeasure can be averted."

Millar is not amused.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
Well at least you're not being blamed this time, Andrew.

Longman, Dodsley and Cave chuckle. Millar scowls. Dodsley comes to the end of his "Rambler".

DODSLEY
Very good, Edward. So, who is your mysterious Rambler?

Cave smiles, a glint in his eye.

CAVE
I'm sorry, gentlemen, I am not at liberty to say. (beat) But I did hear a rumour that it was Lord Chesterfield...

Longman chuckles at this familiar ruse. Dodsley guffaws.

DODSLEY
I don't think so! (reading aloud)
"Bow to no patron's insolence; rely
On no frail hopes, in freedom live and die."

Longman and Cave laugh. Millar remains stern-faced.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
Sounds more like Sam...

The penny drops. All eyes turn to Cave. And Cave cannot disguise his guilt. The Booksellers glare at him, shocked and enraged.

MILLAR
You treacherous snake, Cave, how could you?!

Cave pushes his chair back nervously.

CAVE
Come now, Gentlemen, we are all businessmen. You would all have done the same.

But the Booksellers are now deeply offended, and Millar looks positively dangerous. Cave has gone too far this time, and he knows it. There is nothing to be done but to retrieve his hat and slope away.

Longman is the first to regain his composure.

LONGMAN
We should hire someone else to finish the Dictionary as quickly as possible. What about that other lexicographer, Martin?

DODSLEY
His dictionary has hardly set the world alight.

The others digest this news. Longman is the first to voice what they are all thinking.

LONGMAN
Maybe the public doesn't want a dictionary?

Silence. This is a grim possibility.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
Maybe we should pull out now, before we waste any more money?

Millar's fist clenches. Dodsley considers this notion calmly, and takes up Longman's point.

DODSLEY
You are right, Thomas.

Millar is about to explode again.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
The public doesn't want a dictionary - they want THE Dictionary.

The others listen.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
Sam Johnson may be shambolic, but he really is a clever man. Maybe we should redo the Dictionary the way he wants to? It could be a truly ground-breaking book.

Millar looks at Dodsley in absolute horror. Nor does the prospect appeal to Longman.

MILLAR
I can't believe you're even considering this!

DODSLEY
If Sam truly believes the Dictionary will make his name, he will find a way to do it. We just have to find a way to make him do it quickly and cheaply.

LONGMAN
Robert, reluctantly, I feel I have no choice but to agree.

Longman looks questioningly at Millar.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
Andrew?

But Millar shakes his head in flat refusal.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
Then, gentlemen, it seems that the Dictionary consortium has broken down.

Dodsley despairs. Millar glowers into his coffee.

137 INT. TETTY'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT MORNING 137

Tetty is in bed. Her condition has deteriorated considerably, and she is oblivious to the fact that Sam is looking down at her.

138 INT. LANDING GOUGH SQUARE - MORNING, MOMENTS LATER 138

Sam hurries to Dr Levet's room.

SAM
Dr Levet!

No response. The door is ajar and so Sam pushes it open. Dr Levet is sprawled on the floor, empty gin bottles around him, completely inebriated. Sam sighs. Elizabeth the maid comes up to him, and hands him a note.

ELIZABETH
A message for you, sir, from Mr Longman.

Sam's spirits sink still further.

139 INT. COFFEEHOUSE - MORNING, A SHORT WHILE LATER 139

Slurp! Sam downs a cup of tea in one. Longman and Dodsley watch him, unperturbed, accustomed to his extreme lack of decorum. Millar, however, eyes Sam with a deep distrust.

LONGMAN
Mr Johnson, we have asked you here to talk about the Dictionary.

Sam grabs a cake.

DODSLEY
We have been considering your discoveries about the language...

Sam takes a huge bite out of the cake.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
And have come to the conclusion that you are right.

Sam stops, mid chomp. He looks at them in amazement.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
We are willing to rethink the Dictionary. You can start again from scratch, and the entry for each word should be as long or as short as you see fit.

Sam looks at Millar in disbelief.

MILLAR
(grimly)
Within reason.

Sam beams with delight.

SAM
Gentlemen, this is excellent news!

Dodsley and Longman smile, pleased. Millar, however, remains stony-faced.

SAM (CONT'D)
I will be able to reuse some of the old copy, for the simpler words.

LONGMAN
That's good. We have decided that it would be better not to use notebooks, but to work on single, separate sheets.

Sam is too happy to be fazed by this.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
We require you to work alphabetically, and to hand the sheets of text to William Strahan as they are finished.

Sam nods. This seems reasonable to him.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
And, Mr Rambler, we will no longer pay you a lump sum in advance.

Sam winces, and reddens with shame.

The Waiter appears at the Booksellers' table, a tray of coffee in his hands. A deep rumbling sound. Suddenly, a voice cries out.

VOICE (O.C.)
Earthquake!

The Waiter dives for cover. Coffee goes flying all over the Booksellers' table.

But the panic is a false alarm - through the window a huge wagon can be seen rumbling past.

Their table now a disaster area, the Booksellers continue as if nothing had happened.

LONGMAN
Instead you will be paid one guinea per sheet of manuscript - provided it is neat enough to meet the typesetter's standards.

SAM
How will I afford supplies - paper, candles and such?

LONGMAN
Candles you must pay for yourself. Paper you can buy from us at a discounted rate.

Sam knows that this is the best deal he can hope for.

SAM
Then, gentlemen, I agree.

Longman and Dodsley smile. Millar manages a grimace.

140 MONTAGE 140

1. Dawn breaks, and the first light floods the garret. Sam leaps out of bed with gusto.

2. Sam sits at his desk compiling enthusiastically. He stops and looks at his work, and smiles with satisfaction.

3. At his desk, Sam hands Frank a pile of compiled dictionary copy, and Frank rushes off.

4. At Strahan's printworks, Frank hands the copy to Strahan. He inspects it, then gives Frank a handful of coins.

5. Tetty looks even sicker than before, weak and flushed. A sober NEW DOCTOR finishes examining her, as Sam looks on, extremely anxious. Sam pays him with a handful of coins.

6. A pile of handwritten sheets of Dictionary text grows on a shelf in the printworks.

7. Tetty is in bed, but has slumped forwards at an awkward angle, unconscious. Coming in, Sam sees her state with alarm, rushes to the bed, and gathers her to him. He holds her close - and can feel she is still alive. Panic subsiding, Sam gently leans her back onto her pillows, and tenderly rearranges them so that she is comfortable. His eyes are filled with mingled love and pain.

8. Sam has written "The Rambler No. 208. The Rambler bids his readers farewell."

9. The pile of Dictionary text on the printworks shelf has grown even larger. Longman, Dodsley, and Millar inspect it, and smile with relief.

141 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - DUSK 141

Sam is consulting his quotation file. Elizabeth comes in, her face white. One look at her, and Sam knows.

142 INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - DUSK, MOMENTS LATER 142

Tetty lies in bed, eyes closed, barely alive. Sam creeps towards her, full of dread. He sits on the bed next to her. She is motionless, but still breathing. Sam is suddenly convulsed by emotion.

Tetty's eyes open. Sam looks down at her, filled with terror and pain, willing her to stay with him. But after a second Tetty's eyes close again, and she slips away.

143 EXT. GRAVEYARD - AFTERNOON, A FEW DAYS LATER 143

A tranquil graveyard in Bromley, Kent. A coffin is lowered into the ground. A handful of earth falls onto it.

The sole mourner is Elizabeth the Maid, who has her bags with her. Sam is not there.

144 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 144

Sam lies in his bed, pinned down by grief, as he clutches the portrait brooch.

145 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - MORNING, DAYS LATER 145

Sam lies in exactly the same position, still clutching the portrait brooch. Garrick stands over him, deeply concerned. Garrick is hit by a pang of guilt.

GARRICK
I'm sorry, Sam.

Sam is distant, confused.

GARRICK (CONT'D)
About what happened...

Garrick struggles to get his apology out.

GARRICK (CONT'D)
On the night of the play.

SAM
Davy, you did your best. I am grateful to you.

Garrick's voice is strikingly subdued, almost a whisper.

GARRICK
No, before, about Tetty. My behaviour was unforgivable.

Sam shakes his head vehemently.

SAM
No, no, Davy. That was my fault. All my fault. I failed as a husband. I did not make her happy.

146 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - DUSK, THREE MONTHS LATER 146

Sam has not moved. He lies in bed, in a desperately dishevelled state, the portrait brooch by his side.

BANG! BANG! BANG! A loud sound breaks the silence. Sam looks up, bewildered. BANG! BANG! BANG! He locates the sound as his front door. Frank watches anxiously, as Sam hauls himself up.

147 INT. HALLWAY - DUSK, SEVERAL MONTHS LATER 147

BANG! BANG! BANG! Sam blunders towards the door, and opens it.

Millar, Longman and Dodsley stand there, fuming. Sam struggles to speak.

MILLAR
Mr Johnson, we have just come from Strahan's printworks. He tells us that he has not received any copy from you in over three months!

Sam reels from the force of this blast.

DODSLEY
You have our deepest sympathies over the death of your wife, Sam, but we have invested a lot of time and money in this Dictionary, and you have let us down.

Sam struggles to cope with this onslaught.

LONGMAN
Mr Johnson, we have come to the end of our voyage together.

The Booksellers turn their backs on Sam, and march off. Sam watches them go, numb and in shock.

148 EXT. SAM'S HOUSE GOUGH SQUARE - DUSK, MOMENTS LATER 148

Sam staggers out of his house. He is greeted by a curious sight. The square is full of cases, carts and carriages. The whole world seems to be packing up and leaving. Sam spots Miss Grainger about to get into a carriage. He approaches her.

SAM
Why is everyone leaving?

MISS GRAINGER
(surprised)
Haven't you heard?

Sam shakes his head dumbly.

MISS GRAINGER (CONT'D)
A plague of frogs was found in a pond in Hyde Park, and now the whole of London is convinced that there will be another earthquake tonight.

Sam looks around him in bewilderment.

149 EXT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - DUSK, MOMENTS LATER 149

Sam pushes the pub door, but it is closed.

150 EXT. FLEET STREET - DUSK, MOMENTS LATER 150

Sam spills out of Hind Court into Fleet Street, where he is greeted by the mother of all traffic jams, as every vehicle in London seems to be trying to leave the city via Temple Bar.

He walks along the street towards Temple Bar. The shops, pawnbroker's and gin shop are all shut up.

151 EXT. TEMPLE BAR - DUSK, MOMENTS LATER 151

Sam looks up at the prison grille. There are no boxes suspended on string. He calls up, but there is no reply.

152 EXT. DRURY LANE - DUSK, A SHORT WHILE LATER 152

Sam turns into Drury Lane. Further along the street, Davy Garrick stands outside the theatre with a bag. Filled with relief at the sight of his friend, Sam stumbles towards him.

A coach bowls past Sam, and comes to a halt by Garrick.

Sam waves his arms, but to no avail. Garrick does not see his friend. Garrick gets into the coach, and is whisked away, leaving Sam alone in the street.

153 EXT. GLASS FACTORY - DUSK, A SHORT WHILE LATER 153

Sam wanders through an eerie, steamy landscape of piles of warm ash. Nearby is a building with the sign "Glass Manufactory". Sam spots a figure on the ground, and rushes over.

Shiels lies motionless in the ash, grey as a ghost, surrounded by clinker in beautiful oxidized colours. Sam looks at him in horror. He kneels down, and gently brushes Shiels' forehead. The grey comes off, to reveal normal skin colour underneath. Sam heaves a sigh of relief, and shakes him gently to wake him. Still Shiels does not stir. Sam shakes him again... but Shiels is dead. A devastating blow. Then Sam notices something in the clinker, by Shiels' side - a book. He picks it up. On the spine is a familiar title: "Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland to the Time of Dean Swift".

154 EXT. FLEET STREET - DUSK, A SHORT WHILE LATER 154

Sam trudges along Fleet Street in the direction of home. He stops and looks around. The street is completely empty and eerily quiet.

Sam looks at Shiels' book in his hand. It falls open naturally, on a page about Pope. One couplet has been underlined. Sam reads it aloud.

SAM
"Thus vanish sceptres, coronets,
and balls,
And leave you in lone woods, or
empty walls."

Sam turns to the beginning of the book. There, under the familiar title, the first page states "by Mr. Cibber".

Sam's eyes fill with tears.

155 EXT. BOOKSHOP - DUSK 155

The Old Man has stepped away from the shop. He returns to the door and tugs at the chain again. He smiles with satisfaction.

OLD MAN
That should do it, Sam.

Above the door is a sign that says "Johnson's".

156 EXT. FLEET STREET - DUSK, CONTINUOUS 156

Sam stands desolate and all alone. In his hour of need, his beloved city has deserted him.

He looks down at the offending title page. Feeling a surge of anger, Sam snaps the book shut. He marches off with determination in the direction of home.

157 EXT. LONGMAN BOOKSELLER'S - LATER THAT NIGHT 157

Beneath the sign of the ship, Longman's shop is all closed up. Sam bends down and shoves a letter underneath the door.

158 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - NIGHT, A SHORT WHILE LATER 158

Sam marches into his garret holding a padlock and chain. Frank watches, astonished. Sam sits down at his desk, and chains himself to it, snapping the padlock shut. Sam flings the key into a far corner of the room, and picks up his quill.

Frank is deeply perturbed.

Chained to his desk, Sam looks down at the sheets of paper and quotation slips in front of him. He starts muttering to himself.

SAM
Caitiff - a slave and a knave...
"The wretched caitiff, all alone,
As he believ'd, began to moan,
And tell his story to himself."

Sam starts writing.

MONTHS LATER

Sam is still writing. Sheets have mounted up on his desk.

SAM (CONT'D)
Damask rose... Dame... Damn...

As Sam compiles, the word "damn" floats off the page, and hangs in the air. He flinches.

SAM (CONT'D)
Damnable, damnably, damnation...

More and more words crowd around him, filling him with terror.

SAM (CONT'D)
Damned, damnific, damnify, damningness...

But Sam keeps writing, doggedly persevering...

MONTHS LATER

Sam's dictionary garret has degenerated into a filthy state - the air thick with cheap candle smoke, and the walls singed with black marks. Sam, still writing, bent over his desk, looks older, more dishevelled, more tormented.

SAM (CONT'D)
Loiter...loll...lomp...lone...

The word "lone" floats off the page, and hangs in the air.

SAM (CONT'D)
Loneliness, lonely, loneness...

The words crowd around him again.

SAM (CONT'D)
Lonesome.

Bam! Sam's chair crashes to the ground as he stands up, in a sudden, decisive action. He grips his desk.

SAM (CONT'D)
Let's go to the pub!

He turns to look at the trestle tables. Needing no second bidding, Macbean, Peyton, Maitland and Shiels leap up enthusiastically, sending quotation slips flying.

Sam lurches away from his desk. Yank! He is immediately pulled back by the chain. Sam falls to the ground. He sits on the floor, looking around him in a daze. The Poets have vanished.

Sam is distraught. He casts around the room, desperate for human company. Sam looks towards the door.

Tetty comes through it smiling.

Sam's heart leaps with joy. Tetty comes closer. Sam reaches towards her, full of longing. Tetty bends down towards him, and Sam flings his arms around her. She vanishes. Sam looks in anguish at the empty space. He calls out.

SAM (CONT'D)
Frank!

But the garret is empty, and silent as the grave, smoke hanging in the air. Sam realizes that he is totally alone.

159 EXT. BOOKSHOP - DUSK 159

One last look at the front of the shop, and the Old Man's security ritual is complete. He turns around.

MICHAEL JOHNSON
Always remember, son, that books are very precious.

Satisfied, he walks down the side of the shop, and heads off through the rain.

As Michael Johnson walks away, the back of the bookshop is revealed. It is totally dilapidated, and has mostly rotted away, leaving the books inside exposed to the elements.

160 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - NIGHT 160

Sam sits on the floor, grief-stricken and dazed.

161 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - NIGHT, WEEKS LATER 161

Sam, pale as death now, is chained to his desk - writing, writing. He pauses, and looks down at the Dictionary manuscript in front of him. He has reached "M".

SAM
Maculate...maculation...macule... mad.

The word hits Sam like a dart.

SAM (CONT'D)
Mad...mad...mad.

He pats the quotation slips on his desk, making strange paddling motions with his hands. His fingers finally rest on one, and he picks it up. He holds it close to his short-sighted eyes, and reads it.

SAM (CONT'D)
"We must bind our passions in chains, left like mad-folks they break their locks and bolts, and do all the mischief they can"

Sam clutches the quotation slip, racked with pain. He picks up his inclusion list, and reads aloud from it, manically.

SAM (CONT'D)
Mad...

The word floats off the page. Sam paddles with his hands on the desk.

SAM (CONT'D)
Madbrain... madbrained...

He paddles his hands more furiously, but to no avail. These words float off too. Sam paddles with his hands and feet, faster and louder, his fetters jangling.

SAM (CONT'D)
Madhouse... madman...

These words float off, and join the others, crowding around him.

SAM (CONT'D)
Madness!

Sam closes his eyes tight, and clasps his hands together in passionate prayer.

SAM (CONT'D)
Heavenly Father, Almighty God, look with mercy upon the affliction of thy unworthy servant, and loose me from the chain of my sins.

Sam opens his eyes. But the floating words are still there.

With an almighty sweep of his giant arms, Sam swipes all the books and papers off his desk. But the floating words still crowd around him.

Sam's head hits the desk.

162 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - AFTERNOON, NEXT DAY 162

Sam lies motionless, in the same position, with his head on his desk. His face is contorted with madness.

163 INT. DRURY LANE THEATRE - AFTERNOON 163

Garrick is rehearsing a play on stage with Hannah Pritchard, both with scripts in hand, and Garrick making a great speech.

164 INT. APOTHECARY'S SHOP - AFTERNOON 164

Frank is on his hands and knees scrubbing the floor. He stops for a rest, and the APOTHECARY gives him a kick.

165 EXT. TEMPLE BAR - AFTERNOON 165

A small box on a string hangs in midair. Macbean's face is at the prison grille.

166 INT. PAWNBROKER'S - AFTERNOON 166

Maitland, clad only in breeches, puts the brown coat that Sam gave him on the Pawnbroker's counter.

167 EXT. FLEET STREET - AFTERNOON 167

Outside the gin shop, Peyton, ragged quill in hand, struggles to write alone.

168 INT. LONGMAN BOOKSELLER'S - AFTERNOON 168

The Booksellers work quietly, Cave scrutinizing a copy of the "Gentleman's Magazine", Dodsley reading a manuscript, Millar going through accounts, and Longman presiding behind the counter. In front of them, the splendid "Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française" dominates the room.

169 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - DUSK 169

Sam lies on his desk, still in chains, immobile. His eyes are as grey as boiled gooseberries, expressionless, dead.

Above him, the quotation filing system hangs like a skeleton, stripped of all but a few shreds of flesh.

Scattered on the floor around him, are the dusty, decomposing remains of the Dictionary, battered and dismembered - literary carnage.

170 INT. DICTIONARY GARRET - MORNING 170

Sam suddenly sits up from his desk.

SAM
Zootomy.

And there, in front of him, is the last page of Dictionary text, with the completed entry for "zootomy".

171 EXT. GOUGH SQUARE - MORNING, A SHORT WHILE LATER 171

The front door of Number 17 opens, and Sam emerges from his house, blinking in the bright sunlight, dishevelled as a derelict and pale as death. He is carrying the last sheet of Dictionary text in his big hands.

Suddenly, the two Bailiffs leap out and grab Sam. The Chandler appears.

CHANDLER
Mr Johnson, your candle account is two guineas in the red.

SAM
Mr Chandler, I will be able to pay you very soon. I am on my way to deliver the last page of a great work to Mr Strahan, the printer. I will settle my accounts with the booksellers there.

CHANDLER
Then we shall accompany you.

172 INT. STRAHAN'S PRINTWORKS - MORNING, MOMENTS LATER 172

Dodsley, Longman, Millar and Cave are sitting at a table with Strahan. Millar is doing the accounts. The mood is tense.

MILLAR
To recoup our costs, the Dictionary needs to retail at four pounds ten shillings a copy.

LONGMAN
An expensive book.

MILLAR
And a great temptation to pirates.

This worries them.

DODSLEY
We need to establish the Dictionary's authority. We must create an image of the author as a man of great stature.

Splat! Enter Sam, ragged and rank, and flanked by the Bailiffs. The Chandler brings up the rear.

At the sight of Sam's extremity, Longman and Dodsley are dismayed, Cave concerned, and Millar enraged. Strahan tries not to smile. Sam holds out the sheet of manuscript to Strahan.

SAM
The last sheet.

Longman and Dodsley almost melt with relief.

MILLAR
Only six years late.

Sam stands there, blinking, in the grip of the Bailiffs.

Longman turns to Millar.

LONGMAN
I think we had better give Mr Johnson his final payment.

Millar consults his accounts. Sam prays silently, hoping that it will be a good amount.

MILLAR
It seems, Mr Johnson, that you owe us twelve pounds, four shillings, and threepence.

Sam looks at Millar in shock - how can this be?

MILLAR (CONT'D)
Your paper bill.

Sam is too weary to put up a fight.

CHANDLER
To the magistrate!

The Bailiffs drag Sam towards the door.

LONGMAN
Wait!

The Bailiffs stop. Longman turns to the Chandler.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
How much does Mr Johnson owe you?

CHANDLER
Two guineas.

LONGMAN
Andrew, pay the man.

Millar is incensed. But Longman remains adamant. Millar fishes out the money reluctantly, and hands it to the Chandler. The Chandler vanishes, along with the Bailiffs.

LONGMAN (CONT'D)
And, Mr Johnson, we will let you off your paper bill.

Millar is further outraged. Sam collapses with exhausted relief into a chair. But Millar hasn't finished with him yet. He picks up a pile of printed final text.

MILLAR
I've been looking over some of the Dictionary text...

He glowers at Sam.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
Many of the definitions leave a lot to be desired.

Sam is stung.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
"Etch - a word of which I know not the meaning"...

Dodsley and Longman look distinctly perturbed. Sam is embarrassed. Strahan stifles a smile.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
"Oats - a grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people"...

Strahan is deeply offended. Cave finds this rather amusing, but Longman looks extremely stern.

MILLAR (CONT'D)
"Patron - commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery"!

LONGMAN
What!!!!

DODSLEY
What!!!!

Cave's smile vanishes. Millar delivers his killer blow.

MILLAR
I heard a rumour that the "Dictionary of the English Language" was written by Lord Chesterfield.

Sam struggles with his emotions, as the anger and frustration of decades boils up inside him.

Even Cave is taken aback by such a low trick. But Dodsley and Longman give Millar's idea serious thought.

DODSLEY
I suppose the definition of "patron" could be explained as his Lordship's self-depreciating little joke.

Dodsley's betrayal is the final straw for Sam. He explodes.

SAM
This is my work!

Sam summons up all his self-control, and delivers a speech from the heart.

SAM (CONT'D)
If our language is not fully displayed, then I have only failed where no human powers have before succeeded. Every other author may aspire to praise, but the lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach. But no dictionary can ever be perfect, because no living tongue is perfect.

Millar looks at Sam with total scepticism.

SAM (CONT'D)
Chaos is an inevitable part of language, just as it is an inevitable part of life. The language cannot be tamed, but it has been illuminated.

Millar snorts disdainfully. Sam faces him head on.

SAM (CONT'D)
Your critique of the Dictionary, Mr Millar, can only exist because I have written it!

Longman, Dodsley and Cave are surprised - they have never seen Sam this assertive before. Millar glowers.

SAM (CONT'D)
I have devoted this book to the honour of my country, that we may no longer be mocked by the nations of the continent.

Longman and Dodsley nod, almost imperceptibly.

SAM (CONT'D)
Whether I shall add anything by my own writings to the reputation of English letters, must be left to time. But I shall not think my employment useless or ignoble, if by my assistance, foreign nations and distant ages gain access to Shakespeare, to Dryden, Milton, and Pope - propagators of knowledge, and the teachers of truth!

Sam draws himself up to his full, gigantic height.

SAM (CONT'D)
Because the chief glory of a nation, is its authors! And the author of the Dictionary, is me.

Cave clasps his hands with delight at Sam's speech. Criticism has been silenced. Sam takes a breath, recovering.

CAVE
So, are you free to come back to the "Gentleman's Magazine" now, Sam? Same rate as before.

Sam looks at Cave in stunned disbelief.

173 INT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - AFTERNOON, SEVERAL MONTHS LATER 173

Splat! Sam, his old scruffy self, lands in the Cheshire Cheese. Inside, a party is in full swing. The smarter end of the publishing world is out in force, and dressed in their best. Sam sighs. He never felt less in the party mood.

Wandering further into the room, Sam spots Garrick in full flow, and his spirits rise. But they fall just as quickly when he sees who Garrick is speaking to - Lord Chesterfield.

Sam spots Macbean, Maitland and Peyton, over in their usual corner, in celebratory mood. Relieved, Sam struggles through the crowd to reach them. Suddenly, everyone goes quiet.

Longman, Dodsley and Millar stand on a raised platform.

DODSLEY
Lords, ladies, and gentlemen, I have the pleasure to present...

The CROWD parts for two FOOTMEN, each bearing an object covered by a cloth. Sam watches them process by, vaguely amused by such pomp and circumstance. The Footmen reach the table in front of the Booksellers.

DODSLEY (CONT'D)
The "Dictionary of the English Language"!

Applause. The Footmen whip away the cloths. There is the Dictionary - a truly splendid sight, its two majestic volumes bound in dark red leather, and embossed with gold.

Sam is drawn towards it. He opens the cover, and there on the first page, is the title "Dictionary of the English Language". Below it, in red, is the author's name - "Samuel Johnson A.M.". Sam feels a rush of pride.

Maitland points to the A.M. after Sam's name.

MAITLAND
I thought you got kicked out of university!

SAM
I did. But in recognition of my work on the Dictionary, Oxford saw fit to award me an honorary degree.

Sam smiles - decades of bitter failure finally expunged.

LATER

Macbean has commandeered one of the volumes. He looks at the entry for: "SCALE". There is his quotation, and his name in print: "In contemplation's *scale* I'll soar/ And be enraptur'd more and more. Macbean". Macbean does a little jig for joy.

Peyton has the other volume of the Dictionary, and is running his finger down one of the pages.

PEYTON
Discord...

His finger stops. Peyton is triumphant.

PEYTON (CONT'D)
Discordant!

He tries this new item of vocabulary for size.

PEYTON (CONT'D)
Mary, my love, each time we part,
Tis like discordant music in my heart.

Peyton smiles with satisfaction - the Dictionary actually does its job.

Dodsley approaches Longman and Millar, with a decidedly animated air.

DODSLEY
Lord Chesterfield's comments on the Dictionary were extremely favourable. He is willing to be credited as patron on future print runs!

But Sam is listening too, and he has other ideas. Locating Chesterfield on the far side of the room, next to Garrick, Sam calls out.

SAM
Your Lordship!

The room falls silent. Urbane as ever, Chesterfield turns to look at Sam.

CHESTERFIELD
Mr Johnson?

Dodsley moves quickly to avert disaster.

SAM
Forgive me, for I had a little difficulty with my definition of "patron"...

Alarmed, Dodsley tries to steer Chesterfield away. But Chesterfield resists.

SAM (CONT'D)
What is a patron? One who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has finally reached ground, encumbers him with help?

The Poets explode with laughter. Longman is aghast, Millar incensed. Garrick is astounded. Dodsley puts his head in his hands. But Chesterfield remains unruffled.

CHESTERFIELD
I apologize, Mr Johnson. I fear I mislaid your address.

Chesterfield pats Dodsley reassuringly on the arm, then turns to leave.

For a split second, with his back to the company, Chesterfield's mask slips, and we see that Sam has got to him.

Sam continues his speech.

SAM
I have wandered in a vast sea of words, and have finally reached land.

The speech takes a more sombre tone.

SAM (CONT'D)
Many of those whom I wished to please, have sunk into the grave - Robert Shiels...

The Poets silently pay their respects.

SAM (CONT'D)
The true author of "Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland to the Time of Dean Swift"...

There are a few raised eyebrows around the room.

SAM (CONT'D)
My wife, Tetty...

174 EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY 174

Sam stands in the rain, in a lush and leafy graveyard, by Tetty Johnson's grave.

SAM (O.C. CONT'D)
Without whose love and support, the Dictionary would not have been possible...

He bows his head in respect.

175 INT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 175

Sam continues his speech.

SAM (CONT'D)
And Edward Cave.

176 INT. OFFICE OF THE GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE - DAY 176

The splendid portrait of Cave on his office wall.

Beneath it, CAVE's body lies in a grand open coffin.

177 INT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 177

The Booksellers feel the loss of their friend.

Sam continues his speech.

SAM (CONT'D)
A mere literary man is a dull man. A man who is solely a man of business is a selfish man...

The Booksellers are stung by this barb.

SAM (CONT'D)
But when literature and commerce are united, they make a respectable man.

The Booksellers wonder where this is going.

Sam gestures towards them.

SAM (CONT'D)
The booksellers have raised the price of literature in the land. They are generous, liberal-minded men.

General applause. Longman and Dodsley smile with genuine warmth. Millar, aware that his ordeal is now over, manages a weak smile of relief.

Garrick comes over to Sam, full of admiration. He reaches up, and claps his giant friend on the shoulder. Sam glows. Friends again, Sam and Garrick set off together, passing the Booksellers on their way to the exit.

MILLAR
Thank God I am done with him!

Just out of Millar's hearing, comes Sam's riposte.

SAM
I am glad he thanks God for anything.

Garrick smiles, amused.

178 EXT. THAMES - LATE AFTERNOON, MOMENTS LATER 178

Sam and Garrick walk along by the Thames, bathed in a warm golden light. They come to a stop.

GARRICK
It's seventeen years since we set out from Staffordshire to seek our fortunes in this fair city.

Sam knows only too well. He looks out at the Thames, full of little boats.

Behind them, the dome of St Paul's dominates the skyline, the sky tinged with pink. London looks truly magnificent. Sam smiles.

SAM
When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life!

GARRICK
Wasn't it Shakespeare who said that?

SAM
(testily)
No!

He turns, and sees that Garrick is teasing him.

SAM (CONT'D)
It was me -

Sam looks out at his world with a new confidence.

SAM (CONT'D)
Samuel Johnson.

The awkward young poet is no more. Samuel Johnson is a literary Colossus, who knows that his place in history is secured.

Somewhere behind him, no doubt outside a gin shop, a small riot starts.

CAPTIONS:

The Académie Française recognized Sam's Dictionary by formally presenting him with copies of their own.

Sam's Dictionary remained the standard dictionary of English for over a hundred years, and is still used to interpret the U.S. Constitution.

Within a year of the publication of the Dictionary, Sam was arrested for debt.

2. Thesis

My impossible task? Writing an ethical biopic of Samuel Johnson

Introduction

> You can't handle the truth!
> Hollywood's obsession with distorting the facts has led to a rash of 'liopics'.

Film critic William Thomas (2002, p. 34) attacks the Hollywood biopic for its factual inaccuracies, singling out Akiva Goldsman, writer of *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), the biopic of mathematician John Nash. Thomas accuses Goldsman of unethical practice, of airbrushing out Nash's bisexuality and abandonment of his wife, in order to ensure 'punter- and Oscar-friendly material'. I had enjoyed the film immensely, and felt a sense of betrayal at this revelation. This was a brilliantly crafted script, deservedly winning the 2001 Oscar for best adapted screenplay. But was it really necessary to lie to the audience in this way?

'Biopics aren't my favourite form of movie,' says Bill Condon (2004, 00:01:28). This may seem a surprising remark from the writer and director of biopics *Gods and Monsters* (1998) and *Kinsey* (2004), but the biopic is not an easy genre to get right. The biopic can be defined as a film about a real person and the story of his[1] life, or a portion of his life, which employs the techniques of fiction, rather than documentary. The term 'biopic' normally refers to films intended for theatrical release, rather than television single dramas.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the 'liopic' lies the danger of the 'big, bland biopic', a phrase coined by the reviewer of the *Village Voice* (Maland, 1997, p.54) to describe *Chaplin* (1992), and which might equally be applied to *Ali* (2001). The 'big, bland biopic' is one that remains faithful to the story of the life at the expense of dramatic structure, with an over-long and aimless narrative as the unfortunate result. It has an equivalent in what literary biographers call a 'hagiography' – an over-reverential biographical portrayal.

---

[1] My response to the lack of a gender-neutral pronoun in English is to generally refer to the subject as 'he', and the writer as 'she'.

[1] My response to the lack of a gender-neutral pronoun in English is to generally refer to the subject as 'he', and the writer as 'she'.

In 2003 I was just beginning to write my biopic of the great eighteenth-century lexicographer and writer Samuel Johnson, which forms the practice part of this practice-based PhD, and wanted to avoid the dangers of both the 'liopic' and the 'big bland' hagiography. My research question is: is it possible to write a biopic that is both ethical and a good film? And is there some kind of framework that can help the biopic writer to achieve this? By a 'good film' I mean one that is both emotionally engaging and entertaining for a large audience. By an 'ethical biopic', I mean a truthful one.

Ethical Biopic

My notion of an ethical biopic comes from a desire to form a professional code of practice, based on my sense of responsibility towards both the real people portrayed as characters, and the audience watching my film.

By an 'ethical biopic' I mean a truthful one, which avoids the two extremes of hagiography and defamation. When considering whether a portrayal is defamatory, Michael Rose (2009a), entertainment law expert for the website of *The Stage*, has the following advice: 'The test is whether what is written or said or done may bring the person concerned into hatred, ridicule or contempt'.

I felt that an ethical portrayal was of paramount importance in the case of my subject, Samuel Johnson, but I also wanted to see if I could apply the same ethical standards to the portrayal of the real people who make up my secondary and tertiary characters. Since all of the real people in my biopic are dead, I do not have to worry about the possibility of a law suit. As Rose (2009b) explains: 'under English law ... a dead person cannot be defamed'. However, this does not mean that someone's ancestors or compatriots cannot be hurt, as the case of the portrayal of First Officer William Murdoch as a tertiary character in the film *Titanic* (1997) proves. The film showed Murdoch as 'a corrupt coward and a murderer who shot passengers and then took his own life', when there is no evidence that any of this is true. In his hometown Murdoch is remembered as a hero, and 'is described by historians as having done his utmost to save passengers' (BBC News, 1998). The vice-president of 20th Century Fox travelled to Murdoch's Scottish hometown and made a formal apology, but Murdoch's nephew (BBC News) was still deeply hurt:

> 'In three or four years people will have forgotten about this ceremony but the film and video will still portray my uncle as a murderer when he was a hero and helped save many passengers'.

Film is an extremely powerful medium. The whole purpose of screenwriting is to create a world that draws the audience in and holds their attention, and in order to achieve that, the world must be both captivating and convincing. Caroline Merz (1983, p.9) believes that biopics 'signal their own fictionality so prominently' that there is no likelihood of audiences 'confusing the "reality" they create with the "real" reality in the world.' I am certain audiences understand that biopics are fictionalized versions of the subject's life, and that they expect the film to contain elements that are made up. However, for the audience there is no way of knowing which elements of the biopic are true, and which are fiction.

George F. Custen, in his *Bio/pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (1992, p.7), claims that biopics are often an audience's only source of information on a particular historical person or subject, and this does ring true. *Amadeus* (1984) signals its own fictionality very clearly, employing an unreliable narrator who tells his story from the confines of an asylum. Yet as Carolyn Anderson (1988, p.339) points out: 'For many moviegoers, Tom Hulce's madcap is the only Mozart they will ever know.' Custen (p.16) argues convincingly that, in time, the source of the information is forgotten or misattributed, and the knowledge gained from it becomes, to use Polanyi's (1967) terminology, 'tacit' knowledge – simply what we know.

Added to this is the fact that film is also an international medium, dubbed into many languages, and shown to audiences in many parts of the world. The biopic has the power to create enduring incarnations of real people on a global scale. This is why I feel a great weight of responsibility as the writer of this film.

William Nicholson (2009, 0:10:25–0:10:35), screenwriter of biopics *Shadowlands* (1993) and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007), summarizes his approach to these ethical dilemmas thus:

> I've come to the conclusion that the test is to imagine the real person watching it with you when it's finished, and if you die with embarrassment, you've done something wrong.

Will I be able to imagine sitting comfortably next to the real people portrayed in my biopic when it is finished? I hope this will be possible, but at this early stage in the project, cannot be sure. The title of my thesis is a question, 'my impossible task?', because I do not know whether an ethical portrayal is possible in the case of the protagonist, let alone the secondary and tertiary characters and those occupying the role of antagonist in the film.

Hollywood Screenwriting

In my practice I have made a commitment to follow the conventions of classic Hollywood screenwriting, as set out by screenwriting theorist Syd Field (1984), and developed, among others, by Michael Hauge (1988), Robert McKee (1999), Linda Seger (1992), and Phil Parker (1998), and which has its origins in the conventions for dramatic structure set out in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1996, written c. 335 BC). My analysis in the thesis deliberately confines itself to this model of a script. The essential tenet of the Hollywood model is the three act structure, which I outline briefly in Appendix 1, and which I discuss in depth in relation to my practice in chapter 2.

The Hollywood model also has a great impact on characterization, as Hauge explains in *Writing Screenplays That Sell* (1988), and which I discuss in depth in relation to my practice in chapter 3.

It is possible to write a successful biographical film that does not follow these conventions, such as Federico Fellini's *Casanova* (1976), considered a masterpiece of the European art film tradition; and works from independent filmmakers, such as Mike Leigh's *Vera Drake* (2004), and Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2006). However, I have chosen to follow the Hollywood model for screenwriting, because what I enjoy best as a viewer is a film that adheres to these conventions and yet is still original and surprising. The familiar form has the effect of making the audience feel comfortable, while the content challenges them. I feel that eighteenth-century lexicography is challenging and unfamiliar subject matter, which does not have obvious mass appeal. The Hollywood model has been developed with the aim of appealing to a mass audience, and so I hope that by adopting it, I can achieve my aim of transforming potentially dry subject matter into accessible entertainment.

I could have chosen to tell Johnson's story as a docudrama, such as television films *Longitude* (2000) and *Shackleton* (2002), which are longer than films for theatrical release, and are not bound by Hollywood's structural constraints. This would probably have been a better way to convey the facts of Johnson's life and lexicography. As stated above, one of my main aims was to convey the truth of Johnson's life, but as we shall see later in this thesis, facts are just one type of truth. A major difference between docudrama and the Hollywood biopic, is that the former errs on the side of fact while the latter errs on the side of emotion. Emotional engagement is one of the key stated aims of my practice. Overall, the Hollywood model seemed the best one to adopt in order to achieve my aims.

Literature Review

There has been little serious study of the biopic, and almost nothing dealing specifically with screenwriting. For this reason, throughout the thesis, I refer to the field of literary biography when it can be used to help fill this gap.

There are only two books published on the subject of the biopic. The first is Robert Miller's (1983) *Star Myths: Show Business Biographies on Film*, which attempts to define the sub genre of showbiz biopics, based on an analysis of over 125 American theatrical and television biographical films made in the period 1930–1982. The second is George F. Custen's (1992) *Bio/pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History*, which argues powerfully that, during the classical era of 1927–1960, Hollywood used the biopic to systematically alter the American public's perception of history, reducing the lives and achievements of great men, and a small number of women, to a uniform formula that promoted the producers' own world view and conservative values. Neither of these books deals specifically with screenwriting.

There is little help available for the writer of biopics from the screenwriting theorists or the teachers of the craft. Dancyger and Rush (1995, p.68) devote a little under a page of *Alternative Scriptwriting: Writing Beyond the Rules* to the genre of biographical film, giving a list of what they consider to be the ten key characteristics of the biographical film genre. However, these are in note form and not contextualized, and so of limited help. Dancyger and Rush make no mention of the ethical issue.

The best source of help for biopic writers is to be found in Linda Seger's *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film* (1992), despite the fact that the terms 'biopic' or 'biographical film' are not used. In the field of screenwriting, the term 'adaptation' is normally used to refer to the process of transforming a literary work such as a novel, short story, or play into a film, but Seger broadens it out to include what she calls 'true-life story', giving the autobiography *My Left Foot* (1989) and its adaptation for the screen as a case study, in her chapter entitled 'Why True-Life Story Resists Film'.

Seger makes extremely valuable points, especially about structure, which I will come back to in chapter 2. But she makes no specific mention of the ethical issues, and her position with regard to fact and truth is difficult to discern. She praises the adapters of Christy Brown's *My Left Foot* for solving the problem of translating the protagonist's 'rich inner life' into the more objective medium of film (p.49): 'by not following the book at all. By drawing on other material besides the book and combining and changing characters and situations, they created a film.' Here Seger sanctions the changing of the protagonist's life story in order to make the film. However, a few pages on (pp.50–51), Seger relates how she rejected the life story of a country and western singer as a possible film, because it could not be made to fit dramatic structure with ease. Seger's overall position (p.9), however, is that in order for the adaptation to be a success, the original material must be changed: 'The adaptation is a new original. The adaptor looks for the balance between preserving the spirit of the original and creating a new form.'

Richard Krevolin, in *How To Adapt Anything Into A Screenplay* (2003, p.10), takes a boldly uncompromising view:

> Rule number 1: *You owe nothing to the original text! ...*
> Rule number 2: *If it makes for a good story it stays, if not it must be trashed!*

Krevolin's statement that the writer owes nothing to the original is far too extreme for the purpose of the ethical biopic. If the writer owes nothing to the original, then she is not adapting, but fictionalizing. However, Krevolin's second point is worth considering, since it supports my desire to entertain and to avoid the danger of the 'big bland' hagiography. The second part of Krevolin's demand is absolutely right – anything that does not make for a good story must be trashed. The first part, however, does not

apply to the ethical biopic, since decisions about inclusion cannot be based on entertainment value alone. Truth must also play an important part. And truth in the biopic, as my thesis will show, is complex and not just of one kind.

Alan Rosenthal, in *Writing Docudrama* (1995, pp.207–209), agrees with Krevolin's demand that the biopic be entertaining, whilst introducing a new priority, being 'true to the spirit' of the subject. He states (p.208) that: 'Accuracy is only a beginning. Beyond that you have to capture the real spirit of a person. If you fail in that, then however technically accurate your film is regarding facts, details, dates, and events, it will be a failure'. The complicated relationship between truth, accuracy, the subject, and the subject's spirit is something that I will explore later in this thesis.

Methodology

The methodology of my practice conforms to the usual professional process of screenwriting, which is briefly explained in Appendix 1 for the reader who is unfamiliar with this. The methodology of my thesis has been guided by debates in literary biography.

Bernard Crick (1980, p.xxiv) argues in the introduction to *George Orwell: A Life*, that it is the duty of the literary biographer to 'show how he reaches his conclusions, not to pretend to omniscience, and he should share things that are moot, problematic and uncertain with the reader.' A literary biographer can be open with the reader, and state specifically which parts are fact and which interpretation or conjecture. A biopic in the classic Hollywood mould cannot. The biopic writer must do her research, wrestle with the contradictions and gaps in the knowledge, decide upon her interpretation, then leave all of her workings-out behind, and present her chosen view with confidence and conviction in the form of the polished final draft. The goal of my practice is to draw the audience into the world that I have created. The purpose of this thesis, however, is to do what Crick demands, and show my workings-out.
Whilst still in the initial planning stages of the project, I developed an ethical framework, a list of guidelines to adhere to, pertaining to both structure and character. These are two of the most important elements of a script, and each brought distinct ethical questions into focus.

Structure –

i. to keep to chronological order;
ii. to include all the important events of the subject's life during the chosen time period;
iii. to only include fictional episodes which I believe could have happened, at least in a similar way.

Character –

i. to portray my subject in a way which I believe to be true;
ii. to portray secondary characters as fairly and accurately as possible.

However, I was mindful of the fact that it would be extremely difficult to keep to these criteria. Writing a screenplay is a complex and difficult process, without imposing any additional restrictions. I was reminded of Alan Bennett (1995, p.xxx) screenwriter of *The Madness of King George* (1994). A historian before he became a writer, Bennett relates that during the initial writing stages he would have been outraged at the suggestion of taking the King to Westminster to confront the MPs, instead of setting the scene in Kew where it actually happened. But Bennett admits that such purism could not be sustained:

> By the time I was plodding through the third draft I would have taken the King to Blackpool if I thought it would have helped.

Like Bennett's, my journey as a writer did not go according to plan. And the issues of truth in the biopic turned out to be far more complex than I could ever have anticipated.

Chapter 1, 'Truth', will explore the concept of truth in biopics, and will show how I came to my interpretation of Johnson. Chapter 2, 'Structure', will explore the ethical issues which arose during the process of turning the story of Johnson's life into a three-act screenplay. Chapter 3, 'Character', will explore the ethical issues which arose when I turned historical people into characters in my film. My *Conclusion* will present a revised ethical framework, based on my experience of writing *Sam J.*

Chapter 1

Truth

> When I was writing *Shadowlands* I realized that the little boy in the story – was aged nine – was going to become quite an important character. That little boy, of course, was very much alive and living in Tasmania, and he eventually showed up. And he said: 'But I didn't say any of this', and to his eternal credit, when he saw the film, he got it. He said: 'What you have put on screen is not true, but it's the truest thing I've ever seen about my stepfather and my mother.'
>
> William Nicholson (2009, 00:10:00–00:10:25)

As I stated in my introduction, by my concept of an ethical biopic, I mean a truthful one. However, as we can see from this quotation about *Shadowlands*, the story of the relationship between writer C. S. Lewis and poet Joy Gresham, truth in biographical portrayals is not a simple black and white matter. Douglas Gresham, portrayed as a little boy in *Shadowlands*, says that the film is not true in one sense, but true in another, and so it seems that there is more than one type of truth in biographical portrayals. I decided to try and tease out the different types of truth, and began to see them as forming a spectrum that runs from fact through to myth:

fact > truth of personality > emotional truth > universal truth > myth

Facts are verifiable truths. Johnson was born in Lichfield on 18 September 1709. On 18 June 1746 Johnson signed a contract with a consortium of booksellers to compile a dictionary of the English language. On 17 March 1752 Tetty Johnson died. Some time shortly after Tetty's death, the young slave boy Frank Barber came to live in Johnson's house. These definitely happened. Chronology, the order of events in the subject's life, is also part of this truth type.

When Douglas Gresham says that what Nicholson has put on the screen in *Shadowlands* is not true, I assume that he is referring to the facts of his mother's life. However, the verifiable facts of someone's life, when put together, tell you very little about them, as Thomas Carlyle's (2002, first published 1833–4, p.207) fictional German philosopher, Teufelsdrockh, says: '"What are your historical Facts; still more your biographical? Wilt thou know a Man, above all a Mankind, by stringing together bead-rolls of what thou namest Facts?"' Whilst the facts in themselves are true, stringing together the facts of someone's life does not convey the truth about him:

> There is a virtue in truth; it has an almost mystic power. Like radium, it seems able to give off for ever and ever grains of energy, atoms of light. It stimulates the mind, which is endowed with a curious susceptibility in this direction as no fiction, however artful or highly coloured can stimulate it. Truth being efficacious and supreme, we can only explain the fact that Sir Sidney's life of Shakespeare is dull, and that his life of Edward the Seventh is unreadable, by supposing that though both are stuffed with truth, he failed to choose those truths which transmit personality.
>
> (Virginia Woolf, 1927, p.473)

The facts must be selected by the biographer, and woven into a narrative through which the personality of the subject is revealed. Virginia Woolf sees biographical portrayal in terms of the evocative metaphor the 'marriage of granite and rainbow' (1927, p.473), where granite represents the facts about the subject, and rainbow his personality and spirit. We are reminded of Rosenthal's (p. 207) commandment to be 'true to the spirit' of the subject.

Here I see the 'personality' as being the collective traits – psychological, intellectual, emotional and physical – that make someone an individual. The concept of the subject's 'spirit' is a part of this personality – his attitude to life and other people. It should be noted here that this is a 20th-/21st-century view of what constitutes personality. Even when a biopic portrays a character from pre-Freudian times, the contemporary audience will expect the portrayal to conform to commonly held 20th-/21st-century notions of personality, based on psychological and psychoanalytic approaches.

In biopics it is common practice for screenwriters to write a non-factual scene, which nevertheless conveys the truth of the personality of the protagonist. In *Ray* (2004) director Taylor Hackford (2004, 0:02:44 – 0:04: 49) invents a scene where the young Ray Charles wants to leave his home town in Florida and set out on an odyssey across the United States, but is told by a bus driver that he will not allow a blind man to travel without a guide:

> But there's no way in the world that Ray is not gonna get across the country. So on the spot he improvises, as he improvises in his music, and he devises a lie, he devises a story about him being a veteran and losing his eyes in the war. ... It's ... post war late 1940s, and ... you see a lot of wounded veterans coming back. So Ray effectively gets his way and talks himself across America. You know there was no way that Ray Charles was gonna be deterred from his goal, ... driving forward.

This conversation between the bus driver and Ray Charles never happened. It is a fiction invented by Hackford to capture the truth of Ray's personality – his quick-thinking intelligence and determined, independent spirit.

This is the truth that Douglas Gresham is referring to in *Shadowlands* – the truth about the personalities of his stepfather and mother, what they were like as individuals, and since this is the story of a relationship, how they affected each other. Part of this truth of personality is the truth of Joy Gresham and C. S. Lewis' emotional journey, how they responded emotionally to each other and to the events at this time in their lives. This is the third point on my spectrum – 'emotional truth'.

Emotional truth is not dependent upon factual truth, as this case study in Krevolin (pp. 119–139) illustrates. *Madison* (2001), written by Scott Bindley, is a 'triumph-of-the-underdog' sports story, based on the remarkable true achievements of a real community in the field of hydroplane power boat racing. Bindley explains how he had to radically alter the story in the process of adaptation, compressing it in time and amalgamating characters. Despite this, however, the real people of the town responded (Krevolin, p. 13) to the finished film with tears and cheers: '"When the real characters watch our film, I truly believe the emotions we portray onscreen take them right back to the emotions they felt during their lives, regardless that we changed the years and the names"'. It is therefore possible to convey emotional truth using a factually inaccurate story.

Bindley chose to prioritise the emotional truth above the factual truth of his story. This is the essential difference between drama and documentary.

Scott Hicks (Sardi,1997, p. v), director of the biopic *Shine* (1996), felt that his biopic could better convey the truth about his subject, pianist David Helfgott, and his mental health than a fact-based psychological or medical account:

> For me these ideas lay outside the structures of diagnosis, therapy, and the clinical – the TV movie of the week fare. Rather the power and poetry of the story lay in the emotional journey of an artist who finds himself consumed by the very medium he is trying to conquer.
>
> At the same time, everything in the story has its touchstone in reality. Despite the usual condensations, compressed chronology and elements of invention *Shine* remains true to the emotional journey of David Helfgott's life.

In *Shine*, the facts have been manipulated in order to portray the subject's emotional truth.

The term 'emotional truth' has two different yet very closely related senses. In the examples above, it means the truth of the subject's emotional journey and responses to the events in his life. But it has a second sense, commonly used in screenwriting, which refers to the authenticity of the audience's experience. This sense of emotional truth concerns itself with the question of whether the emotional responses of the characters portrayed on the screen chime with the audience as true.

This emotional journey of the protagonist is the means by which the screenwriter's goal of emotional engagement on the part of the audience is achieved. The audience engages with the protagonist's emotional journey to such an extent, that they experience those emotions too. Here we see that authenticity of experience is also relevant – in order for emotional engagement to occur, the protagonist's emotional journey must ring true for each member of the audience. This leads me to my fourth truth type, 'universal truth'.

> 'We don't go to Shakespeare for history. He is never true, but he is always truthful.'
>
> (Gore Vidal, quoted by Woodhead, 1999, p. 108)

This is the type of truth found in fiction. Screenwriting theorist Robert McKee (1999, pp. 24–25) identifies a persistent error in bad scripts – the inclusion of a lot of true facts or random happenings from real life, in the mistaken belief that they convey truth:

> Fact, no matter how minutely observed, is truth with a small 't'. Big 'T' Truth is located behind, beyond, inside, below the surface of things, holding reality together or tearing it apart, and cannot be directly observed. Because this writer sees only what is visible and factual, he is blind to the truth of life...What happens is fact, not truth. Truth is what we *think about* what happens.

Universal truth is the truth contained in a work of fiction, a literary biography, or biopic that we take away with us and use to try and make sense of our own lives.

This 'making sense of life' function of universal truth is, according to literary biographer Paula Backscheider (1999, p. 17), one of the main appeals of the literary biography as a genre:

> It is read so avidly and seriously because readers recognize that ways of understanding and relating to the world are the subject of biography ... Because the great subject of biography is modes of thought in and about the world, the form speaks to readers' searches for an understanding of life that will give them coping skills and a satisfying 'philosophy' of life.

In the case of film, this type of truth is to be found in the theme. As Michael Hauge (p. 31) says:

> By *theme* in a screenplay, I mean the universal statement the screenplay makes about the human condition. This is a level of meaning that goes beyond the plot of the film and applies to life in general. The theme is an idea that any member of the audience can apply to her own life, whether or not she's been in a similar situation. The theme gives the audience 'words to live by'.

Furthest away from fact lies my fifth truth type, myth. 'Biography' says literary biographer Ira Bruce Nadel (1984, p. 176) 'is essentially a demythologizing form. Consistently, it functions to correct, restate, or reinterpret false or distorted accounts of the subject.' As Nadel points out, Boswell wrote his *Life of Johnson* partly to correct the mistaken impression given by other biographers. However, as old myths are dispelled, new ones are inevitably created. Even Boswell, for all his note-taking and meticulous care, created misconceptions of Johnson, as Richard Holmes demonstrates in *Dr Johnson and Mr Savage* (1994). Boswell portrays Johnson as the 'great Cham', a literary giant of his age. But Boswell did not meet his subject until Johnson was in his fifties, when he and his *Dictionary* were firmly established. According to Holmes, Boswell's portrayal assumes that Johnson had always been a great man, failing to appreciate what he was like as a youth. Holmes uncovers Johnson in his twenties, a vulnerable Outsider Poet, wandering the night streets, passionate but bereft, in the company of the devastatingly dissipated poet Richard Savage.

In my spectrum, myth is the truth type which contains the least amount of verifiable truth. However, this does not mean that it contains no truth at all. Myths persist because they do contain truth in some form. Backscheider (p. 63) notes that: 'Unfortunately some of the best stories may be purely fictitious. Sometimes it takes bravery to explode such myths; long survival generally signals cultural usefulness'. Such is the case with the story of Johnson being kept waiting in Lord Chesterfield's anteroom, while Chesterfield held an audience with Colley Cibber. It is generally accepted that the whole episode is a myth, with Johnson himself denying that it ever happened (Boswell, 1999, first published 1791, pp. 130–131). However, it does contain the emotional truth of Johnson's hurt at Chesterfield's continued neglect of the dictionary project. So, this episode is both true and not true.

Do all these truth types have equal status? Douglas Gresham's approval of the film *Shadowlands,* in spite of Nicholson's manipulation of the factual truth, seems to suggest that there is a hierarchy within the truth types. We can assume that Gresham places a higher value on the truth of his mother and stepfather's personalities and their emotional truth, than he does on the factual truth. However, some facts are more important than others. As Krevolin (p. 94) says, when talking about the genre he calls 'historical fantasy':

> The key to this genre of adaptation is to avoid tinkering with widely known events and their outcomes. If the British win the Revolutionary War, the audience just might think something's up, but good historical fantasy never goes that far. It obeys major know historical fact.

The main facts, especially the well-known main facts, cannot be altered, as this would undermine the credibility of the film.

As we have seen, biographical portrayal contains different types of truth, which often seem to contradict one another, and yet must inevitably all be present in the same work. How can this best be done? My solution lies in what I have come to call the interpretative approach.

Interpretative Approach

> Uninterpreted truth is as useless as buried gold; and art is the great interpreter. It alone can unify a vast multitude of facts into a significant whole, clarifying, accentuating, suppressing, and lighting up the dark places of the imagination.
>
> (Lytton Strachey, cited in Edel, 1985, p. 183)

In the twentieth century, literary biographers began to see the limitations of what Virginia Woolf called the 'compendious life' written by their Victorian predecessors, which attempted to include all the facts of the subject's life and was written with an excessive reverence (Woolf, 1942, pp. 188–189). This has its equivalent in what I have previously identified as the 'big bland' or hagiographic biopic, which, like the Victorian biography, lacks focus because its aim is to include as many facts and events as possible from the subject's life, and to portray him as a great and worthy man, with the result that we learn little of the subject's personality or emotional truth.

Literary biographers such as Lytton Strachey pioneered a more selective, interpretative approach. In recent years, the majority of biopics have also taken a more focused interpretative approach, rather than simply charting their subject's success and showing the main events of their life on the screen. The interpretative

biopic is more focused on its portrayal of truth of personality, emotional, and universal truth, than on including as many facts as possible.

A Beautiful Mind is an example of an interpretative biopic. Screenwriter Akiva Goldsman (2002, 00:07:13–00:07:45) had a particular take on the life of John Nash, which was that he wanted to communicate the emotional truth of schizophrenia from the point of view of the sufferer, rather than the onlooker:

> Mental health movies are often like going to the zoo. They can be wonderful, but you go with the normal person surrogate and together you view the person with mental illness. You see the disease from the outside in. And it does a disservice to our ability to empathize and understand. If we saw the way people suffer see it, we would understand them different [*sic*], the hope being that if one person came home from the movie theatre, just one, and saw somebody screaming at empty air on the street corner, and related to them differently, with understanding, then we would have done our job.

Although Thomas (p. 34) might be right in maintaining that Goldsman left out Nash's bisexuality and abandonment of his wife in order to avoid offending the Oscar judges, it can also be argued that they were cut because they did not belong to the schizophrenia story, and so would have weakened it by providing a distraction. The interpretative approach demands that material which undermines or detracts from the writer's chosen interpretation be suppressed or left out.

Strachey felt that it was legitimate for the biographer to alter the facts in the interest of sustaining his interpretation of the subject. For this reason, he portrayed Florence Nightingale dying in a shaded room, when in fact she died in a bright one that faced south (Nadel, p. 4). Strachey even went so far as to suppress the late correspondence of Queen Victoria, because it conflicted with his view of her as a widow remaining in mourning (Nadel, p. 7). These are the tough decisions that have to be made, if you are to unearth the buried gold.

How does the writer set about forming an interpretation of the subject? Here I drew on my reading about literary biography. In *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica* (1985), Leon Edel argues that the main task of the literary biographer is to discover the 'life-myth' of the subject, the hidden truth of the subject's personality, the main

psychological motivation or force that makes them who they are. Edel (p. 161) quotes Yeats to clarify his argument: '"There is some one Myth for every man, which if we knew it, would make us understand all that he did and thought"'.

For Edel (p. 161), this life-myth is 'the covert myth, which is a part of the hidden dreams of our biographical subjects, and which even they would have difficulty to describe because these are lodged in the unconscious, in the psyche', and is discovered by a method that is 'part Sherlock Holmes, part Freud':

> The covert myth has to be deduced from the public myth, and from the stray bits of psychological evidence offered us by our subjects, the little hints, the casual remarks, or the poetry or prose set down out of themselves.

In the DVD commentary to *Walk The Line* (2005), we see that co-writer and director James Mangold (2005, 00:42:32–00:43:59) has used this method to uncover the life-myth of subject Johnny Cash. Cash had a serious drug problem, and was clearly a deeply troubled man. This could be explained by tensions in his life – exhaustion from touring, struggling to be a husband and a father as well as a rock star, and fighting his love for June Carter. But Mangold (00:42:48–00:42:57) also discovers something deeply significant in Cash's unconscious. The key was in the line of the song *I Still Miss Someone* written by Cash:

> I go out to a party, to look for a little fun,
> But I find a darkened corner, cos I still miss someone.

Mangold interprets this as a reference to the tragic death of his brother Jack when they were both children. 'The loss of Jack, so many years ago, left a hole in John's heart. And that hole was not filled, until June Carter came into his life' (00:43:48–00:43:59). Mangold's life-myth of Johnny Cash is of a man who, haunted by the loss of his brother, fails to fulfil the roles in his life, losing himself to his demons and to drugs, until the love of June Carter rescues him and helps him to regain control of his life.

Backscheider (p. 92), however, takes issue with the whole 'life-myth' approach: 'Biographers and readers share a belief in the myth that biography can portray the "real Me"'. Backscheider argues that there is no 'real Me', that it is a concept fuelled by the desire for a sense of unity of personality, but that unity of personality does not

exist. Backscheider (pp. 228–229) quotes Virginia Woolf's fictional biography *Orlando* (1928, p. 308) in support of this:

> These selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter's hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own ... so that one will only come if it is raining, another in a room with green curtains, another when Mrs. Jones is not there.

As this quotation illustrates, people are so multi-faceted, that the whole truth of a person can never be known by their biographer or biopic writer.

So, is a single interpretation of a subject valid? Let us compare two recent biopics of Truman Capote, *Capote* (2005) written by Dan Futterman, and *Infamous* (2006) written by Douglas McGrath. Both films take the same period in the subject's life, and select the same basic facts:

Truman Capote goes to investigate the horrific murder of a Kansas family, and is inspired to write a book. During his period of research, Capote forms a close relationship with one of the two killers, Perry Smith, who tells the writer the story of his life. The killers are sentenced to death, and eventually executed. The book, *In Cold Blood*, is a great success, but Capote never finishes another book.

Although both films include these facts, their interpretations of Capote's character are radically different. *Capote* sees its subject's downfall as having been brought about by his own ambition. He tells his friend Harper Lee that when he thinks of how good his book could be, he can hardly breathe. Capote forms a relationship with Perry Smith and helps him. But the only way the book can be finished is when the killers have been executed, and so Capote withdraws his help. The guilt Capote feels at wishing them dead, however, tortures him and drives him to alcoholism. When the book finally comes out, *In Cold Blood* is a great success, but Truman Capote has destroyed his own soul in the process, and never finishes another book.

Infamous interprets the story completely differently. It is a tragic love story, a notion set up beautifully at the beginning of the film, when Gwyneth Paltrow, playing a nightclub singer, sings *What Is This Thing Called Love?* and suddenly feels such heartbreak and pain, that she breaks down and cannot sing. During the course of

researching his book, Capote falls in love with Perry Smith. *In Cold Blood* is a great success, but Capote is so heartbroken by Smith's death that he never finishes another book.

Thus it can be seen how the same basic facts can be interpreted in radically different ways. These screenwriters had very different takes on what they considered Truman Capote's truth of personality and emotional truth to be. Does this undermine the validity of the interpretative approach? No, because human beings are so complex, as the quotation above from *Orlando* shows, that interpretations of a life can differ yet both be true at the same time. As Miranda Seymour (2002, p. 255) says, 'We, in our emotional human state, can establish and develop and retain different interpretations of people familiar to us.' The distinction between a written life and a known life is that in the case of a known life 'we can oscillate between our interpretations' (p. 254), but in the case of a written life 'we cannot accept, and neither ... can the life-writer hope to impose, conflicting interpretations'. A biography cannot present life in the 'inchoate, multi-faceted form' (p. 255) that we experience it in reality.

Both these interpretations are plausible perspectives to have on Truman Capote's character and story. In a known life they can co-exist. But they could not co-exist in a single biopic in the classic Hollywood mould, since they would serve only to undermine each other.

It is worth noting here that, despite their divergence, both interpretations agree on the importance of showing the continued relationship between Capote and Smith. The importance of the ongoing relationship to the biopic is something that I will discuss in chapter 2.

Appendix 2 shows how my interpretative approach affects the film at the level of the page. This next section describes the methods that I used to discover my own version of Johnson.

My Interpretation of Samuel Johnson

I return to my original framework, and my intention:

> i. to portray my subject in a way which I believe to be true

Much has been written about Samuel Johnson. As Holmes (1994, p. 1) says, 'scholars seem to know him in minutest detail', and although little has been written about Johnson for the screen, I wanted my portrayal to be different. I did not just want to adapt Boswell or Holmes' biographies for the screen, but to uncover what I thought to be the truth about Johnson, and to base my interpretation on that. I chose to restrict my portrayal to the years spent compiling the first edition of the *Dictionary* for reasons of structure, as I will explain in chapter 2, and also for reasons of interpretation.
As someone who has both struggled to scrape a living as an unknown writer in London and worked as a lexicographer for Longman, admittedly two and a half centuries later, I felt that I had a special understanding of certain aspects of Johnson's life. Similarly, John Wain (1974, p. 14), writes in the introduction to his biography *Samuel Johnson*:

> Perhaps more than most, I am in a position to see his life from the inside. I was born in the same district as Johnson – some thirty miles away – and since then have lived the same life of Grub Street, chance employment, and the unremitting struggle to write enduring books against the background of an unstable existence.

This provokes a very strong response from Backscheider (p. 36):

> The statement that John Wain makes claiming that he has special insight into Samuel Johnson ... is striking not just because of its bizarre forthrightness and arrogance but because ... it is nearly unique.

According to Backscheider, this kind of identification is something that, in the field of literary biography, is not the done thing. Playwright David Edgar (1999, pp. 181–182) gives a similar interesting example of a difference between the historian and the dramatist. He imagines a scenario in which a historian gets two sets of minutes from

two different men, who are both at a series of important meetings. First the historian would set the minutes against other facts, then he might broaden his research to discover what he can about the characters of the two men from other sources, such as testimonies from their relatives, friends, and acquaintances. However:

> What I suspect the historian would not do – because it would be a most unscholarly procedure – would be to set these two men's recollections of this one event against the behaviour of the historian's *own* relatives, friends, or acquaintances, or even against the behaviour of him- or herself.

The dramatist and the biopic writer use their own knowledge of the world and human nature, based on their own personal experience of life and their knowledge of themselves and all the people they know – in other words their knowledge of emotional truth and universal truth – to come to an understanding and interpretation of their subject. It is legitimate for me to use my experience as a writer and lexicographer, in combination with my knowledge of the facts, to come to my interpretation of Johnson and his life.

My starting point was Richard Holmes' convincing portrayal of Johnson the vulnerable Outsider Poet in his twenties. My portrayal of Johnson would have to bridge the gap between Holmes and Boswell. It would start with the Outsider Poet, and end with the beginning of the towering figure, the literary Colossus, the 'great Cham', that Johnson was to become.

My interpretation is intended to fill in a part of Johnson's life that is not fully explored by the other literary biographies. Nobody knows for sure how the *Dictionary* was made, since very little evidence of the processes Johnson went through remains, and Boswell (p. 98) offers very little specific detail on the subject. It is only in very recent times that scholars have seriously addressed the question of Johnson's method of compilation, most notably Allen Reddick, author of *The Making of Johnson's Dictionary 1746–1773* (1996); and Anne McDermott, editor of *A Dictionary of the English Language on CD-ROM* (1996), who gave a lecture entitled *How Johnson's Dictionary was Made* at Dr Johnson's House on 3rd August 2006. Both have theories as to how this great feat of lexicography was actually achieved, which were extremely influential in the formation of my interpretation. I also relied on my own experience as a lexicographer.

My story of Johnson ends with the triumph of the *Dictionary*, which Lawrence Lipking in his essay *The Birth of the Author* (1998, p. 42) rightly calls 'the work that made his name'. Lipking (p. 45) pinpoints Johnson's moment of triumph to his famous letter to Lord Chesterfield (Boswell, pp. 132–133), the lexicographer's withering response to the Earl's apparent offer of patronage of the *Dictionary*, after it had been written:

> The signature applies the finishing stroke to Chesterfield and his pretensions. Yet, even more, it seems to announce Johnson's coming of age as an author. His name had not meant much before. Though he had been employed in London as a hack since 1738, when he was 28, JOHNSON had not appeared on a title page till more than ten years passed, and he had very seldom written in the first person. Now everything has changed, for he is *known*.

I adapted Johnson's letter into Sam's dialogue in the *Dictionary* launch party scene (*Sam J*, p. 114), making this the final moment of triumph for Sam at the end of the film. The Outsider Poet is able to reveal his genius to the world, and finally gets the validation he deserves: 'If the times demanded that he be an anonymous hack, he would prove that hack and genius could be one person. The unknown vagabond draws the bow, and suddenly everyone recognises Odysseus' (Lipking, p. 52). This man dressed in rags is not a beggar, as he appears to be, but the Greek mythic hero and king. Lipking identifies this moment not only as the moment of Johnson's personal triumph, but as the moment of the 'birth of the author'.

In addition to biographical and critical texts, I also looked at Johnson's own words to help me access the 'covert myth' during this period in his life. In the *Preface* to the *Dictionary* (1990, first published 1755, 8th unnumbered page), Johnson writes the line:

> The dreams of a poet doomed at last to wake a lexicographer.

Just as James Mangold found the key to his interpretation of Johnny Cash's life-myth in the lyrics of one of his songs, I found this line to be particularly illuminating. What Johnson is saying in the *Preface* is that he originally had plans for his *Dictionary* to be something much greater than it is, but that in the end he had to be realistic in his ambitions for it. However, the line stuck in my mind separately from this context, and I developed a broader interpretation of it: that Johnson was a creative writer and intellectual, who saw poetry as the route that he should take to creative satisfaction

and recognition of his literary talent. Backed up by the theories of Reddick, as well as my own experience as a lexicographer, I came up with the interpretation that Johnson the poet discovered, to his surprise, that the *Dictionary*, a seemingly laborious task of mechanical drudgery, was actually the route to his goal. This, in accordance with the theories of Reddick (p. 26), is because compiling the *Dictionary* was a much more creative task than Johnson had envisaged when setting out his plan:

> The wealth of possible usages for words, as he read through printed books gathering his examples, swelled to exceed the expectation of even the keen, extremely well-read Johnson. And the result was that his project became too large for his methods and had to be recast, with much of the prepared manuscript ... simply discarded ... What seems simply a technical problem of procedure is actually a philosophical crisis of imagination. Johnson's ability to reconceptualize and reshape his project allowed him to come into his own as an imaginative lexicographer and to save the great project, in danger of foundering.

Here my experience of lexicography in the twentieth century supports my interpretation, and affords me an opportunity to illuminate an area of Johnson's life which has not been portrayed before, to do what Virginia Woolf (1942, p. 196) describes as 'hanging up looking glasses at odd corners'. I started work as a lexicographer on the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* at the beginning of corpus lexicography. The British National Corpus, a vast computer database of language, with special software designed to help search it, became available to the lexicographer, revealing glittering seams of hitherto undiscovered meaning. The area where most discoveries were made was in the case of the most frequent 'core' verbs, such as 'make', 'see', and 'take'. These verbs were seen to have many more senses than had been previously identified. I saw Johnson's collection of quotations as forming the first corpus of the English language, and concluded that having the language laid out in this way would have revealed the complex nature of these core verbs for the very first time. Johnson would have discovered an astonishing range of new senses, in the same way as a twentieth-century lexicographer with a computerized corpus.

No one knows how Johnson ordered and organized his quotation slips, but I felt that however they were sorted, he must have created a rudimentary corpus, which would have given him a window onto the richness of the language, of which earlier

lexicographers and scholars would have been unaware. He would also have been struck by the fact that extracting and organizing these senses was not a mechanical task, but one requiring judgement, creativity, and skill. The route to creative satisfaction and validation for Johnson was not his play *Irene*, which was not well-received, but his revolutionary *Dictionary*, which became a landmark in literary history. This is the odd corner where I hung my looking glass.

However, a writer's close identification with her subject does have a negative side. In *Sidetracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer* (2005, p. 197) Richard Holmes acknowledges that the empathetic approach to biography does pose a risk:

> By the very act of biographical empathy, how much does the biographer create the *fiction* of a past life, the projection of his – or her – own personality into a story which is dramatically convincing, even historically correct, but simply *not the human truth as it happened*?

Although not all biographical portrayals are empathetic – one thinks of Oliver Stone's biopics *Nixon* (1995) and *W.* (2008) – Edel finds that a large number are, and in his manifesto (p. 14) warns of the dangers of too close a connection between biographer and subject:

> The relation of the biographer to the subject is the very core of the biographical enterprise ... Most biographies tend to be written in affection and love. If there ensues an emotional involvement on the part of the biographer he or she must be reminded that love is blind. Psychology calls this 'transference'.

Transference is a very real danger for literary biographers, whom Nabokov (cited in Edel, pp. 20–21) calls 'psycho-plagiarists', incomplete people, who seek to bolster their own egos and complete their own lives, by writing the lives of others, a charge which, it seems, could potentially be applied to me. Edel identifies transference as one of the most common reasons for biographers' failure, and gives many examples, including André Maurois' biography of Shelley (Edel, p. 69). Maurois claims to have been attracted to his subject because he saw many resemblances between Shelley and his own youthful self, but in the end Maurois was dissatisfied with his biography, and Edel suggests that this is because he was aware of the fact that he had not expressed Shelley, but himself.

Transference is a trap that the biographer and biopic writer should most definitely avoid. However, that is not to say that the writer should not be present in her work. In the collection of essays *Introspection in Biography: The Biographer's Quest for Self-Awareness* (Baron & Pletsch, 1985, p. 188) Richard Westfall concludes that:

> It is impossible to portray another human being without displaying oneself.

Samuel Baron (1985, p. 9) argues that both conscious and unconscious reasons for writing a biography are valid, since they perform different functions, with: 'the external and professional motives operating at the conscious level, while much of the energy of the task stems from unconscious motives'. Elise Domenach (2007, 00:05:36–00:06:11) remarks of Olivier Dahan, writer/director of *La Vie En Rose* (2007):

> He blends faithfulness with unfaithfulness in the cinematographic act, which at the same time is a director's act which appropriates the biography of Piaf in order to say – and he does it openly, which is quite touching – to tell his own life story. And Dahan has said in interviews 'Yes, it is completely autobiographical, and in telling Piaf's story I'm telling my life story. I'm talking about my anxieties in my own relationship with creative art, and a film which would have recounted the events of my own life story would not have been any closer to the essence of my life than a film recounting the events of Piaf's life.'

A biopic is a work of art, and self-expression on the part of its creator does have a legitimate role to play.

So how should the biopic writer deal with these conflicting conscious and unconscious forces? She should use the empathy, identification, and self-expression to power the writing process and give the work warmth, passion and vibrancy. And then, aware of the danger of transference, she should step back and spend a period of time away from the finished draft, in order to gain objectivity. Feedback from people familiar with the subject from other sources can also help to create a more objective portrayal (although they will have their own biases too).

Despite all these conflicting influences, successful biographical portrayal is possible, as Virginia Woolf (cited in Backscheider, 1999, p. 76) discovered after her monumental struggle to write the life of her friend Roger Fry:

> It was an experiment in self-suppression; a gamble in R's power to transmit himself. And so rich and to me alive and various and masterly was he that I was certain he would shine by his own light better than through any painted shade of mine. Lord how I sweated! But to my amazement, its [*sic*] succeeded ... the public does see Roger plain.

Conclusion

A biopic, being a work that combines fact and fiction, contains different kinds of truth. I have found that the interpretative approach is the best way to incorporate all of these truth types. I came to my interpretation of Samuel Johnson by means of research, and by using my imagination and own experience to fill in lacunae. My identification with the subject fuelled the writing with passion and energy, but transference created distortion in my portrayal, and I found it necessary to take a step back from the project in an attempt to regain objectivity.

Chapter 2

Structure

> The biographer is doing two incompatible things – providing us with sterile and fertile. Things that have no bearing on the life. But he has to provide them ... Since a life has to begin with birth and to continue through the years these facts must be introduced in order. But have they anything to do with him? That is where doubt begins; the pen trembles; the biography swells into the familiar fungoid growth.
>
> Virginia Woolf (cited in Lee, 1996, p. 10)

'SCREENPLAYS ARE STRUCTURE'

William Goldman (1983, p. 195)

The perfectly turned three act structure, explained in Appendix 1, is the hallmark of classic Hollywood screenwriting. If I do not achieve this, my film will fail. However, when faced with the mass of information about someone's entire life, the danger of fungoid growth is ever-present, and many biopic writers succumb to it. My task is to extract the film's story from Johnson's life, and to craft that story into three acts. So what of the ethical dimension? In my introduction I listed three ethical intentions which relate to structure:

i. to keep to chronological order;
ii. to include all the important events of the subject's life during the chosen time period;
iii. to only include fictional episodes which I believe could have happened, at least in a similar way.

So, how does the writer set about forming the structure of a biopic?

I started by constructing a chronology of Johnson's life. Right from the beginning of the structural process, ethical dilemmas arose. I wanted to at least start off with a truthful and factual base, but soon realized that even creating a basic skeletal chronology of a life involved making ethical choices. For example, what does the biopic writer do where literary biographers do not agree? The potential for distortion starts as soon as even the most basic of structures is imposed upon the material.

This chapter follows the process that I went through in creating the structure of the film, focusing on the stages where ethical dilemmas were especially prevalent.

Finding the Story – the Outline Stage

After writing my chronology of Johnson's life, the next stage was to look at it and try to extract the story of the film from it. I did this by writing a series of outlines, each with a different approach to dramatizing Johnson's life. Linda Seger's *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film* (1992, pp. 53–55) offers advice on how to find the story when considering adapting a true-life story into film. (I have reordered Seger's points to help with the flow of my discussion, and removed those not relevant to structure.) She advises looking for the following:

1. a story that covers a short period of time;
2. a central incident that can help you build a dramatic focused storyline;
3. a rising dramatic line rather than repetitive action;
4. a story building to a clear climax;
5. strong ongoing relationships between at least two characters;
6. a story that can be told visually.

I felt that it was vital to spend time at this stage selecting the part of Johnson's story that best fitted the three act structure, since the closer the fit, the fewer changes I would have to make to Johnson's life story, and so the more ethical it would be.

1. a story that covers a short period of time

What immediately leapt out as a problem from my chronology was the time span of the story. Where should the story begin and where should it end? The period of Johnson's life that I found interesting ran from the time that he was forced to leave university as an undergraduate in 1729, until the publication of the *Dictionary* in 1755 when he was finally awarded an honorary degree, a period of 26 years in all.

Maland (1997, pp. 47–51) rightly criticizes the biopic *Chaplin*, which covers the subject's life story almost from cradle to grave, for attempting to portray too long a time span:

> [Chaplin's] full movie career and tumultuous personal life easily provide enough material for a mini-series. How could one possibly hope to make a cinematic biography, a 'bio-pic', within the confines of three hours or less? ... As with many bio-pics, the temporal compression demanded by a feature-length film breeds problems. Those unfamiliar with the details of Chaplin's private life might feel like the movie moves too quickly from film to film and from wife to wife.

Chaplin is a clear case 'fungoid growth', which is symptomatic of the 'big bland' hagiographic biopic. It seems to me that *Chaplin*'s writers, William Boyd, Bryan Forbes, and the great William Goldman himself, made the mistake of feeling compelled to make structure subservient to fact and truth, rather than the other way round. In classic Hollywood screenwriting, structure takes priority.

Fearful of this fungoid growth, I decided that 26 years of Johnson's life was too long a period for a biopic to cover. Screenwriters Scott Alexander and Larry Karazewski (1994, 00:22:16–00:22:49), specialists in the field of the biopic, came to a similar conclusion when writing their biopic of the movie director *Ed Wood*:

> We felt that a lot of people make mistakes when they do biopics, that they have to tell the whole story, and they have to say where the guy was born, and they have to show him as a little child, and they have to show him dying at the end. We sort of said that in real movies you don't do that, and in a normal movie you just sort of focus on the interesting period in the character's life, so we said why is Ed Wood remembered?

> He's remembered because of the Lugosi movies. You know, as much as we'd like to defend the whole body of work, people don't watch *Sinister Urge* as much as they watch *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, and so we said let's focus on the Lugosi years which was about a five year period.

Biopic writer and director Bill Condon (2004, 00:01:28–00:02:00) also came to a similar conclusion while making *Gods and Monsters* (1998), his biopic of movie director James Whale, adapted from the novel by Chris Bram:

> Biopics aren't my favourite form of movie, and I actually think the best way to sort of tell a person's life is to really pick a moment in time. You know I think that's how we know people. For example in *Gods and Monsters*, the structure of that came from the novel by Chris Bram, but that was really a three week period in James Whale's life, and I was able to actually deal with other moments in his life because of this ailment that he had, you know he'd had a series of strokes, that left him incapable of controlling where his brain took him, so that motivated these flashbacks.

Limiting the time period of the narrative to these few weeks helps to give the film a tight structure. At the same time, the effect of the strokes are a clever way of introducing flashbacks which allow us to see Whale's earlier life – his childhood in England, the trenches of World War I, and his heyday as a director in Hollywood – without compromising this structure.

Ed Wood and *Gods and Monsters* both give compelling portrayals of their subjects, and so the advice to limit the time span of the story seems to hold true. However, on his next biopic, *Kinsey* (2004), Condon (00:02:00–00:02:28) found that his own advice did not work:

> With Kinsey it became very clear, as I started to research, I couldn't really find the moment, that this was a life that had to be told in its entirety, that it was gonna have to be, you know, the scene you're seeing now, you know, his relationship with his father, his first discovery of science, of nature, and obviously all of his experiences in early marriage were such a crucial part of answering the question of who this man was who did this extraordinary thing. So it was gonna have to be the scope of the whole life.

Condon took his cue from Kinsey, who collected eight and a half million gall wasps and discovered that not one was identical to another, and then applied that idea to human sexuality, concluding that no one human being's sexuality is the same as another's. Condon (00:03:48–00:04:04) then, by extension, concludes that no one human being's biopic should be the same as another's.

Within the confines of the three act structure, there are still endless possibilities for variation. The structure of every biopic, then, is different, and should be constructed in a way that reflects the uniqueness of the subject. A very good example of this is *Shine* (1996), which spans such a long time period that it requires three actors to play the protagonist, first as a child, then as a youth, and then as an adult. Despite this, however, the film manages to be totally engaging throughout. Writer Jan Sardi (1997, p. vi) explains how he and director Scott Hicks achieved this:

> A strong emotional line is what drives a film or play and engages an audience in a way that was essential for *Shine* to work. Screenwriting manuals will tell you the shorter the time frame in which a story takes place the better. David's real-life story covers three decades and an enormous range of characters, relationships and incidents, all of which threw up the usual problems and pitfalls of the 'biopic' genre which we assiduously wanted to avoid. The key, we both agreed, was to create a strong emotional line.

Sardi dealt with the structural pitfalls of the biopic, not by portraying a short period in Helfgott's life, but by narrowing down the focus in another way – by means of his interpretation. Sardi interprets Helfgott's life as being about his father's tyrannical treatment of him as a boy, and the effect that this has on his mental health and his talent as a pianist throughout his life. A central interpretation of the subject's life allows dramatic focus to be sustained across a long time span. Sardi puts the film's success down to what he calls 'a strong emotional line'. As I mentioned in my introduction, emotional engagement on the part of the audience is a primary objective of Hollywood film. If the protagonist's story is emotionally involving enough, the audience will have no difficulty in following it across long time spans.

So I would like to replace Seger's 'a story that covers a short period of time' with:

1. a story that has a strong emotional line

Johnson's chronology reveals three strong emotional lines – his long and desperate struggle for literary and intellectual validation, his struggle against depression and mental illness, and his painful relationship with his wife. These emotional lines also suggest three different possible interpretations of the subject and his life.

2. a central incident that can help you build a dramatic focused storyline

Michael Hauge, author of *Writing Screenplays That Sell*, gives the following advice in Krevolin (pp. 197–198) with regard to the structuring of biopics:

> Life stories may be compelling on A&E, but as films they almost always fail at the box office, or struggle to break even. *Chaplin*, *The Babe*, and *Hoffa* may be about unique, larger-than-life figures, but the movies give us nothing specific to root for, and lost a ton of money.

(A&E is an American cable and satellite television network which originally focused programming on biographies, documentaries, and drama series, and has now expanded to include reality television.) Hauge continues:

> There are two ways to overcome this dilemma: select subjects whose lives are devoted to a single, visible outcome (freedom for India in *Gandhi*; freedom for Scotland in *Braveheart*); or pick a single incident from the life of your subject and make that the outer motivation of the movie. The written biography of John Nash reveals an abundance of events and conflicts throughout his life, but the movie focuses specifically on his and his wife's battle against schizophrenia within a much shorter period of time. And *Erin Brockovich* is the story of a woman who wants to win a lawsuit against PG&E [Pacific Gas and Electric] – none of the rest of her life is included.

To be more precise, in the case of Erin Brockovich, other parts of her life are included, since she does not encounter PG&E until Act 2. Act 1 shows her life as an uneducated, unemployed single mother struggling to survive. This is included so that we can appreciate the scale of her achievement, and the benefits that victory over PG&E will later bring her. Act 1 tells us only what we need to know about the rest of Erin Brockovich's life in order to contextualize the story of the lawsuit against PG&E.

In screenwriting theorist Drew Yanno's (2006, p. 18.) terminology, Act 1 raises a question, and Act 3 answers it. Act 1 asks: will Erin Brockovich get out of poverty and achieve validation? Act 3 answers: yes, when she wins her case and is rewarded with a generous cheque.

So I would like to change 'a central incident that can help you build a dramatic focused storyline' to:

> 2. a central goal or incident that can help you build a dramatic focused storyline

In the case of my biopic, whilst looking at my chronology of Johnson's life at the beginning of the project, I could not decide what the central focus should be. Should it be the story of Sam's academic validation, starting with him being thrown out of Oxford as an undergraduate and ending with him finally getting his honorary degree? Should it be the story of his marriage to Tetty? Should it be the story of the Outcast Poet struggling for literary fame and fortune? Should it be the story of a genius caught between creativity and madness? Should it be the story of a poor young man who, like Dick Whittington, comes to seek his fortune in London? Or should it be the story of the struggle to make the *Dictionary*? I felt that each of these possibilities represented a different emotional truth in Johnson's life. They were all truthful, but which was the best one to go for in terms of drama? I explored these various possibilities in a series of outlines.

3. a rising dramatic line rather than repetitive action
4. a story building to a clear climax

A rising dramatic line is one in which the protagonist is faced with a series of challenges or problems where each is bigger than the last. This is difficult to achieve, since, as Seger (p. 50) says:

> Not only are there many stories in one person's life, but seldom does anyone live his or her life in the right dramatic order. Instead of the stories building to one neat dramatic climax, the climax to one subplot might occur far later than the climax of the A, or main, storyline.

But the story must consist of rising action and build to a clear climax, or it will not work as Hollywood film. A good example of this is *Ray*. The two stories of Ray Charles' rise to stardom and his escalating drug abuse provide rising action throughout the film. At the end of Act 2 both stories come together, when Charles realizes that his drug abuse could cost him what he holds most dear – his music. In Act 3 he goes into rehab and, in the final climax, confronts his demons and is freed from his addiction. Director Taylor Hackford (2:18:00–2:18:04) rightly chose to end the story there. He wasn't interested in the rest of Ray Charles' life, which was 'Success, success, success. Boring, boring, boring as far as I was concerned'.

Looking at the chronology of Johnson's life, there was definitely potential for rising action building to a clear climax within the period shown. His marriage to Tetty showed potential. It began with a genuine love match and a wedding, and the setting up of a school in Edial Hall in picturesque rural surroundings, but began to turn sour as the school failed and Tetty's fortune was lost, and went seriously wrong when they moved to London where Tetty became deeply unhappy, turning to drink and drugs, and banished Johnson from her bed. Act 2 could have ended with her death, and Johnson's terrible grief and guilt. The final act could have been his redemption, as he took proper care of Frank Barber in a way that he had never managed with his wife, climaxing with Sam rescuing Frank from the clutches of brutish sailors. However, I decided to reject this approach, for reasons that I will later explain.

I came to the conclusion that the clearest climax for my purposes in Johnson's life was the publication of the *Dictionary*, the work that made him famous. Working backwards, then, the obvious point to start the film was with Johnson's lack of literary success. Following the pattern of *Erin Brockovich* discussed above, Act 1 would show what Sam's life lacked before he took on the dictionary project, and would end with the turning point of signing the contract with the Booksellers. I felt that I could build rising action through Act 2 by making the dictionary project more and more of a struggle, and relations between Johnson and the Booksellers increasingly strained. Woven in with that, I could have the 'B story' of Richard Savage, the charismatic but dissipated laureate to Queen Caroline, who would show what could become of Sam if the dictionary project failed. Savage's patron would die, bequeathing him nothing, and he would descend into vagrancy and debt, sleeping in the warm ashes of a glass factory, as described by Holmes (1994, p. 50), surrounded by clinker in beautiful oxidized colours, rising in the morning like a grey ghost. This worked beautifully. There was

only one problem – the historical Richard Savage died three years before the dictionary project began.

This was my first encounter with what literary biographer Michael Holroyd calls 'the prison of chronology' (2002, p. 21). Was chronology one of my ethical aims that, in the interest of structure, I ought to break? This is something that Alexander and Karazewski (1994, 01:27:32–01:29:02) considered when writing *Ed Wood*:

> 'We did try to stay as close to the truth as possible, I mean at one point we looked at each other and said, you know, wouldn't it be a better third act if *Glen or Glenda* is the third act of the movie as opposed to *Plan 9 From Outer Space*? And we said as an emotional growth if it's about this guy who makes these two monster movies and they don't really work out and he makes a decision, you know, what I've gotta tell my own story, I've gotta tell the story from my heart, and he goes off and makes this personal vision. We thought that would make probably a better dramatic arc for the film, but we felt we couldn't play with the facts that much, and so we decided to keep *Glen or Glenda* as the first film that he made.'
> 'We were really obsessive with trying to stick to the facts as much as possible, I mean yeah some things got omitted and some people got omitted but in terms of what you see on screen, we really tried to be truthful ... so then the dilemma became well if Ed Wood's most genre-bound movie *Plan 9 From Outer Space* is the third act, how do you make it emotionally satisfying? We sort of had this whole idea of him trying to continue his life and his work without Lugosi, and then having this epiphany that this will be the movie he's remembered for, and you sort of get this ridiculous absurd ending where he has transcended, he knows he's made his mark. The postmodern joke is he doesn't know he's made it for the wrong reason.'

Alexander and Karazewski found that breaking with chronology in such a major way transgressed their internal sense of biopic ethics, and so instead changed their interpretation of Ed Wood's life, in order to make it fit within his true chronology. I wrote an outline of *Sam J* which had Richard Savage still alive whilst Johnson was writing the *Dictionary*. But, like Alexander and Karazewski, I found that it troubled my conscience.

Some biopics do manage to escape the prison of chronology. This can be done by means of gaps in knowledge, as in the case of *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) where little is known about the subject's life, leaving the screenwriter free to invent. Chronology can also be transcended by means of clever narrative devices, as in *De-Lovely* (2004), where director Irwin Winkler and screenwriter Jay Cocks (Winkler & Cocks, 2004, 00:07:17–00:07:58) made the whole biopic a musical of Cole Porter's life, presented to the protagonist just before he dies, by a figure called Gabe, who represents the angel Gabriel:

> The primary conceit of the film ... we use the songs to tell the story and to move the plot along, and the character development along, and this device allowed us to do that otherwise we might have been bound to almost a historical format of and then he wrote, and then in 1926 he wrote, and then in 1927 he wrote, and then in 1930 he wrote, and then, following that kind of format. This way we were free to roam about in his mind and use the songs as we felt most portrayed the emotions we wanted at any particular time.

This ingenious device gave Cocks and Winkler the wonderful freedom of being able to use Porter's songs out of chronological order, as a powerful subtext to the story. A similar device is used in *Quills* (2000), written by Doug Wright, which turns the life of the Marquis de Sade into a story that combines fictional elements with some facts from de Sade's life and themes from de Sade's works. The device is set up by the opening lines, in the form of a voiceover from the character of de Sade: 'Dear reader, I've a naughty little tale to tell, plucked from the pages of history – tarted up, true – but guaranteed to stimulate the senses.'

I tried to think of a clever narrative device for my biopic. Perhaps I could use a framing device of someone, maybe Frank Barber, thumbing though the finished *Dictionary*? The entries where lines from Richard Savage's poetry were actually used could introduce flashbacks, and bring Savage back to life. But this felt contrived. Really, I feel that the default structure of a film should be chronological and linear, and that the screenwriter should only deviate from it when she has a legitimate reason, and can do so with originality using a device that feels organic to the whole, as in the case of *De-Lovely* and *Quills*, rather than forced. An original and organic solution did not present itself to me, and so chronology had to rule. I was forced to cut Richard Savage. In the end I found a solution to Savage's loss by dividing his role among Johnson's

amanuenses, who I made into a group of Outsider Poets, all living on the edge. I discuss the ethical implications of this in chapter 3.

5. strong ongoing relationships between at least two characters

This is especially important in biopics, because the audience will find it difficult to engage with characters who do not stay on the screen for long. This is a problem in *Chaplin*, whose protagonist moves quickly from wife to wife. Alexander and Karazewski were faced with this problem in *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (1996). Flynt had several different lawyers during the time span of the film, but the writers felt that it was important to have a single lawyer with whom the protagonist could have a relationship for the entire film, and so they created a composite of all the lawyers in the character of Alan Isaacman (Alexander & Karazewski, 1996, 00:38:33–00:40:18). Despite the fact that having a single lawyer contravened U.S legal practice, since the same lawyer could not have represented Flynt in the different courts where he appeared, the writers felt that this decision was justified, and I agree with their decision. The contravention of U.S. legal practice is less distracting than it would be to have a series of different lawyer characters. Also, the character of Isaacman has a crucial speech to make at the climactic trial at the Supreme Court, and so has to be someone that the audience has already engaged with, for them to root for him in the climactic scene.

In the case of Johnson, another argument for having the story cover the span of the dictionary project was that the Booksellers would be present throughout the story, in a way that is similar to the character of Isaacman in *The People vs. Larry Flynt*. Tetty would be present throughout until her death, which could occur at the end of Act 2, hurling Sam into grief and depression, and causing a crisis in the project. The character who did present a problem in this regard was the black slave boy Frank Barber. Ostensibly a servant, but really Johnson's surrogate son and heir, Barber was sent to Johnson's household shortly after the death of Tetty by Johnson's beloved friend Dr Richard Bathurst. But with my current choice of outline, this would mean that Frank would arrive in Act 3, when it is almost impossible to introduce a new character. Having Frank Barber appear out of the blue at this stage would be impossible, but as Johnson's surrogate son and heir, Frank was a very important figure in his life. He was also a very appealing character, bringing both youthful vibrancy and ethnic diversity to the screen. Audience members who knew about Johnson's life would

expect to see Frank Barber in the film. Going back to my original ethical framework, I felt that leaving Frank out would be breaking my second intention, 'to include all of the major events of Johnson's life during the chosen time period'. I also found it particularly undesirable to airbrush a black character from history. Frank Barber presented an ethical minefield, and I could not find a solution at this stage.

6. a story that can be told visually

Cinema is an overwhelmingly visual medium, and I did feel that my current choice of the story of the *Dictionary* would be problematic in this area. Murphy (2002) questions the suitability of film as a medium for telling the lives of writers, and notes how often other aspects of the writer's lives are shown instead of their work as writers, so that *Wilde* (1997) concentrates on Oscar's relationship with Bosie, and *Mrs Parker and the Vicious Circle* (1994) portrays Dorothy Parker mostly as a socialite at lunch.

At this stage I did not know how I could tell the story of Johnson and the *Dictionary* in a visual way. *Shakespeare in Love* was my inspiration, and proved that a commercial film about the writing of a literary work was possible. But screenwriters Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard had the visual splendour of the Elizabethan theatre and a romance between two good-looking young people to help them. Perhaps I should focus on Johnson's romantic life instead, and give him a young lover. But there was no young lover in Johnson's life during the period covered by my script. I lamented the loss of Savage with his tattered silk frock coat and habit of quoting his own verse, running around London trying to avoid his debtors, sponging off his friends, and breaking into Lady Macclesfield's home to accuse her of being his true mother. All I had was a man writing a dictionary. Where was the visual splendour in that?

To conclude, when trying to extract the story from a chronology of the subject's life the biopic writer should try to find: a single focused story with a strong emotional line, that is based around a central goal or incident, that has rising dramatic action building to a clear climax, strong ongoing relationships between at least two characters, and can be told visually.

By the end of the outline phase I had still not succeeded in narrowing Sam's life into a coherent, focused story. This is not surprising, as screenwriting is a highly complex

process, with a myriad of decisions to be made. I decided that I would proceed to the next phase, that of the rough draft.

Finding the Focus – the Drafting Stage

When my rough draft was finished, it was a massive 178 pages long. It included scenes of Sam writing the *Dictionary*, which mixed live action with animation to illustrate his thought processes as he struggled with lexicographic issues; scenes of conflict with the Booksellers throughout the project, as they became increasingly impatient with Sam and his lack of progress; flashbacks to Sam's youth at Oxford University and in his father's bookshop; Sam and the Poets working on the dictionary project; the Poets slacking, drinking, and cheating; Sam bailing Peyton's wife out of prison; scenes of marital discord between Sam and Tetty, her drug addiction, decline, and death; Frank Barber helping Sam out of his grief; and a story of Frank running away to sea. It was a giant, misshapen, and over-inclusive thing – a clear case of fungoid growth. What the next draft needed was dramatic focus. And the key here was genre.

Genre

The biopic is not a genre in itself, at least not in screenwriting terms. The vast majority of biopics belong to the personal drama genre, and so should follow the conventions of that genre. Phil Parker (1998, pp. 159–161) breaks the personal drama genre down into different types, and gives different conventions for each. I now had to decide which of these would best fit my film.

Following Parker's analysis of the personal drama (pp. 159–161), there were three potential subgenres in this first draft:

1. the inner personal drama

This would show Sam sliding towards the madness of his father, and getting lost in the world of words.

2. the domestic drama
This would focus on Sam's relationship with Tetty, Frank and the Poets.

3. the communal drama
This would focus on Sam as a struggling writer against the world. His antagonists would be the Booksellers, but Chesterfield, the Poets, Tetty, and Garrick would all cause problems for him.

The fourth subgenre, the epic personal drama, which would take an even broader view of eighteenth-century life, is not possible here, since Sam is not active on the bigger stage, exemplified by the American War of Independence or the expansion of the British Empire.

All of the three subgenres above would work well with this material, and ethically I could see no difference between them, since they were all equally based on truth. So how does the biopic writer know which one to choose? The answer to this lies in her interpretation of the subject and his life. Each possible interpretation of the subject's life pointed towards one of the possible subgenres. For example, the interpretation of Johnson as a creative genius battling against depression clearly belongs to the inner drama subgenre. I had been working with several different interpretations of Johnson's life, but now it was time to choose just one and commit to it, and to cut all the material that was not relevant to it. I found this decision difficult, but made it by asking myself which scenes I would least like to lose. I found that my favourite scenes were those between the Booksellers and Sam, particularly the scene where he is interviewed in Longman's shop, and the two annual budget and schedule review meetings. These clearly belonged to the communal drama subgenre, the story of the struggling writer against the world. This seemed to fit with the interpretation of Johnson as Outsider Poet that I had been developing alongside the structure, as explained in chapter 1. The decision to go with the communal personal drama was a great leap forward in the process of writing my biopic, because it was at this point that I made a definite decision about my interpretation. The matching of interpretation and subgenre was a great leap towards dramatic focus, since I now knew that my main story was:

Sam the Outsider Poet, in conflict with the literary establishment represented by the Booksellers, struggles to make his name.

Sam's story was therefore a validation story.

I could now set about writing my next draft, weaving it around this narrative spine. Scenes which belonged to the internal or domestic drama categories could be cut. Obvious candidates were the scenes where Sam's thoughts on lexicography were illustrated by animation, since these were too internal for a communal drama. Several of the scenes with Tetty, especially one where Sam was not present, clearly belonged to domestic drama, and were not about Sam and his validation in the literary community. This does not mean that all portrayals of Sam's mental state and domestic relationships should be cut, but merely that they should not be too much to the fore. The story of Sam's validation in the literary community should dominate.

Finding the subgenre was a great help in dealing with my ethical question. I now saw that my second ethical intention, to include all of the major events of Johnson's life during the chosen time period, was wrong. Only those which fit, or could be made to fit the subgenre should be included.

The next great leap in the process of structuring my film was the discovery of the theme.

Theme

Theme is an important element in its own right, but it is so intimately bound up with structure, that I have chosen to cover it here. The theme of the film is not usually something that the writer is consciously aware of when she starts the project, but reveals itself organically, through the writing process. Theme represents a universal truth. The theme which revealed itself in the rough draft of my biopic was the relationship between chaos and order. In the rough draft the idea of chaos was present everywhere – in Sam's working methods, in Sam's mental state, in Sam's domestic situation, and in the precarious lives of the Poets. Crucially, the theme of chaos also applied to the linguistic/lexicographic story, which was vital in helping to integrate such unfamiliar intellectual concepts into a mainstream film. I also liked the irony of such a chaotic man as Sam being tasked with taming the chaos of the language.

Theme is a great aid to the structuring of the film, because it helps the writer to narrow down the dramatic focus. The main story could now be further refined to:

Sam the chaotic Outsider Poet, in conflict with the literary establishment represented by the Booksellers, struggles to tame the chaos of the English language and make his name.

This theme of chaos would have to penetrate every scene, and so there would be earthquakes, riots in the street, and no peace even in the coffeehouse.

This thematic decision was pleasing with regard to my ethical aims, since my understanding from social history books describing the period, as well as the engravings of Hogarth, is that London was indeed a chaotic place at that time. Roy Porter's *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1991, pp. 17–21) describes a society without protection for the weak or sick, with bloodsports, public executions, binge drinking, and rioting taking place in streets awash with dung. Chaos was also something that was perceived by the literary elite of the time to be a disturbing problem in the English language. Without a definitive dictionary or grammar of English, writers ventured out into chaos and uncertainty every time they wrote a sentence (Crystal, 2004, p. 365), prompting Lord Chesterfield's lament in the *World* on 28 November 1754: 'It must be owned that our language is at present in a state of anarchy'.

The second great service that theme does for structure is to provide dramatic focus for all the other characters' stories. As Parker (p. 93) says: 'One of the most powerful uses of theme in narrative construction is for all the stories in the narrative to reflect the same basic theme.'

Knowing that all of the characters' stories had to be about chaos and order helped me to discover what I would need to cut or change from the giant first draft. For example, Tetty's story should now be about her attempt to bring some kind of order to the chaos of her domestic situation, as represented by her full tea service, and attempt at a civilized social life with her neighbours. When the chaos of the household beats her, and order cannot be imposed, she gives up on the world and retreats to her bed with her laudanum.

Theme also shows me that my ethical intention of including all of the major events of my protagonist's life during the chosen time period was wrong. I was forced to cut the arrival of Frank in the Johnson household. Frank's story, although about validation, now fell outside the range of both the Outsider Poet interpretation and the theme of chaos and order. Frank's story was about slavery and freedom, a very powerful theme in its own right, and therefore a great distraction from the main focus. As McKee (p. 115) says:

> The more beautifully you shape your work around one clear idea, the more meanings audiences will discover in your film as they take your idea and follow its implications into every aspect of their lives. Conversely, the more ideas you try to pack into a story, the more they implode upon themselves, until the film collapses into a rubble of tangential notions, saying nothing.

Cutting Frank completely from the film was ethically undesirable, but his story of slavery and freedom deserved to have a whole film of its own, and could not be relegated to the position of being a tertiary story in a film about something else.

In the final polish stage, however, I did bring Frank back in a small capacity. This was because some people with knowledge of Johnson's life who read the script expressed surprise and disappointment that Frank was absent from the film. Audience expectation is something that the biopic writer must take into account. For example, screenwriters Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely (2004, 00:40:30–00:42:09) felt that there was no way they could avoid showing Peter Sellers playing Inspector Clouseau in *The Life And Death of Peter Sellers* (2004), despite the fact that they found it problematic to show an actor (Geoffrey Rush) playing an actor playing a character.

Eventually I decided that including Frank in a reduced capacity was the lesser of two evils. I broke with chronology, and had him arrive in Sam's house a full five years before this really happened. In order to make him fit the theme of chaos and order, I showed him tidying up, and succeeding in imposing some order upon the chaos of papers in the dictionary garret. In order to make him fit my Outsider Poet interpretation, I made Frank bond with the Poets and express a desire to be like them, giving Sam a reason to finally boil over with frustration at the plight of all poets, himself included.

However, I am still dissatisfied with my portrayal of Frank. The reason for this can be explained by relating it to the different truth types. My portrayal does not comply with fact, for reasons that I have explained above. It fares a little better with regard to Johnson's truth of personality, in that it does portray his kindness in taking Frank in. However, it does not comply with the third truth type, since the emotional truth of Frank's arrival is, I feel, that this young boy brought light and hope into Johnson's life at a time when the widower was paralyzed by grief.

Creating the Three Acts – the Rewrite Stage

The next stage was to rewrite the film several times to make it fit the three acts. Appendix 1 shows a diagram of the film's final three act structure. This section focuses on the two areas that gave me the most difficulty with regard to my ethical intentions during the rewrite stage – creating a major reversal, and creating a third act.

The Reversal

The reversal, originally defined by Aristotle (p. 18) as 'a change to the opposite in the actions being performed', is a common technique of screenwriting. I make use of it in the Act 2 sequence which runs from p. 67 to p. 89. Before this reversal sequence, Sam is confidently speeding towards the end of the *Dictionary*; the Booksellers are pleased with his progress; relations with Tetty are much improved; and Sam's dream of seeing *Irene* on the stage is finally about to come true. By the end of the sequence, Sam is so disillusioned with the *Dictionary* that he is about to stop all work on it for a period of two years; he has lost the support of the Booksellers and Chesterfield; his marriage is damaged beyond repair; and his dreams of literary greatness have been shattered. Although these misfortunes really did all befall Johnson, they did not occur in such quick succession. Fitting nine years of Johnson's life into 117 minutes demands considerable compression.

In the film, the following all happen in the space of less than 24 hours:

17 June 1749
Disastrous first night of *Irene*.
Tetty is visited by her son.
London is hit by a second earthquake.
Sam's revelation about the verb 'to break'.
Crisis in the dictionary project, as Sam realizes that it cannot be written in the way that he had originally intended.

18 June 1749
The original deadline for compilation.
Martin's *Lingua Britannica Reformata* is on the press.
Sam asks the Booksellers if he can start the text again from scratch, but they refuse.
Sam is refused an audience with Chesterfield.
Compiling comes to a halt.

This is when they actually happened:

The original deadline for compilation.	18 June 1749
Disastrous first night of *Irene*.	6 Feb 1749
Tetty is visited by her son.	True episode, date unknown
London is hit by a second earthquake.	8 Mar 1750
Sam's revelation about 'to break'.	Fictional episode
Crisis in the dictionary project	late 1749 – early 1750
Lingua Britannica Reformata on the press.	Oct 1747
Sam asks the Booksellers if he can start the text again from scratch, but they refuse.	Fictional episode
Sam is refused an audience with Chesterfield.	Myth
Compiling comes to a halt.	late 1749 – early 1750 according to Reddick, late 1749 according to McDermott

This sequence is worth examining in the light of my original ethical framework relating to structure:

i. to keep to chronological order;
ii. to include all the important events of the subject's life during the chosen time period;
iii. to only include fictional episodes which I believe could have happened, at least in a similar way.

The biggest departures from my original intentions involve chronology, but as I discussed earlier in this chapter, by now I have come to the conclusion that chronology cannot be a rigid criteria for biopics, although it is desirable to keep to it where possible. Really, the deviations from chronology in this sequence are not too serious, since the worst offenders, the printing of Martin's rival dictionary and the earthquake, are peripheral events which are not central to the main concern of the film. I am not concerned about the placing of the arrival of Tetty's son in Gough Square, since the date of this event is not known, and so I feel free to place it at any time between Sam and Tetty's arrival in Gough Square and Tetty's death. The events which are central to our main story, the disastrous first night of *Irene*, the crisis in the dictionary project, and compiling coming to a halt, are in fact shown in the correct chronological order, with the first night of Irene being shown four months after it really happened, and the crisis in the project being shown six months or so earlier than it really happened. Given the overall time compression required, I do not feel that this is too unreasonable.

The sequence poses no problems with regard to the second ethical intention of including all of the major events during that period, since there is nothing of importance that I have left out.

Have I kept to my third intention of only including fictional episodes which I believe could have happened, at least in a similar way? Is Sam's revelation about the verb 'to break' something which 'could have happened, at least in a similar way'? Reddick (p. 26) tells us that: 'The wealth of possible usages for words, as he read through printed books gathering his examples, swelled to exceed the expectation of even the keen, extremely well-read Johnson.' McDermott, as she explained in her lecture, thinks that it is the core, frequent verbs which would have surprised Johnson with their large number of senses and additional phrasal verbs, which had not been identified in

previous dictionaries. McDermott suggests that Johnson would have first been made aware of this when he came to compile 'to bear'. I chose to use 'to break' instead of 'to bear' as a metaphor for Sam's broken spirit after the disastrous performance of *Irene* and Tetty's tirade, and also for his now shattered lexicographic methodology. I do feel that this scene is close to what it must have really been like for Johnson to make this discovery. The difference between the reality as I imagine it to have happened, and the scene in the film is limited to the additions which are necessary in order to make the scene cinematic, i.e. told by means of visuals and sound, namely the earthquake and the design of the quotation slip filing system. London was hit by an earthquake, although there is no record as to how it affected life in number 17 Gough Square, and it has merely been moved in time. Frustratingly little is known about how Johnson organized his quotation slips. We know that (Reddick, p. 32):

> The quotations were transcribed neatly in columns, which were then cut up into slips, with one quotation to a slip. After a time they were sorted by the amanuenses into alphabetical order and, much later, were either copied or pasted into the manuscript of the *Dictionary*.

How they were stored and sorted is not known. What kind of stationery and storage systems would have been available to Johnson? Paper folders? Wooden filing cabinets? I went to Johnson's *Dictionary* for inspiration and looked up 'file'. There I found the definition: 'A line on which papers are strung to keep them in order', and there was my answer. I would show the quotation slips strung on a series of lines. I would suspend them from the ceiling of the dictionary garret, and, as they swelled in number, make them look like the branches of a tree in full leaf, as a metaphor for the chaotic and organic nature of the language.

I have justified this sequence in terms of dramatic structure, and in terms of the truth type 'fact', but how does it relate to the other truth types on the spectrum? Is it an accurate representation of Johnson's truth of personality? Where I feel that I have succeeded in this regard is in showing how his great mind got to grips with the immensity of the language and the mammoth task of defining it. Where I feel that I have failed is in portraying Johnson as too mild-mannered. He does not, for example, confront Garrick about insulting Tetty. I suspect that this is a case of transference, and is something that I will rectify in subsequent drafts.

With regard to the third truth type, I feel that this sequence is faithful to Johnson's emotional truth, in that it portrays his hope for *Irene*, and great disappointment at the play's reception (Clifford, 1979, p. 13); his unhappiness in his marriage (Holmes, 1994, p. 20); and his emotional struggle with his lexicographic task, written 'not in the soft obscurities of retirement, or under the shelter of academick bowers, but amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow' (*Preface* to the *Dictionary*, 10th unnumbered page). In this sequence, dramatic structure and emotional truth take priority.

Creating an Act 3

Some biopics don't have a third act. *The Naked Civil Servant* (1975) about flamboyant homosexual Quentin Crisp; *Bound For Glory* (1976) about folk singer Woody Guthrie; and *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980) about country star Loretta Lynn, all finish abruptly, in a way, I would argue, that takes the audience by surprise and leaves them unsatisfied. This is because they do not have an Act 3. I conclude that this is because the writers wanted to adhere closely to the facts of the lives. The classic Hollywood Act 3 concludes the narrative, resolves the conflict, confirms the theme, and, most crucially, answers the question posed by Act 1. When in real life do we feel such a sense of resolution and closure? Real life doesn't have an Act 3.

Alexander and Karazewski's biopics conform to the classic Hollywood paradigm. This is what they (1996, 01:42:32–01:43:26) did when writing Act 3 of *The People vs. Larry Flynt*. The film:

> Goes into a bit of plot machinery in this wrap up so we could kind of take the political story, and the legal problems, and the relationship with Althea, and her dying, and the relationship with Allan, and sort of tie it all up, feeling dramatically satisfying ... We ended up doing a bit of chronological reordering in this area in terms of the timing between the different court decisions, and Althea's death, and Falwell showing up on the TV with that quote, and Larry wanting to take the case back to the Supreme Court. It's a bit of shuffling on our parts, but we wanted to sort of feel like a movie, and it still has the integrity that this is about real life, but where the audience has a bit of that up and then they're down, and

> then they're sad and there's a bit of catharsis, and a final climactic fight at the Supreme Court.

Alexander and Karazewski, as we have seen, take great pains to be ethical in their treatment of their subjects, but when it comes to a choice between strict chronological order and a satisfying Act 3, the need for an Act 3 wins. As Yanno (back cover) says: 'A film's ending is crucial ... more than any other part of the film, the ending determines whether the audience likes a film or not.'

Yanno breaks the parts of Act 3 down into four stages: the setup of the final battle, the final battle, the outcome of the final battle, and the denouement. Each of these is necessary to ensure a satisfying Act 3, and so must be created out of the subject's life. This is where most ethical dilemmas occur.

In *Sam J*, the 'set up of the final battle' is the sequence during which Sam chains himself to the desk and compiles doggedly, seeing visions and descending into madness (pp. 103–107). This is a fictional episode, invented to fulfil the requirements of this stage of the narrative. However, I feel that it conforms to Johnson's truth of personality and emotional truth, since Johnson's struggle with depression is well documented, and Boswell (p. 122) says that 'his sufferings upon the death of his wife were severe beyond what are commonly endured'. With regard to factual truth, it is also important to note just how much work Johnson did on the *Dictionary* in those last few years. McDermott believes that the bulk of the *Dictionary* was compiled in those final two years after Tetty's death. At the time of Tetty's death in March 1752, the text had only been printed off up to DAME 2 (the second sense of the entry for 'dame'), and yet compilation was complete by spring or early summer in 1754. So I imagined that the combination of grief and extreme hard work put great strain on his mental health.

The 'final battle' is fulfilled by the scene in which the Booksellers threaten to credit Chesterfield with the authorship of the *Dictionary*, and Sam defends himself with a great speech (pp. 111–112). This episode is complete fiction, and the one which gives me the greatest cause for concern in the whole film. This is because there is no evidence anywhere that the booksellers ever thought of cheating Johnson out of the authorship of the *Dictionary*. I think that this episode does transgress my third ethical intention 'to only include fictional episodes which I believe could have happened, at least in a similar way'. This is a fiction born out of structural and thematic necessity.

Sam has to be provoked in this way in order to incite his great speech, which contains the film's conclusions on the theme of chaos, which represent its universal truth. Since this is a matter which concerns the portrayal of real people, Millar, Longman, and Dodsley, I discuss the ethical impact of this further in the next chapter.

The 'outcome of the final battle' is fulfilled by the launch party sequence (pp. 112–114) where the *Dictionary* appears in all its glory and Sam publicly trounces Lord Chesterfield, emerging triumphant. The purpose of this stage (Yanno, p. 59) is to answer to the question posed by Act 1. Will Sam achieve his dream of literary renown? The answer is yes. This has a much stronger ethical basis. Although there is no record of the eighteenth-century equivalent of a launch party as such, the *Dictionary* shown in the film is faithful to the appearance of the real one, including Johnson's honorary degree and the line of verse sneaked in by Macbean. Johnson's conflict with Chesterfield conforms partly to factual truth. It is well documented that Johnson did have a confrontation with Lord Chesterfield at the time of the publication of the *Dictionary*. This was not, however, face to face, but in the form of the famously withering letter written by Johnson to Chesterfield (Boswell, pp. 132–133). Letters are intrinsically uncinematic, and so I adapted the contents into a speech delivered by Sam to Chesterfield at the launch party. Although much shorter, the speech retains the letter's image of the drowning man, and remains faithful to the original tone.

The 'denouement' acts as a 'curtain call' and a 'final farewell' (Yanno, p. 73), and is fulfilled by Johnson's thank you speech, and the final scene with Garrick (pp. 115–117). Johnson thanks everyone who has contributed to his success in turn. This speech was in danger of feeling contrived, and of being truer to the sentimental spirit of Hollywood than the robust spirit of Johnson. I remember having a similar uncomfortable feeling during the Nobel Prize acceptance speech at the end of *A Beautiful Mind*. I attempted to mitigate this problem by incorporating as many of Johnson's own words as possible, including the moving line from the end of the *Preface* to the *Dictionary* (10th unnumbered page): 'I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please, have sunk into the grave.'

The very final scene poses no ethical problems. Johnson stands on the bank of the Thames, and takes his rightful place in history. This is a plausible fiction, and does not violate my original intention 'to only include fictional episodes which I believe could have happened, at least in a similar way'.

Conclusion

Here I return to my original ethical framework which relates to structure:

i. to keep to chronological order;
ii. to include all the important events of the subject's life during the chosen time period;
iii. to only include fictional episodes which I believe could have happened, at least in a similar way.

In the course of developing the structure of the film, I found that point ii. was not, after all, a desirable aim for the biopic writer. This I discovered when I realised the importance of dramatic focus, and of cutting material which does not serve to support the writer's interpretation of the life. However, audience expectation also plays a part in decisions about the inclusion of a character or event.

I found that criteria i. and iii. still stand up as desirable aims for the biopic writer, but discovered that there were points in the development of the narrative where each was superseded by structural necessities, which had to take priority.

This clearly reveals that the list of criteria does not stipulate the ethics of the film. However, neither is it the case that the conventions of Hollywood reign supreme. I also have an internal ethical boundary. Right at the edge of this boundary, but just within it, is Millar's suggestion that Chesterfield be credited as author of the *Dictionary* (*Sam J,* p. 110). The inclusion of Richard Savage, a character who is dead by the beginning of the story, lies beyond it.

Chapter 3

Character

This chapter examines my portrayal of real people as characters in the film in the light of my original ethical aims, as stated in my introduction:

i. to portray my subject in a way which I believe to be true;
ii. to portray secondary characters as fairly and accurately as possible.

These ethical aims relate to the second truth type, truth of personality, and also to the third, emotional truth.

There are two screenwriting theorists who deal with characters and their dramatic functions within the screenplay, Michael Hauge, in *Writing Screenplays That Sell* (1988), and Linda Seger in *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film* (1992). Both break the dramatic functions of characters down into four categories. Hauge's model is aimed at screenplays of all genres within the Hollywood mainstream, while Seger's book is aimed specifically at screenwriters who are adapting true life stories or literary works into film. I have chosen to follow Hauge's model, however, because it is much more systematic than Seger's. At times Hauge's model seems simplistic, and one can think of examples of successful films which fall outside its parameters. However, there are also many which fall within it. I feel that this model is a suitable one for my project, because it is very much focused on the achievement of commercial success in the Hollywood mainstream.

Hauge breaks the dramatic functions of characters down into just two types, primary and secondary characters. He gives very little analysis to the secondary characters, and places much greater importance on what he calls the primary characters, which he analyses in great detail. He subdivides the primary characters into four types: the hero, the nemesis, the reflection, and the romance.

I have used Hauge's model to structure my analysis of the primary characters in my film. My analysis of each character role examines two questions: firstly whether my

portrayal meets Hauge's criteria, thus fulfilling its dramatic functions and achieving commercial viability, and secondly whether that portrayal is ethical.

The Hero

In Hauge's model (p. 4) the hero is by far the most important character in the whole film:

> Understanding what a screenplay needs to accomplish is simple; I can tell it to you in one sentence: *Enable a sympathetic character to overcome a series of increasingly difficult, seemingly insurmountable obstacles and achieve a compelling desire.*

According to Hauge (p. 11), the whole film hangs upon the hero and his goal:

> Every facet of your screenplay grows out of this marriage of character and motivation. Story concept, character development, plot structure, and even each individual scene must contribute to the main character's motivation ... every word of the entire screenplay will grow out of that visible motivation.

However, as Hauge (p. 41) himself says, if the film is an adaptation of a true story, then the writer begins with a 'more fully defined hero', and that although 'you can vary and compress the truth somewhat even in docudrama, at least 80 percent of your character will be dictated by the actual events you are dramatizing'. This percentage is, in reality, impossible to compute, and can at best serve as a rough guideline.

I explained in chapter 1 how I came to my interpretation of Johnson and began to create the character of Sam. I will now look at the development of the character of Sam from the point of view of screenwriting, using Hauge's model of the dramatic functions of the hero.

Hauge (p. 57) defines the hero thus:

> This is the main character, whose outer motivation drives the plot forward, who is the primary object of identification for the reader and audience, and who is on screen most of the time. As with all the primary characters, the hero must possess some outer motivation and conflict, while an inner motivation and conflict may or may not be revealed and explored.

The hero needs four basic attributes: audience identification, originality, motivation and conflict.

Identification

In order for the audience to emotionally engage with the hero, identification must take place. In order to create this audience identification, Hauge (pp. 41–46) states that the writer must do the following:

1. Create sympathy for the character as soon as he appears on the screen, by giving him an undeserved misfortune; putting him in jeopardy; or making him likeable (by being a good or nice person, being funny, or being good at what he does).
2. Introduce the character as soon as possible.
3. Show the character as being 'in touch with his own power', whether 'power over other people', 'power to do whatever needs to be done, without hesitation', or 'power to express one's feelings regardless of others' opinions'.
4. Place the character in a familiar setting.
5. Give the character familiar flaws and foibles.

Of these, the one which gives me most cause for concern is the fourth, the familiar setting. The eighteenth century has been represented on the cinema screen, but in the majority of cases these films have been of the swashbuckling action adventure type, such as *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962) and the recent *Pirates of the Caribbean* series. There have been films of court intrigue, such as *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988), as well as biographical films such as *Amadeus* (1984) and *The Madness of King George* (1994). Casanova has been the subject of a romantic comedy *Casanova* (2005) directed by Lasse Hallström, and a TV series *Casanova* (2005) written by

Russell T. Davies. There have also been literary adaptations such as *Tom Jones* (1963), and the TV serials *Clarissa* (1991) and *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders* (1996). The TV detective series *City of Vice* (2008) is also set in eighteenth-century London. However, the London literary world of this period is far from familiar to the international cinema audience.

The second point also presents a problem, since I do not manage to get Sam on the screen until page seven. The reason for this is connected to the previous point, in that an unfamiliar world with an unfamiliar problem, the lack of a dictionary, has to be set up at the beginning of the film. We then meet our hero, who will be given the challenge of solving this problem. However, the character of Sam scores highly in the first category, creating sympathy. In Act 1 Sam has several undeserved misfortunes: his play *Irene* is not read simply because he does not have a patron; he is paid a pittance by Cave who can clearly afford more; and he is insulted by Colley Cibber for his unfashionable dress. In Act 1 Sam is put in jeopardy when the Chandler and Bailiffs try to arrest him (also an undeserved misfortune, since Cave does not pay him enough to afford his rent). This quality fits in perfectly with my interpretation of Sam as Outsider Poet. He is an underdog in the literary world, a situation which is undeserved since Sam, in line with Hauge's second point, is good at what he does. Sam's talent is something that we first see in the interview scene in Longman's shop, when he has the brilliant idea of putting literary quotations in the *Dictionary* (*Sam J*, pp. 23–24). This is later reinforced in the pub scene where he explains his plan to the Poets (pp. 38–40), and then later when he has his great revelation about the language and its true nature (pp. 76–83). This is crucial to retaining the audience's identification with Sam, since their sympathies could easily switch to the Booksellers as the dictionary project progresses and Sam sets about the task in such an eccentric way, eventually failing to keep to the schedule and then refusing to work for two years.

Sam is portrayed as 'a good and nice person'. The audience first sees his kindness at the beginning of Act 2, when he uses his new position to help rescue the Poets from prison and poverty.

These characteristics do create sympathy for Sam, but are they all true? Do they fulfil my stated ethical aim of portraying Johnson as I believe he truly was? Johnson's play *Irene* was rejected by Fleetwood, the patentee of Drury Lane theatre, in 1738, 'probably because it was not patronised by some man of high rank' (Boswell, p. 56). There is no record of Johnson being arrested for debt at this time, but he did struggle

to afford candles. Boswell (p. 58) claims that Johnson 'probably obtained a tolerable livelihood' working for Cave as a contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and yet evidence to the contrary is to be found in his letters to Cave, one of which (Boswell, p. 72) he signs himself *impransus* – supperless, and another (Boswell, p. 82) which adds in a postscript that Cave's printer's messenger boy 'found me writing almost in the dark', because he had no candles, and continues 'If you can spare me another guinea for the history, I should take it very kindly, to-night; but if you do not, I shall not think it an injury. I am almost well again.' Most telling of all regarding Cave's payment of Johnson at this time, is an anecdote recorded by Boswell (Wain, p. 115) in which a dinner guest of Cave's praised the *Life of Savage*, not realising that the author could hear, since Johnson was dressed so shabbily, that he dined whilst hidden behind a screen. The episode where Colley Cibber insults Sam for his unfashionable dress is a fiction, but Johnson's clothes were thought unacceptable in polite company, as the previous anecdote shows. It seems to me that the undeserved misfortunes that I have given to Sam are indicative of the poverty and humiliation that he suffered at the time, and are true to what we know of his life.

Sam is shown as being good at what he does. It is not clear who first had the idea of putting quotations in the *Dictionary*. Dodsley's biographer Harry H. Solomon makes this claim for Pope (Solomon, 1996, p. 119), and illustrative quotations had been used by the Italians in their great *Vocabulario* of 1623 (Reddick, p. 15). However, Johnson was the first to attempt to determine the meanings of words by deducing them from a collection of quotations (Reddick, p. 15), a truly great innovation in lexicography. Boswell (p. 32) says that Johnson was 'blest with all the powers of genius and understanding in a degree far above the ordinary state of nature', and according to Adam Smith (Boswell, p. 36) '"Johnson knew more books than any man alive"'. There is also, obviously, the evidence of the great *Dictionary* itself. Whatever Dodsley's contribution to the project, no one disputes that the great book was written by Johnson himself, clearly a remarkable achievement for a single human being.

The 'goodness of Johnson's heart' is something that makes an impression on Boswell (p. 212) from the very beginning of their acquaintance, and is an absolute gift to the screenwriter in maintaining sympathy for the hero. The area where maintaining sympathy for the protagonist became a balancing act, was in Sam's treatment of his wife. Here the audience could easily take the view that Sam ought to throw the ne'er-do-well Poets out of his house, since Tetty's dislike of their presence is reasonable, and Sam's first duty should be to his wife. For this reason, I invented the story about

Macbean and Richards (a totally fictional character) being in prison, and Richards dying before Sam could rescue him. This story is crucial because it explains why Sam feels compelled to give shelter to the Poets despite the upset it causes Tetty – if he doesn't they may die. My creation of this fictional story of Richards conveys the truth that Johnson's amanuenses did depend on him for their survival. As Boswell (p. 98) says: 'To all these painful labourers Johnson shewed a never-ceasing kindness, so far as they stood in need of it,' long after they ceased to be in his employ, rescuing Alexander Macbean from homelessness by getting him admitted 'a poor brother of the Charterhouse', and frequently giving money to Peyton 'when reduced to penury', finally meeting the funeral expenses of both him and his wife.

Sam is extremely funny, right from the first time we see him, coming out of his reverie and singeing his wig on his candle, and remains funny all the way through the film up until the point where the tone changes, at the point where Garrick mimics Tetty (*Sam J*, pp. 67–69). The character of Sam generates comedy in two ways – by the physical comedy of his awkwardness, and the wit of his dialogue. This was also a gift from the historical Johnson, who was physically awkward and a famously quotable wit. The wit of Johnson's conversation is well documented by Boswell throughout the *Life*, and the comical nature of Johnson's appearance comes across in this description (Boswell, p. 125) of *Rambler* reader Bennet Langton's first meeting with him:

> Mr Langton was exceedingly surprised when the sage first appeared. He had not received the smallest intimation of his figure, dress, or manner. From perusing his writings, he fancied he should see a decent, well-dressed, in short, a remarkably decorous philosopher. Instead of which, down from his bed-chamber, about noon, came, as newly risen, a huge uncouth figure with a little dark wig which scarcely covered his head, and his clothes hanging loose about him.

The character of Sam also scores in the third category, by being 'in touch with his own power', in the sense that he has the power to express his feelings regardless of others' opinions, as we see in his reaction to Colley Cibber. This confrontation with Cibber is a fiction. However, I feel that it is justified since it is used to show Johnson's truth of personality. This is a character trait that he really had, as the book-felling incident with Osborne (Boswell, p. 80) shows. Sam also demonstrates this confidence in the way that he deals with Chesterfield in the launch party scene (*Sam J*, p. 114), which is based, as I have explained, on Johnson's famous letter to the Earl.

In the last category Sam scores very highly. He has many flaws and foibles, including clumsiness, awkwardness, and a variety of curious but endearing habits. These were all true, since the historical Johnson was lumbering and physically awkward, and suffered from 'profound problems of temperament and physical disability' (Holmes, 1994, p. 17), which gave him strange physical habits 'of the convulsive kind' (Boswell, p. 75). Boswell (p. 76) cites an example of Johnson's eccentric behaviour related by Sir Joshua Reynolds:

> When he and I took a journey together into the West, we visited the late Mr Banks, of Dorsetshire; the conversation turning upon pictures, which Johnson could not see well, he retired to a corner of the room, stretching out his right leg as far as he could reach before him, then bringing up his left leg, and stretching his right still further on. The old gentleman observing him, went up to him, and in a very courteous manner assured him, that though it was not a new house, the flooring was perfectly safe. The Doctor started from his reverie, like a person waked out of his sleep, but spoke not a word.

I think with regard to audience identification that I am simply lucky in my choice of protagonist. Samuel Johnson is a very appealing character, and I did not have to distort my interpretation of him in order to make him fit these criteria. My task was merely to structure especially Act 1 so that all these identification-building characteristics appeared on the screen as soon as possible.

Originality

Hauge (p. 47) rightly says that: 'The character must be different from other characters who have been in films before'. A lack of originality is not normally a problem for writers of biopics, although Custen (1999, p. 133) does find instances among Darryl Zanuck's Hollywood biopics of the 1930s and 40s:

> The references used to construct *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell* were not contemporary accounts of Bell's life or interpretations of what the new invention meant for the nation. Instead *Bell* was based upon previous Fox hits, only some of which were biopics, like *Drums along the*

> *Mohawk* (1939), *Suez* (1938), and *In Old Chicago* (1938). Bell, like other characters in biopic fiction, is made, like Mary Shelley's creature, of bits of previous incarnations of already-lived lives ... a hit life was constructed out of resurrected hit movies.

The way to avoid this problem is for the interpretation of the subject to be created with a certain amount of independence from the requirements of film. It is too simplistic to say that the writer should come to an interpretation first, and then address the dramatic functions afterwards, since all but the most novice writer is very much aware of these functions from the very start, but the writer should try to keep them at a distance during the main interpretation phase.

Whilst this section of my thesis gives a neat breakdown of how the character of Sam was created, the reality was not as systematic as this, but much more chaotic, as creative processes usually are, involving a great deal of rewriting, and trial and error. My analysis gives the impression that I developed Sam as an interpretation first and a film character second, but in reality the two were developed at the same time, out of a creative 'mess', with the other elements of the screenplay all simultaneously making their own demands. Hopefully, what emerges is a character who conforms to the requirements of drama, but who nevertheless retains enough of his original essence (we are reminded of Hauge's recommended 80%) to seem fresh and new.

Motivation and Conflict

Hauge (pp. 50–54) divides motivation into two types: 'outer' and 'inner motivation'. According to Hauge, 'outer motivation', what the character 'visibly or physically hopes to achieve or accomplish by the end of the film' is compulsory, since it drives the main plot and determines the premise of the movie. 'Inner motivation' (pp. 51–52) is what drives the character to achieve his outer motivation, the answer to which is 'always related to gaining greater feelings of self-worth', of feeling better about himself. Outer motivation is compulsory in every Hollywood film, whereas inner motivation is optional. Whilst this, again, may seem over simplistic, it is nevertheless worth considering as typical of the Hollywood commercial mainstream.

'Outer conflict is whatever stands in the way of the character's achieving his outer motivation', is generated by nature or other characters, and is compulsory. 'Inner conflict is whatever stands in the way of the character's achieving her inner motivation', is generated within the character, and is only needed if you have chosen to explore the inner motivation of your character (pp. 54–56).

Hauge's notions of inner motivation and conflict merit further investigation, since they are directly related to the third truth type, emotional truth. Hauge rightly claims that these are not required in every film. Most biopics belong to the genre of personal drama (Parker, pp. 159 –161), a genre in which the inner motivation of the hero is present to varying degrees, according to the subgenre. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the personal drama can be divided into the subgenres of inner drama, domestic drama, communal drama, and epic drama. These subgenres vary in the amount of narrative space that is available for portraying the inner motivation of the protagonist.

The inner drama has a great deal of narrative space to deal with the inner motivation of the protagonist. In *A Beautiful Mind*, John Nash's outer motivation is to be a great mathematician and fulfil the potential of his genius. His inner motivation is to fulfil a need for self-worth, but his inner conflict, schizophrenia, prevents this from happening. In the case of the inner drama, the inner conflict is also the outer conflict, since the film allows us to see inside the hero's mind. The domestic drama is more about relationships but still has a lot of space to deal with the inner motivation of the protagonist. In *Tina: What's Love Got To Do With It* (1993), Tina Turner's outer motivation is to be a successful singing star, and her outer conflict is her violent husband who beats and controls her. Her inner motivation is to fulfil her need for self-worth, a lack first brought about by her mother abandoning her as a child. Her inner conflict is her inability to leave her violent husband. The communal drama has minimal narrative space for inner motivation, but it is present. In *Kinsey*, the hero's outer motivation is to pioneer the scientific study of human sexual behaviour. His outer conflict is the opposition he meets from society in general. This is what takes up the majority of the narrative space. His inner motivation is to rebel against his rigidly pious upbringing and to change society's puritanical attitudes towards sex. His inner conflict, briefly explored, is his own inability to fully comprehend the emotional aspect of human behaviour. The epic drama has space only for minimal exploration of inner motivation. In *Braveheart* (1985), William Wallace's outer motivation is that he desires freedom for Scotland, and his inner motivation is the desire to avenge the death of his

father, brother, and wife. However, this is where the development of the inner Wallace stops, because he does not have inner conflict to oppose this inner motivation, but rather never doubts his beliefs, and does not suffer from a lack of self-worth.

Since my film is a communal personal drama, inner motivation and inner conflict should be present, but minimal. My interpretation of Johnson can be made to fit Hauge's model of motivation and conflict. Sam's outer motivation is to become a successful writer. This fulfils Hauge's requirement of being what the hero 'visibly or physically hopes to achieve or accomplish by the end of the film'. Sam's outer conflict is that the old system of patronage and the new bookselling industry both seek to keep the writer in his place. Once he gets the job of lexicographer, his outer conflict is expanded to include the chaotic nature of the language, which he must tame in order to write the *Dictionary*. Sam's inner motivation is to achieve respect from others through literary renown, shown clearly in his opening dream. Sam's inner conflict, briefly explored, is that he suffers from depression and fears that he could go mad like his father.

These four points both fulfil Hauge's criteria for the dramatic functions of motivation and conflict, and fit with my interpretation of Johnson. Do they all fit in with my notion of the ethical biopic? Since they are so fundamental to the portrayal of my subject's emotional truth, they should be true.

We know that Johnson's outer motivation at this time in his life was to become a successful, known writer. This was the reason that he spent so long writing his tragedy *Irene*, and the reason he came to London in the first place. Boswell (p. 50) tells us that in 1737, whilst Johnson was still living in Staffordshire, Gilbert Walmsley suggested that Johnson get *Irene* produced on the stage: 'Johnson now thought of trying his fortune in London, the great field of genius and exertion, where talents of every kind have the fullest scope, and the highest encouragement'.

Sam's outer conflict, his struggle to break into the literary world, is nicely summed up by these lines, quoted by Boswell (p. 64), from Derrick's *Fortune, a Rhapsody*:

> Will no kind patron JOHNSON own?
> Shall JOHNSON friendless range the town?
> And every publisher refuse
> The offspring of his happy Muse?

With regard to Sam's second outer conflict, we know from the *Preface* (1st unnumbered page) to the *Dictionary* that Johnson found the language chaotic and the task of compiling to be an heroic and nearly impossible endeavour:

> When I took the first survey of my undertaking, I found our speech copious without order, and energetick without rules: wherever I turned my view, there was perplexity to be disentangled, and confusion to be regulated; choice was to be made out of boundless variety, without any principle of selection; adulterations were to be detected, without a settled test of purity; and modes of expression to be rejected or received, without the suffrages of any writers of classical reputation or acknowledged authority.

Sam's inner conflict with mental illness is also described by Boswell, who tells us that Sam inherited from his father '"a vile melancholy ... which made him mad all his life, at least not sober"' (Boswell, p. 17). Boswell (p. 304) summarised this aspect of his character in a memorable metaphor:

> His mind resembled the vast amphitheatre, the Coliseum at Rome. In the centre stood his judgement, which, like a mighty gladiator, combated those apprehensions that, like the wild beasts of the *Arena*, were all around in cells ready to be let out upon him.

Although there are indeed other aspects of Johnson's character and life which could have been selected as his motivations and conflicts, this is the emotional truth of Johnson that I chose to depict, in line with my interpretation.

I will now look at the process involved in creating the other three of Hauge's dramatic roles, that of nemesis, reflection, and romance. The creation of these three is strikingly different from the creation of the hero, in that the hero is created first, and the other dramatic roles are subservient to him.

Christopher Booker, in *The Seven Basic Plots* (2004, p. 282), sees these roles as being extremely restricted:

> Ultimately it is in relation to this central figure that all the other characters in a story take on their significance. What each of the other characters

represents is really only some aspect of the inner state of the hero or heroine themselves.

Not only are these characters bound to the hero, but they are also allotted considerably less narrative space. With such severe limitations on their portrayal, is it possible to give an ethical depiction of the historical people who have been given the dramatic functions of nemesis, reflection, and romance?

The Nemesis

We now come to Hauge's second category of primary character, the nemesis. (Hauge uses the term 'nemesis' where most screenwriters and screenwriting theorists would use the term 'antagonist'.) Hauge makes three points about the nemesis:

1. The nemesis (p. 57) is 'the character who most stands in the way of the hero achieving his or her outer motivation'. Hauge goes on to say that the nemesis must be 'a visible and specific character'. He writes specifically about the roles of characters in drama, not what McKee (pp. 317–318) calls 'the forces of antagonism', which are 'the sum total of all forces that oppose the character's will and desire', which in Sam's case could include abstract concepts such as the system of patronage, and the chaotic nature of the language. The nemesis (Hauge, p. 57) is often, but does not have to be, a villain. He could be 'an opponent, a rival, or even a good guy' (as in the case of Mozart, Salieri's nemesis in *Amadeus*), as long as he is a character and complies with the above definition.

2. The nemesis (p. 57) should be strong and powerful. 'The stronger and more formidable your nemesis, the more effective the story'. The nemesis should have power over the hero, and appear to be more powerful than the hero.

3. The final confrontation between the hero and the nemesis (p. 58) must be shown on screen, because 'it is at this point that the hero either succeeds or fails to achieve his outer motivation.' This final confrontation is usually the climax of the whole film.

I will now deal with each of these points in turn, first examining whether I have fulfilled Hauge's criteria in my screenplay, and secondly discussing the ethical issues involved in meeting these criteria.

1. It is worth noting here that while all films have 'forces of antagonism', many films do not have a nemesis, and that this is very often the case with biopics. So who, if anyone, is the nemesis in Sam's story? With so many of the characters causing problems for him at some time or another, it is not immediately obvious. In chapter 2 we determined that the film followed the conventions of the subgenre of communal drama, placing the Booksellers and wider society as Sam's main antagonists. The Booksellers as a group also fit with Hauge's basic definition of the nemesis. Sam's two-fold outer motivation is to become a successful, known writer; and to tame the language. The Booksellers, despite the fact that they are the ones who employ him to write the *Dictionary*, are also the ones who most stand in Sam's way, repeatedly regarding him as a failure. On p. 23 of the script the Booksellers tell Sam that he has not passed the interview. On pp. 46–49, at the first annual dictionary project meeting, they express severe doubts about Sam's ability to carry out the task. On pp. 61–64 they express severe doubts as to Sam's methods of compiling the *Dictionary*. On pp. 82–84 they reject Sam's reconceptualization of the *Dictionary*, based on his revelation about the language, sending him into a depression which stops him from working for two years. On p. 92 Millar considers suing Sam. On p. 100 they sack him from the dictionary project.

And so it can be seen that the Booksellers repeatedly stand in the way of the hero's outer motivation, in a way that fulfils the dramatic function of Hauge's nemesis. But is this aspect of my portrayal of the Booksellers a success in terms of my ethical intentions? Is it actually true?

In reality the *Dictionary* consortium had seven members (Boswell, p. 95), which I reduced to three for reasons of limited narrative space. My film shows the Booksellers as constantly standing in Sam's way, but would the relationship between the lexicographer and his publishers have been so antagonistic? Little is known about the period of Johnson's life when he was working on the first edition of the *Dictionary*, as Reddick (p. 3) says:

> Remarkably little has been established about Johnson's nine years of work on the *Dictionary* ... The most obvious reason for our ignorance

> concerning the making of Johnson's *Dictionary* has been the apparent lack of documentary or manuscript evidence relating to the composition of the work. First-hand reports, including Johnson's own scattered comments as well as second-hand ones, such as Boswell's, are sketchy and unreliable.

Since Boswell did not know Johnson at this time, this part of his *Life of Johnson* lacks the wonderful detail and meticulously recorded conversations of Johnson's later years. The details of his relationship with the booksellers at this time remain largely unknown.

Reddick and McDermott have pieced together all the available evidence, and come up with theories as to how the *Dictionary* was made. Both conclude that relations with the booksellers were strained. In her lecture, McDermott maintained that Johnson completed the *Dictionary* 'only after repeated threats from his increasingly impatient publishers'. Reddick (p. 2) says that: 'As the completion of his work stretched far beyond his three year prediction, the author stubbornly resisted the demands of the sponsoring booksellers who had become impatient with his delays.'

Although Reddick and McDermott disagree over issues of Johnson's methodology, their versions of the overall shape and progress of the project more or less agree. Johnson signed the contract with the booksellers on 18 June 1746, and it was agreed that the compilation of the *Dictionary* would take three years. The project looked as if it were nearing completion with only a slight delay when Thomas Birch wrote on 30 September 1749 that the *Dictionary* was '"almost ready for the press"' (Reddick, p. 42), by which time the compilation budget would most likely have been spent. But then the project suddenly broke down completely in late 1749 or early 1750. Johnson realized that the *Dictionary* could not be written in the way that he had originally intended and would have to be radically altered. In Reddick's version of events the whole text had to be started again completely from scratch.

There followed a long period in which progress on the *Dictionary* slowed almost to a standstill. In December 1750 printer William Strahan charged the booksellers for printing off A to CARRY 21. Then there was a 16 month hiatus, with nothing being printed off until CARRY 22 to DAME 2 in May 1752 (Reddick, p. 59).

During this period of desperately slow progress on the *Dictionary*, in March 1750, Johnson started writing the *Rambler*, an anonymous twice-weekly publication. Both

McDermott and Reddick agree that Johnson must have severely tried the patience of the booksellers during this time. A defiant and angry letter from Johnson to Strahan (Reddick, p. 59) dated 1 November 1751 indicates that the booksellers had threatened to cut off Johnson's payment and supplies unless he produced more publishable text. Johnson's response was to threaten to strike.

The booksellers may have been relieved when the last *Rambler* was published on 2 March 1752, but then on 17 March 1752 disaster struck and Tetty died. Johnson, tormented by grief, abandoned the *Dictionary* again.

The next batch of text DAME 2 to GRATE was not printed off until October 1753 (Reddick, p. 69). Finally, by spring/early summer 1754, after nine long years, the *Dictionary* text was complete.

Looking at the outline of the dictionary project, it does not take much to imagine that the booksellers must have been concerned by Johnson's erratic progress and long periods of delay, his change in lexicographic approach, and his moonlighting on the *Rambler*. They had, after all, invested the considerable sum of £1,575 (Boswell, p. 95) in the *Dictionary*'s compilation, and further sums in the printing as the project progressed. It is reasonable to believe that they would periodically have doubted Johnson's fitness for the task, and considered sacking him from the project. Overall, I do feel that this aspect of the portrayal of the booksellers as a group conforms to my ethical intentions. However, let us look at the way in which I have portrayed the booksellers as individuals.

I am not troubled by the ethics of my portrayal of Thomas Longman, since this is fairly neutral. Although Philip Wallis' book *At the Sign of the Ship 1724–1974* (1974) outlines the history of the publishing house, it does not convey any sense of Thomas Longman's personality. It fitted my purpose to portray Longman in an uncontroversial way, as a fairly neutral figure between Millar and Dodsley. The ethics of my script, however, become much more difficult when it comes to the case of Robert Dodsley.

Harry H. Solomon's *The Rise of Robert Dodsley* (1996, p. 5) presents a persuasive argument that booksellers, and Dodsley in particular, have been greatly underestimated by literary historians, in favour of an excessive reverence for authors. Solomon (p. 106) portrays Dodsley as a tradesman of the utmost integrity, who treated his writers fairly:

> Tutored by Pope, Dodsley had a strong sense of literary works as valuable property, the responsible use of which could free authors from the servile indignities of patronage ... Dodsley was known for always offering reasonable and often generous terms to authors.

Dodsley and Johnson were friends, Johnson calling him by the affectionate nickname of 'Doddy' (Boswell, p. 167). Dodsley mourned with Johnson when Tetty died (Solomon, p. 160), and was the only member of the dictionary consortium to remain 'Johnson's firm friend' after the project was completed (Solomon, p. 124). What is more, Solomon portrays Dodsley as the mastermind behind the *Dictionary* (p. 120) who 'created the persona of "Dictionary Johnson" for his friend to grow into' (p. 123).

Given all this, it is difficult to keep my portrayal of Dodsley within the bounds of the dramatic role of nemesis. But the conventions of Hollywood demand that I do. This biopic is Sam's story and is about the birth of the author, not Dodsley's story about the birth of the bookseller.

Within these restrictions, however, I have tried to accommodate some of the bookseller's positive qualities portrayed by Solomon. For example, it is Dodsley who first sees the potential lexicographer in Sam, when he asks him to write the *Dictionary* (*Sam J*, p. 12), and who also has both the humanity and good sense to overlook the abrupt nature of Sam's initial refusal, and give him a second chance when he later changes his mind. Dodsley's insight and forward thinking are clearly shown in the script when he is the first to see the potential genius in Sam's reconceptualization of the *Dictionary*, and is prepared to give the lexicographer yet another chance, even after Sam has done no compiling for two years and has just been unmasked as the moonlighting Rambler (*Sam J*, p. 95).

To conclude, the portrayal of Robert Dodsley in the nemesis role can only be achieved by means of ethical compromise. I now move on to my portrayal of Andrew Millar.

As Austin Dobson, the author of *Fielding and Andrew Millar* (1916), a very slim volume of just 16 pages, admits (p. 3), Andrew Millar is 'a rather shadowy personality', considering that he published the works of Thomson, Fielding, and Hume, and that 'there is little on which to base a biographical sketch'. In my film, I portray Millar as being more antagonistic towards Sam than the other booksellers, but is this justified?

When Boswell (p. 148) talks about the conflict between Johnson and the booksellers, he singles Millar out and mentions him specifically:

> Mr Andrew Millar, bookseller in the Strand, took the principal charge of conducting the publication of Johnson's Dictionary; and as the patience of the proprietors was repeatedly tried and almost exhausted, by their expecting that the work would be completed within the time which Johnson had sanguinely supposed, the learned author was often goaded to dispatch, more especially as he had received all the copy-money, by different drafts, a considerable time before he had finished his task. When the messenger who carried the last sheet to Millar returned, Johnson asked him, 'Well, what did he say? ' – 'Sir (answered the messenger), he said, thank GOD I have done with him.' 'I am glad (replied Johnson, with a smile), that he thanks GOD for anything.'

Although Boswell may well have accurately recorded the words, the tone of Millar's exchange with Johnson can never be known. It could be that this was friendly banter of an ironic, playful nature, and that the two men got on well. Here I return to my point in chapter 1 about the necessity of interpretation. I have chosen to interpret Millar's anger and frustration with Johnson as real. This is partly because, drawing on my own experience of working on dictionary projects, I cannot imagine that the publisher who, according to Boswell's description of his role above, seemed to take the role of project manager, would have been anything but infuriated by a lexicographer who delivered his text six years late.

In my portrayal of Andrew Millar, his frustration with Sam is amplified by the fact that the two characters are such different personalities. Something that Hauge does not mention in his description of the dramatic roles, is that hero and nemesis are often people of opposing character types and views.

Based on the scant biographical evidence available, the character of Millar seemed to mould itself naturally into the antithesis of the character of Sam. Boswell (p. 148) tells us that:

> 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 copy-right; the consequence of which was his acquiring a very large fortune.

Johnson was the opposite of this, being an exceptional judge of literature, and, by his own admission (Boswell, p. 762), decidedly less able in the field of personal finance: '"Why, Sir, said Johnson, I am likewise awkward at counting money. But then, Sir, the reason is plain; I have had very little money to count"'. I chose to portray my character of Sam as a chaotic creative literary genius, and then built upon this clash of personalities to make Millar a dour bean-counter, thus creating a conflict in the way that the two men would approach the dictionary project.

To conclude, given Millar's apparent role of what today we would call a project manager, Johnson's delay in producing text, and the apparent opposite nature of their personalities, it seems ethical to me to have shown Millar as fulfilling Hauge's role of the nemesis in this way.

I now progress to Hauge's second criterion of the nemesis role.

2. The nemesis should be strong and have power over the hero. This is true in the case of the Booksellers. Sam is in a position of poverty and dire need, and desperately needs to be known as an author. The Booksellers have great power over Sam, since they can choose whether to give him everything he wants and needs, by paying him fairly and publishing his work, or not. Sam gains power as the dictionary project progresses, becoming more indispensable as he masters his complex task. However, the Booksellers remain still more powerful than Sam, because their wealth increases vastly over that time, due to the great success of their other ventures *Tom Jones* and the *Oeconomy of Human Life*. If the Booksellers lost Sam from the project, they would struggle to find a replacement, the *Dictionary* may well not be published, and the Booksellers would lose money and face. But their businesses would still be buoyant. Sam, on the other hand, would be in an even worse position than he was at the beginning of the film, powerless, in danger of homelessness or prison, with an ailing wife, and even less chance of achieving his dream of literary renown. The Booksellers amply fulfil this part of the nemesis role.

Is my portrayal of the historical booksellers' power over Johnson true?

Boswell (pp. 69–70) includes a letter from Earl Gower to a friend of the Dean of the University of London, which represents an attempt to procure a degree for Johnson, in order that he might get a job as a schoolmaster. Gower says that Johnson 'is not afraid of the strictest examination', and will take the long journey to Dublin if necessary, 'choosing rather to die upon the road, *than be starved to death in translating for booksellers*; which has been his only subsistence for some time past.' The attempt failed, and Johnson was forced to continue suffering the 'hardship of writing for bread' (Boswell, p. 67). Without a degree, all professions were closed to him. The booksellers of London really did hold Johnson's fate in their hands.

With regard to the dictionary project, the booksellers were also more powerful than Johnson. I am in agreement with McDermott's theory that it was the booksellers who set the three year schedule for the project, rather than Johnson as is commonly believed. Johnson's power in the relationship with the booksellers only increased as the project progressed, and he mastered his task. This power is illustrated in the episode related above (Reddick, p. 59) where Johnson threatens to strike, and yet is not sacked from the project. This power shift is reflected in the film script, when the Booksellers contemplate sacking or suing Sam for his lack of work, but find that there is nothing they can do (*Sam J*, pp. 92–95). Overall, however, the booksellers were far more powerful than Johnson, since they were wealthy men. Millar, publisher of *Tom Jones*, acquired 'a very large fortune' (Boswell, p. 148). Dodsley reaped the huge profits of his *Oeconomy of Human Life*, one of the most successful publications of the century (Solomon, p. 139), and by the mid 1750s, his 'fortune and fame were assured' (p. 167).

3. As stipulated by Hauge's model, the film does show the final confrontation between Sam and the Booksellers. This occurs on pp. 110–112, when Sam hands in the final page of the *Dictionary*. Millar points out inadequacies in the text, and the Booksellers consider going back on their word, and crediting Chesterfield as the author of the *Dictionary*. Sam makes a great speech, and turns his fate around, achieving his outer motivation. Once again, the Booksellers fulfil Hauge's role of the nemesis. However, as I explained in my last chapter, this point represents the most serious ethical dilemma of the whole project, since nowhere in any of the biographies or critical literature is there any mention that the booksellers ever considered crediting anyone but Johnson with the authorship of the *Dictionary*. This is a fiction created by me, out of structural needs explained in the last chapter, and the need for the nemesis to appear in the final confrontation. So does the inclusion of this confrontation create an

unethical portrayal of the booksellers? If not factually true, could this at least be legitimate in terms of their truth of personality?

It was not uncommon for booksellers of the time to leave the authorship of a work blank in order to stimulate speculation, or to use a different author's name, as happened in the case of Robert Shiels' *Lives of the Poets*, whose publishers paid Colley Cibber's reprobate son Theophilus ten guineas in order to put 'Mr. Cibber' on the title page, in the hope of deceiving the public into thinking that his father was the author (Hitchings pp. 61–62). Would Longman, Dodsley, and Millar have been capable of such a low trick?

Thomas Longman does not really pose much of an ethical problem, since he is, once again, portrayed in a fairly neutral way. My portrayal of Robert Dodsley, however, is more difficult to justify. Solomon (pp. 165–166) thinks that Dodsley would not even have wanted Chesterfield credited as patron, never mind author: 'It is inconceivable that Dodsley, who had been the real patron of the *Dictionary* would have encouraged Chesterfield to claim the credit, nor would Chesterfield have done so'. If this is true, then why did Dodsley seem to encourage Chesterfield to take an interest in the *Dictionary*, and to praise it in two articles published in Dodsley's magazine *The World*? Solomon (p. 165) argues that Dodsley and Johnson understood completely different things by the concept of patronage. Johnson saw the credit of 'patron' as implying that the project had been economically dependent upon Chesterfield, whereas Dodsley perceived the role as being similar to that of celebrity endorsement today, with his illustrious name being used to benefit sales. Unfortunately, it is not possible to show such fine distinctions in the climactic scene of the film.

In defence of my portrayal of Dodsley, I would add that the historical bookseller was not above employing cunning tricks to boost sales. Solomon (p. 142) tells us that 'Dodsley got immense pleasure from publishing intrigues'. From his early days as Pope's publisher, who himself '"hardly drank tea without a stratagem"' (p. 45), 'Dodsley had developed a zest for literary deception' (p. 143). Most telling is Dodsley's promotional campaign which deliberately started the rumour that the *Oeconomy of Human Life* had been written by Lord Chesterfield, when it had almost certainly been written by Dodsley himself (p. 141). However, it is clear from Solomon's biography that Dodsley would not have tried to cheat Johnson out of the authorship of the *Dictionary*. His portrayal is distorted by his membership of the nemesis dramatic role.

In terms of the William Nicholson test, I am uncomfortable next to Robert Dodsley whilst watching this part of the film.

My portrayal of Andrew Millar presents an even greater ethical dilemma, since he is the bookseller who comes up with the suggestion of crediting Chesterfield with authorship of the dictionary. But would the historical Millar have acted in bad faith in this way?

Dobson (pp. 12–14) tells us that when Millar, publisher of Fielding's *Amelia*, began to suspect that the novel would be judged inferior to its predecessor *Tom Jones*, he came up with a cunning stratagem. Prior to publication he offered copies of his publications to fellow booksellers with the usual publishers' discount, except in the case of *Amelia*, claiming that it was so much in demand that he could not spare any copies. The ruse worked, and all the copies were sold, with the result that booksellers were burdened with copies of a book which remained on the shelves of their shops.

If Millar was capable of deceiving his fellow booksellers like this, then is it ethical to depict him mistreating Sam in this way? Millar was certainly a canny businessman, capable of a low trick, but there is no evidence that he would stoop as low as he does in my film. I therefore consider that my interpretation of Andrew Millar falls short of the ethical standards that I hoped to achieve. I feel that I may have brought him into 'hatred, ridicule or contempt' (Rose, 2009a), and, in terms of the Nicholson test, I am not at ease sitting next to Andrew Millar as we watch this part of the film.

To conclude, the climactic scene between Sam and the Booksellers does represent the most serious ethical compromise in the entire film. Ultimately we can never know what conversations passed between Johnson and the booksellers, and how the booksellers reacted to the pressures of managing their difficult genius and publishing such a groundbreaking book. Who knows what might have been said in anger? The story in the film ends as it appears to have done in real life, with relations between Johnson and the booksellers being conciliatory, the booksellers letting Johnson off his final debts (Reddick, p. 82; *Sam J*, pp. 109–110) and Johnson praising them in the launch party speech as 'generous, liberal-minded men' (Boswell, p. 156; *Sam J*, p. 116). By this point, In terms of the Nicholson test, I have stopped squirming, and Dodsley, Millar and myself are comfortable sitting next to each other again.

The Reflection

Hauge's third category of primary character is the reflection, whose role he defines thus (p. 58):

> This is the character who supports the hero's outer motivation or at least is in the same basic situation at the beginning of the screenplay. The reflection can be a friend, coworker, sidekick, spouse, mate, lover, or any other character who adds support to the hero's objective.

Hauge (p. 59) identifies two basic dramatic functions for the reflection:

1. To help the hero in overcoming the outer conflict.
2. To give the hero someone to talk to, 'making it easier to reveal background, inner motivation, inner conflict, and theme or to create anticipation ("Now here's my plan, Tonto...")'.

I would say that the role of the reflection in my film is taken by the Poets as a group, since they are in the same basic situation as Sam at the beginning of the film, that of Outsider Poet, each one struggling to survive and hoping to make his name as a writer. Does their portrayal fulfil the functions required by the reflection role, and is this done ethically?

1. Interestingly, this is the first instance in my analysis of Hauge's dramatic roles where the characters appear not to fulfil their dramatic function. With their drunkenness and constant moonlighting, the Poets appear to hinder progress on the *Dictionary*, rather than help Sam's aim of becoming a successful writer. However, on closer examination of their role, we see that the Poets fulfil an alternative function, that of helping Sam to overcome his inner conflict, by providing company, lifting his spirits, and keeping his severe and debilitating depression at bay. Boswell (p. 76) tells us that: 'The great business of his life (he said) was to escape from himself; this disposition he considered as the disease of his mind, which nothing cured but company.'

In old age Johnson described Alexander Macbean, in a letter to his friend Hester Thrale, as 'one of those who, as Swift says, *stood as a screen between me and death*'

(Hitchings, 2005, p. 62–63). Johnson filled his home with needy people, because he needed them.

Is my portrayal of the Poets ethical? Firstly I should mention that they were known not as poets but amanuenses, a term I thought too obscure for a mainstream cinema audience. As in the case of the booksellers, there were in fact more of them, but their number had to be cut for reasons of narrative space. In literary biographies of Johnson, the amanuenses are portrayed as a 'rag-tag group of predominantly Scottish ne'er do wells' (Reddick, p. 2) employed by Johnson more out of pity than because of their abilities. But were they really so inept, or is this a case of the 'hero surrounded by lesser folk', a common fault in biopics identified by film critic Philip French (2004) in his review of *The Aviator*?

Reddick claims that although the amanuenses' 'characters were not spotless, they nevertheless appear to have been capable and intelligent men.' Shiels was a poet, Johnson maintained, with a 'very acute understanding' (Reddick, p. 62). Johnson described Macbean as 'a man of great learning' who 'knows many languages and knows them well', and who had worked as an amanuensis on Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopaedia, or an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*. He had translated and published a book from German, and later wrote two lexicons of his own. Peyton apparently wrote two books on the English language, and knew many modern languages as well (Reddick, p. 62).

However, there are many examples of the amanuenses' alleged stupidity. Hester Thrale relates how Alexander Macbean showed Johnson a section of the geographical dictionary that he was writing. When Johnson pointed out to him that his article on Athens was too short, Macbean's apparent reply was that if he wrote too much about Athens, what room would be left to talk about Abingdon? Johnson despaired (Clifford, p. 53). Boswell records an anecdote in which the author of the *Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Time of Dean Swift* also looks stupid. Johnson was assessing the work of the poet Thomson, and read aloud a large portion to Shiels, asking for his opinion. Shiels expressed his highest approval, to which Johnson replied "'Well, Sir, ... I have omitted every other line"' (Hitchings, p. 62). And, finally, Boswell (Hitchings, p. 215) relates how Peyton was stupid enough to fall for a classic practical joke, when Johnson sent him out to the shops to buy an ounce of vitriol.

Despite their collective expertise, Reddick (pp. 62–63) concludes that the amanuenses did not perform their task on the *Dictionary* well. He speculates as to the reason why – 'illness, death, lack of direction from Johnson, despondency caused by personal exigencies, perhaps laziness or even dishonesty'. Ultimately, we cannot know.

With regard to the amanuenses, I feel that I have perhaps exaggerated their stupidity in order to portray Johnson as a 'hero surrounded by lesser folk', but think that this is ethically acceptable in this instance, since Johnson was a towering intellectual of his age, and the amanuenses, whatever their abilities, were less than this.

2. Of the points raised by Hauge in the second category, the Poets are used for Sam to talk to, most notably in the scene in the pub (*Sam J*, pp. 38–40) where he explains his initial plan for the *Dictionary* to them. The Poets are most important, however, in revealing Sam's inner motivation and the theme.

Sam's inner motivation is to achieve validation by means of literary renown, and in this regard, the Poets are in the same boat. We know that Alexander Macbean, Shiels, and Peyton were all writers of one kind or another, and I decided to make them poets in the film in order to reflect the protagonist's struggle for validation as a writer. The Poets represent the underbelly of the literary world, '"the tunefull starving trade"' (Holmes, 1994, p. 84). Sam and the Poets are all striving to get their names in print, as the scene at the Frost Fair makes clear. The fate of Shiels shows what could befall Sam if he fails – when his *Lives of the Poets* is published with the name of Cibber on the title page (Boswell, p. 98). Macbean, on the other hand, achieves a small victory, by succeeding in sneaking a few lines of his own work into the *Dictionary*, something that the historical Macbean really did, as can be seen at the entries for 'salubrious' and 'scale' (Hitchings, p. 63).

The Poets are also important in their contribution to the exploration of the film's theme of chaos. They cause chaos on the *Dictionary* project and in Sam's household, by means of their inept working methods and drunkenness. They also illustrate the chaos of the times on a more serious level, showing how easy it was for people to become homeless, end up in prison for debt, or die, in a time of primitive medicine and before any kind of social safety net. The Poets reflect the attitudes of many workers of their day, who hurled themselves into life, drinking and rioting with gusto. Roy Porter (1990, pp. 90–91) relates how eighteenth-century workers had a tendency to '"live from hand

to mouth"' and then spend any money earned '"in riot or debauchery"', no doubt in an attempt to try and forget the fact that life hung by a very fragile thread. Two of Johnson's amanuenses met with tragic ends. Robert Shiels died of consumption before the *Dictionary* was finished, and V.J. Peyton sat starving by his sick wife's bedside, then succumbed to a fever and died (Hitchings, p. 63).

To conclude, I feel that the Poets adequately fulfil Hauge's role of the reflection, presenting no major ethical dilemmas in the process.

The Romance

This is the final category in Hauge's (p. 59) system of character roles:

> This is the character who is the sexual or romantic object of at least part of the hero's outer motivation. When your hero's outer motivation includes as its objective winning the love of or getting into bed with another character, then that other character is the romance.

This role is fulfilled by the character of Tetty, since Sam's outer motivation, to become a successful writer, is partly motivated by a desire to win the love of Tetty, or at least to try and mend their relationship. In Act 1, a large part of Sam's motivation for trying to get the job of lexicographer is to stop Tetty from leaving him (*Sam J*, p. 17), and when he gets the job, the first thing he does is to rent a house that he hopes will please her (pp. 25–26). A large part of his dream of success as a playwright is that he has won her love, and she 'smiles adoringly at him' sitting beside him in a beautiful silk gown (p. 7). When his dream finally does come true, Sam is devastated when Tetty rejects him and refuses to come with him to the first night of *Irene* (p. 69).

So, Tetty fulfils Hauge's criteria for the role of the romance, but is this portrayal of her and her relationship with Sam ethical?

The character of Tetty was an extremely interesting one to write, not least because, as Holmes (1994, p. 27) notes, of the 'huge contradictions in the evidence' when it comes to the portrayal of Samuel and Elizabeth Johnson's marriage.

Johnson's old school-friend, John Taylor, claimed that: 'She was the plague of Johnson's life, was abominably drunk and despicable' (Clifford, p. 298). Garrick (Boswell, pp. 48–49) also seemed to have an extremely negative view of Tetty:

> Mr Garrick described her to me as very fat, with a bosom of more than ordinary protuberance, with swelled cheeks, of a florid red, produced by thick painting, and increased by the liberal use of cordials; flaring and fantastic in her dress, and affected both in her speech and her general behaviour.

And yet, in contradiction to this, Johnson insisted (Boswell, p. 47), 'with much gravity' that '"It was a love-marriage on both sides"', and Boswell (p. 122) tells us that Johnson had been totally distraught when Tetty died, suffering from grief much more severely than is normal.

During the time that Johnson was working on the *Dictionary,* Elizabeth Desmoulins, Tetty's companion, told Boswell (Boswell, pp. 99, 121) that the couple spent a lot of time apart, Mrs Johnson preferring to live in the countryside, in Hampstead. Walter Jackson Bate's (1975, p. 263) biography further reveals that Tetty was drinking heavily, and that she had refused to have sexual relations with Johnson for years, using ill health as an excuse. Tetty became increasingly reclusive, to the extent that she did not even attend the opening night of *Irene*, a play which, as Bate (p. 264) points out, she had seen 'grow from nothing', and which she and Johnson had read aloud together during the early years of their marriage.

So what was my interpretation of this relationship to be? Was Johnson telling the truth when he said that their marriage, with its twenty year age gap, was based on love? Was Tetty really as bad as Garrick and Taylor maintain? I felt that Garrick's cruel description of Tetty smacked of ageism and sexism, and that Tetty must have been more sympathetic than this. When Johnson married Elizabeth Porter, she was an attractive woman in her mid-forties, as a portrait of her shows (Bate, illustrations p. 9), recently widowed, with three grown-up children, and a small fortune. Johnson, at this time, was an ugly, awkward, depressed, penniless, unemployed university drop-out in his mid-twenties. Tetty's daughter Lucy described him to Boswell (Boswell, p. 47) thus:

> He was then lean and lank, so that his immense structure of bones was hideously striking to the eye, and the scars of the scrofula were deeply visible. He also wore his hair, which was straight and stiff, and separated behind; and he often had, seemingly, convulsive starts and odd gesticulations, which tended to excite at once surprise and ridicule.

It struck me that the question to ask is 'what did Tetty see in him?', rather than the other way round. Boswell (p. 47) goes on to provide us with the answer: Mrs Porter was so much engaged by his conversation that she overlooked all these external disadvantages, and said to her daughter, 'this is the most sensible man that I ever saw in my life'.

What did Tetty mean by 'sensible'? Johnson's *Dictionary* provides two senses which are qualities of a person, sense 5: 'Having moral perception; having the quality of being easily or strongly affected', and sense 8: 'In low conversation it has sometimes the sense of reasonable; judicious; wise', which is followed by a quotation from Addison in a register which is far from low. Whichever Tetty meant, she clearly admired the young Johnson a great deal. It is perfectly credible to me that these two people, both at a difficult time in their life, found great solace in each other's company. The decision to marry cannot have been an easy one for either of them. Johnson must have given up any hopes of having a family of his own, and Tetty had to defy the wishes of the men in her family. Tetty's late husband's brother offered her an annuity for life not to marry Johnson, and her sons were so appalled by the marriage that Joseph, the younger one, took years to overcome his disgust, and Jervis, the elder one, refused to see his mother ever again (Bate, p. 146). To make such great sacrifices, I can only conclude that the two of them must have been very much in love when they married.

So what went wrong? And how did a woman who had the courage to set out on the adventure of a new marriage, sink so low that she became an alcoholic and recluse? Here I used my imagination to fill in the lacunae, and, in the manner described by David Edgar (pp. 181–182) in chapter 1, set the historical evidence against the behaviour of my own relatives as well as myself. I used the age gap between myself and my mother as a key to understanding the domestic situation of Sam and Tetty Johnson in Gough Square. Given my knowledge of my mother and her friends, I asked myself, what does a woman of Tetty's age want? The answer that came to me was an ordered, tidy, decent home decorated to her own taste, where she can invite

other ladies of her own class around to tea, and a definite absence of bohemian riffraff. Given the emphasis on politeness in the eighteenth century, the importance of tea drinking at all levels of society, and the fact that coffeehouses were a male preserve, why would Tetty have been any different? Johnson (Hill, 1897, vol. 1, p. 247), in later life, described his wife's domestic virtues thus:

> My wife had a particular reverence for cleanliness, and desired the praise of neatness in her dress and furniture, as many ladies do, till they become troublesome to their best friends, slaves to their own besoms, and only sigh for the hour of sweeping their husbands out of the house as dirt and useless lumber.

This creates an obvious conflict in her relationship with Johnson, who was 'undomesticated, with a profound aversion to regular hours, good furniture or smart clothes' (Holmes, 1994, p. 185). Several of Johnson's famous quotations indicate that he found marriage difficult and the opposite sex perplexing, such as: 'The man calls his wife to walk with him in the shade, and she feels a strange desire just at that moment to sit in the sun' (Hill, vol. I, p. 250).

The Grub Street years would have put a great strain on the Johnsons' marriage, with Tetty's fortune gone, and with Sam's irregular and inadequate income failing to provide financial and domestic stability. The fact that she spent much of her last years in Hampstead, something that I was unfortunately unable to put in the script, points to a preference for the peace and quiet of the country, rather than the hustle and bustle of London, the city that Johnson loved. Once the *Dictionary* contract was signed, Johnson was finally in a position to give his wife a decent and stable home, the house in Gough Square, but I imagined that this was not enough, since Johnson would still have been his same undomesticated self. It does not take much to imagine how domestically incompatible Johnson and his houseproud wife must have been.

Whether Tetty was actually sick, or whether her death was brought about by drug and alcohol abuse, we do not know, but I feel that she was deeply unhappy. Tetty had been spirited and adventurous enough to give up her family, her fortune, and her home for a new life with the man she loved, only to find that the new life was a miserable one, in squalid surroundings, with a husband who did not understand her, and whose friends saw her as a figure of fun. It is no wonder that she turned to 'cordials' (defined in the *Dictionary* as 'a medicine that increases the force of the heart,

or quickens the circulation' or 'any medicine that increases strength'), alcohol, or, as Dr Levet told Johnson's friend Hester Thrale (Shaw & Piozzi, 1974, first published 1786, p. 110), laudanum in order to blot out the loneliness and despair. Johnson's suffering after her death was brought about by genuine grief, but I think that it was more extreme than normal because it was supplemented by guilt.

To return to my original aim of portraying secondary characters as fairly and accurately as possible, I feel that I have come to a fair, honest and plausible interpretation of Tetty Johnson's character, based on the evidence available. I also feel that in trying to make my Tetty as much like the real Tetty as possible, I have avoided the pitfall of creating a one-dimensional romance character. A specific danger in biopics of geniuses is that their wives can be portrayed simply as longsuffering, supportive and loyal, and I feel that my character of Tetty is more multi-dimensional than that.

Theme and character

Hauge (p. 72) concludes his system of character roles by explaining how the roles of hero, nemesis, and reflection connect to illustrate the theme:

> *Theme emerges when the hero's similarity to the nemesis and difference from the reflection are revealed.* When we recognize how the hero, at any point in the movie, is like the character he opposes (the nemesis) and unlike the character with whom he is aligned (the reflection), we begin to see the screenplay's broader statement about how one should live one's life.

In my film, Sam is more like the Booksellers and less like the Poets in that, despite his chaotic methods and irregular lifestyle, he does actually complete the task and achieve great things. Perhaps the 'statement about how one should live one's life' could be something like: in order to achieve great things, you need to embrace chaos and think creatively, but also to have sufficient order and discipline to complete the task. And here we see the role of my fourth truth type, universal truth, in the biopic.

This links in to the idea of the birth of the author. Sam is pointing the way towards a new relationship between writer and publisher, one where exploitation of the writer is

replaced by a mutual respect for each other's different roles and abilities, summed up by Sam in the script (p. 116) using an actual quotation of Johnson's: 'A mere literary man is a *dull* man; a man who is solely a man of business is a *selfish* man; but when literature and commerce are united, they make a *respectable* man' (Hill, vol. II, p. 389).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained how I have taken my interpretations of Sam, the Booksellers, the Poets, and Tetty, and moulded them to fit in with Hollywood convention, represented here by Hauge's model for film character roles. I have also examined the ethical implications of the above, explaining where I feel I have succeeded, and where I have been forced to compromise the ethical intentions that I laid out at the beginning of the project.

Conclusion

To return to my original question: is it possible to write a biopic that is both ethical and a good film? And is there some kind of framework that can help the biopic writer to achieve this? By an 'ethical biopic' I mean one that gives the audience a truthful portrayal of the subject's personality and life. By a 'good film', I mean one that is both emotionally engaging and entertaining for the audience.

Everything that is known about a subject's personality and whole life is far too much to put into a single film. A common problem with biopics is the danger of the 'big bland' hagiography, an overly-inclusive, aimless narrative that tries to cover as many facts and events as possible from the subject's life, and portrays him with an excessive reverence. As both a work of fact and of fiction, a biopic contains different types of truth, which often seem to contradict each other – the factual, the truth of personality, and the emotional truth of the subject; as well as the universal truth and myth of fiction. I have found that the way to deal with this whole confusing mass is to adopt a focused interpretative approach.

The writer should come to a single interpretation of the subject and his life. This can be done by 'hanging up looking glasses at odd corners', by illuminating an unexplored aspect of the subject and his life; and by discovering the hidden 'life-myth' of the subject by a method that is 'part Sherlock Holmes, part Freud'. It is legitimate for the writer to use her imagination, empathy, and own experience to help fill in lacunae. Identification with the subject and a desire for self-expression provide motivation for the writer and give the project passion. However, the writer must be aware of the danger of transference, and be able to step back from the work and review it objectively. This interpretation should be chosen with great care, as it will dominate the narrative – the writer must feel in her heart that it conveys the truth of personality and emotional truth of the protagonist.

Both writer and audience must be aware that this is *an* interpretation of the life, and that others are possible. However, only one interpretation is possible in a single narrative, when following the classic Hollywood model of screenwriting. Multiple interpretations in a single biopic would serve only to undermine each other.

How does the writer form the structure of the biopic? When faced with the huge number of events in the subject's entire life, the writer must extract the film's story, and avoid the danger of fungoid growth. She should try to find: a single focused story with a strong emotional line, that is based around a central goal or incident, that has rising dramatic action building to a clear climax, strong ongoing relationships between at least two characters, and that can be told visually. The structure can be further narrowed down by deciding on the film's subgenre and theme, and removing any material which does not support these. The remaining material must then be crafted into three acts.

It is desirable to keep to the chronological order of the subject's life. However, minor chronological reordering may be necessary in order to make the film's structure work. Here the writer should consult her conscience as to what constitutes an acceptable deviation from the facts. Major, well-known historical facts should not be altered, as this would undermine the credibility of the film. However, the writer should not feel obliged to include all of the major events of the subject's life during the chosen time period, since this can lead to fungoid growth. However, audience expectation may dictate that a well-known person, event or episode be shown.

Only including fictional episodes which the writer believes could have happened at least in a similar way is a desirable aim. However, there may be occasions where episodes which transgress this are extremely useful in portraying the protagonist's truth of personality or emotional truth, or are essential to the whole edifice of the film. Where this occurs, the writer should again consult her conscience. If the inclusion of the episode gives a misleading portrayal of the protagonist's truth of personality or emotional truth, then it should be excluded. However, if it gives a misleading portrayal of a secondary character, then it should still be considered for inclusion. Whilst strenuous efforts should be made to portray all real people as truthfully as possible, this is not always possible. The writer may be compelled to portray secondary characters, especially those belonging to the nemesis/antagonist role, in an unfairly negative light. In biopics the protagonist is often portrayed as a 'hero surrounded by lesser folk'. This is inevitable when following the Hollywood paradigm, because the protagonist must be sympathetic in order to ensure audience identification.

So, is it possible to write a biopic that is both ethical and a good film? Not without compromise. To sum up, the portrayal of facts, events, and secondary characters should be subservient to the film's structure, except where the writer's conscience

dictates otherwise. The overall priority should be given to the portrayal of the subject's personality and spirit, and his emotional truth.

Here is a revised version of my ethical framework:

Structure –

i. to keep to chronological order as far as possible and to not alter major, well-known historical facts, but to accept the necessity of the compression of time and the chronological reordering of minor events;
ii. to include the events of the subject's life during the chosen time period which support my interpretation of him;
iii. to only include fictional episodes which I believe could have happened, at least in a similar way, except when the interpretation or film's structure demands that a totally fictional episode be used.

Character –

i. to create an interpretation of my subject which I believe to be true, especially to his personality, spirit, and emotional truth;
ii. to portray secondary characters as fairly and accurately as possible, whilst accepting that their portrayals serve the needs of the interpretation of the protagonist and the dramatic role of the hero, so that secondary characters, especially antagonists, will most likely have to be shown in a more negative light than the protagonist.

Finally, once filtered through the above criteria, every aspect of the biopic should be checked for its entertainment value.

Hopefully the screenwriter will be able to imagine sitting back with the real people portrayed to watch the final film, and find that, although many lively discussions have taken place along the way, by the end both her integrity and that of her companions remains more or less intact.

3. References

Alexander, S. & Karazewski, L. (1994) Audio commentary to *Ed Wood*, directed by Tim Burton, written by Scott Alexander & Larry Karazewski, adapted from the biography by Rudolph Grey, USA: Touchstone Pictures, 127 min [DVD].

Alexander, S. & Karazewski, L. (1996) Writers' audio commentary to *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, directed by Milos Forman, Canada/USA: Columbia Pictures Corporation, 129 min [DVD].

Anderson, C. (1988) Biographical Film. In: Wes D. Gehring (Ed.), *A Handbook of American Film Genres*. pp. 331–51. Westport CT: Greenwood.

Aristotle (1996, first written *c.*335 BC) *Poetics*. Translated by Malcolm Heath, London: Penguin Books.

Backscheider, P. R. (1999) *Reflections on Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baron, S. H. & Pletsch, C. (Eds.) (1985) *Introspection in Biography: The Biographer's Quest for Self-Awareness*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: The Analytic Press.

Bate, W. J. (1975) *Samuel Johnson*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Baugh, A. C. & Cable, T. (1993) *A History of the English Language*. London: Routledge.

BBC News (1998, April 15) *Titanic makers say sorry*. Retrieved 11 April 2009 from http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/50203.stm

Beal, J. C. (2004) *English in Modern Times*. London: Arnold.

Bennett, A. (1995) *The Madness of King George*. New York: Random House.

Booker, C. (2004) *The Seven Basic Plots*. London: Continuum.

Boswell, J. (1999, first published 1791) *The Life of Johnson.* Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Brown, C. (1989) *My Left Foot.* London: Mandarin Paperbacks.

Carlyle, T. (2002, first published 1833–4) *Sartor Resartus.* Edinburgh: Canongate Classics.

Clifford, J. L. (1979) *Dictionary Johnson: Samuel Johnson's Middle Years.* USA: McGraw Hill Book Company.

Condon, B. (2004) Director's audio commentary to *Kinsey*, directed by Bill Condon, written by Bill Condon, USA/Germany: Qwerty Films/American Zoetrope/N1 European Film Produktions GmbH & Co. KG/Pretty Pictures, 118 min [DVD].

Crick, B. (1980) *George Orwell: A Life.* London: Secker & Warburg.

Crystal, D. (2004) *The Stories of English.* London: Penguin Books.

Custen, G. F. (1992) *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History.* New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Custen, G. F. (1999) Hollywood and the Research Department. In: A. Rosenthal (Ed.), *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, pp. 133–145. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.

Dancyger, K. & Rush, J. (1995) *Alternative Scriptwriting: Writing Beyond the Rules.* Boston: Focal Press.

Dobson, A. (1916) *Fielding and Andrew Millar.* London: Alexander Moring Limited.

Domenach, E (2007) *Edith Piaf, that obscure object of desire*, bonus feature on disc 2 *La Vie En Rose,* directed by Olivier Dahan, written by Olivier Dahan & Isabelle Sobelman, France/UK/Czech Republic: Légende/TF1 International/TF1 Films Productions/Songbird Pictures/Okko ProductionsCanal+/Sofica Valor 7/TPS Star, 140 min [DVD].

Edel, L. (1985) *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica.* London: W.W. Norton.

Edgar, D. (1999) Theatre of Fact: A Dramatist's Viewpoint. In: A. Rosenthal (Ed.), *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, pp. 174–187. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.

Field, S. (1984) *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, New York: Dell Publishing.

French, P. (2004, December 26) review of *The Aviator. The Observer.*

Goldman, W. (1983) *Adventures in the Screen Trade*. New York: Warner Books.

Goldsman, A. (2002) *Development of the Screenplay*, bonus feature on disc 2 *A Beautiful Mind* [DVD two disc awards edition] (2001) directed by Ron Howard, written by Akiva Goldsman, adapted from the biography by Sylvia Nasar, USA: Universal Pictures/DreamWorks SKG/Imagine Entertainment, 135 min [DVD].

Grose, Captain F. (1992, first published 1785) *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, edited by Partridge, E., New York: Dorset Press.

Hackford, T. (2004) Director's audio commentary to *Ray,* directed by Taylor Hackford, written by James L. White & Taylor Hackford, USA: Anvil Films/Baldwin Entertainment Group/Bristol Bay Productions, 152 min [DVD].

Hauge, M. (1988) *Writing Screenplays That Sell.* New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Hill, G. B. (1897) *Johnsonian Miscellanies* (2 vols). Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Hitchings, H. (2005) *Dr Johnson's Dictionary: The Extraordinary Story of the Book that Defined the World.* London: John Murray.
Holmes, R. (1994) *Dr Johnson and Mr Savage.* London: Flamingo.

Holmes, R. (2005) *Sidetracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer*, London: Harper Perennial.

Holroyd, M. (Ed.) (2002) *Works on Paper: The Craft of Biography and Autobiography.* London: Little, Brown, and Company.

Johnson, S. (1973, first published 1749) *Irene.* London: The Scolar Press.

Johnson, S. (1990, first published 1755) *A Dictionary of the English Language: Facsimile of Johnson's 'Dictionary'.* Harlow: Longman.

Krevolin, R. (2003) *How To Adapt Anything Into A Screenplay.* Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Lee, H. (1996) *Virginia Woolf.* London: Vintage.

Lipking, L. (1998) The Birth of the Author. In: W. Gould & T. F. Staley, *Writing the Lives of Writers*, pp. 36–53. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (3rd ed.) (1995). Harlow: Longman.

Maland, C. (1997) *How Much Chaplin Appears in 'Chaplin'? Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 25, issue 1, pp. 49–54.

Mangold, J. (2005) Director's audio commentary to *Walk The Line*, directed by James Mangold, written by Gill Dennis & James Mangold, adapted from the autobiography by Johnny Cash, and the autobiography by Johnny Cash & Patrick Carr, USA: Fox 2000 Pictures/Tree Line Films/Konrad Pictures/Catfish Productions/Mars Media Beteiligungs, 136 min [DVD].

Markus, C. & McFeely, S. (2004) Writer's audio commentary to *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers* directed by Stephen Hopkins, written by Christopher Markus & Stephen McFeely, adapted from the biography by Roger Lewis, USA/UK: HD Vision Studios/HBO/BBC Films/Company Pictures/The De Mann Entertainment Company/Labrador Films, 122 min [DVD].

Martin, B. (1748) *Lingua Britannica Reformata: or, a new English Dictionary.* London.

McDermott, A. (1996) *A Dictionary of the English Language on CD-ROM.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McKee, R. (1999) *Story*. London: Methuen.

Merz, C (1983) An Examination of Biography in Film and Television. In: C. Bazalgette & J. Cook (Eds.), *Lust for Lives: an examination of biopix*, p. 9. London: BFI Publishing.

Miller, R. (1983) *Star Myths: Show Business Biographies on Film*. Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press.

Murphy, A. M. (2002) *Limited Lives: The Problem of the Literary Biopic. Kinema*, no. 17, Spring, pp. 67–74.

Nadel, I. B. (1984) *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form.* London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Nicholson, W. (2009) *Film 2009.* Presented by Jonathan Ross, first broadcast 24 March 2009, BBC 1, 30 min.

Parker, P. (1998) *The Art and Science of Screenwriting.* Exeter: Intellect.

Picard, L. (2000) *Dr Johnson's London*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Polanyi, M. (1967) *The Tacit Dimension*. New York: Anchor Books.

Porter, R. (1990) *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Penguin Books.

Reddick, A. (1996) *The Making of Johnson's Dictionary 1746–1773* (revised ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rose, M (2009a) *Legal Eagle*. Retrieved 27 May 2009 from http://www.thestage.co.uk/connect/eagle/0808.php

Rose, M (2009b) *Legal Eagle*. Retrieved 27 May 2009 from http://www.thestage.co.uk/connect/eagle/0511.php

Rosenthal, A. (1995) *Writing Docudrama: Dramatizing Reality for Film and TV*. Newton MA: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Sardi, J. (1997) *Shine: The Screenplay.* New York: Grove Press.

Seger, L. (1992) *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film.* New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

Seymour, M. (2002) Shaping Lives. In: P. France & W. St. Clair (Eds.), *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, pp. 253–266. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shaw, W. L & Piozzi, H. L. (1974) *Memoirs and Anecdotes of Dr. Johnson.* London: Oxford University Press. Piozzi's *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson* was first published in 1786.

Solomon, H. M. (1996) *The Rise of Robert Dodsley: Creating the New Age of Print.* Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.

Thomas, W. (2002) You can't handle the truth! *Empire*, no. 153, March, p. 34.

Wain, J. (1974) *Samuel Johnson.* London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Wallis, P (1974) *At the Sign of the Ship 1724–1974.* Harlow: Longman.

Winkler, I. & Cocks, J. (2004) Audio commentary to *De-Lovely* directed by Irwin Winkler, written by Jay Cocks, USA/UK: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/United Artists/Potboiler Productions/Winkler Films, 125 min [DVD].

Woodhead, L. (1999) The Guardian Lecture: Dramatised Documentary. In: A. Rosenthal (Ed.), *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, pp. 101–110. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.

Woolf, V. (1927) The New Biography. In: A. McNeillie (Ed.) (1994) *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* vol. IV, pp. 473–480. London: The Hogarth Press.

Woolf, V. (1928) *Orlando A Biography.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Woolf, V. (1942) *The Art of Biography* in *The Death of the Moth and other Essays.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company pp. 187–197.

Yanno, D. (2006) *The 3rd Act: writing a great ending to your screenplay.* New York & London: Continuum.

Filmography

Ali (2001) directed by Michael Mann, written by Stephen J. Rivele, Christopher Wilkinson, Eric Roth, Michael Mann & Gregory Allen Howard, USA: Columbia Pictures Corporation/Forward Pass/Initial Entertainment Group/Moonlighting Films/Overbrook Entertainment/Peters Entertainment/Picture Entertainment Corporation, 157 min.

Amadeus (1984) directed by Milos Forman, written by Peter Shaffer, adapted from the play by Peter Shaffer, USA: The Saul Zaentz Company, 160 min.

The Aviator (2004) directed by Martin Scorsese, written by John Logan, USA/Germany: Forward Pass/Appian Way/IMF Internationale Medien und Film GmbH & Co. 3. Produktions KG/Initial Entertainment Group/Warner Bros. Pictures/Miramax Films/Cappa Productions,170 min.

A Beautiful Mind (2001) directed by Ron Howard, written by Akiva Goldsman, adapted from the biography by Sylvia Nasar, USA: Universal Pictures/DreamWorks SKG/Imagine Entertainment, 135 min.

Bound for Glory (1976) directed by Hal Ashby, written by Robert Getchell, adapted from the autobiography by Woody Guthrie, USA: Bound For Glory, 147 min.

Braveheart (1995) directed by Mel Gibson, written by Randall Wallace, USA: B.H. Finance C.V./Icon Entertainment International/The Ladd Company/Paramount Pictures/Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 177 min.

Capote (2005) directed by Bennett Miller, written by Dan Futterman, adapted from the biography by Gerald Clarke, Canada/USA: United Artists/A-Line Pictures/Cooper's Town Productions/Infinity Media/Eagle Vision, 114 min.

Casanova (1976) directed by Federico Fellini, written by Federico Fellini adapted from the autobiography by Giacomo Casanova, Italy/USA: Produzioni Europee Associati (PEA)/Fast Films, 164 min.

Casanova (2005) directed by Lasse Hallström, written by Jeffrey Hatcher, Kimberly Simi, & Michael Cristofer, USA: Touchstone Pictures/The Mark Gordon Company/Gondola Pictures/Power, 111 min.

Casanova (2005) directed by Sheree Folkson, written by Russell T. Davies, UK: Red Production Company/Powercorp/BBC Wales/Granada Television, 173 min (3 parts) [TV].

Chaplin (1992) directed by Richard Attenborough, written by William Boyd, Bryan Forbes, William Goldman & Diana Hawkins, adapted from the biography by David Robinson and the autobiography by Charles Chaplin, UK/USA/France/Italy: Carolco Pictures/Canal+/RCS Video/Lambeth Productions Corp./TriStar Pictures,143 min.

City of Vice (2008) directed by Justin Hardy & Dan Reed, written by Clive Bradley & Peter Harness, UK: Touchpaper Television/Hardy and Sons, 5 × 50 min episodes [TV].

Clarissa (1991) directed by Robert Bierman, written by Janet Baron & David Nokes, adapted from the novel by Samuel Richardson, UK: BBC/WGBH, 180 min (3 parts) [TV].

Coal Miner's Daughter (1980) directed by Michael Apted, written by Thomas Rickman, adapted from the autobiography by Loretta Lynn & George Vecsey, USA: Universal Pictures/DiscoVision, 125 min.

Dangerous Liaisons (1988) directed by Stephen Frears, written by Christopher Hampton, adapted from the play by Christopher Hampton, which is based on the novel by Choderlos de Laclos, USA/UK: Lorimar Film Entertainment/NFH Productions/Warner Bros. Pictures, 119 min.

De-Lovely (2004) directed by Irwin Winkler, written by Jay Cocks, USA/UK: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/United Artists/Potboiler Productions/Winkler Films, 125 min.

Ed Wood (1994) directed by Tim Burton, written by Scott Alexander & Larry Karazewski, adapted from the biography by Rudolph Grey, USA: Touchstone Pictures, 127 min.

Erin Brockovich (2000) directed by Steven Soderbergh, written by Susannah Grant, USA: Jersey Films, 130 min.

The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders (1996) directed by David Atwood, written by Andrew Davies, adapted from the novel by Daniel Defoe, UK: Granada Television/WGBH, 220 min (4 parts) [TV].

Gods and Monsters (1998) directed by Bill Condon, written by Bill Condon, adapted from the novel by Christopher Bram, UK/USA: BBC/Lions Gate Films/Regent Entertainment/Showtime Networks/Spike Productions, 105 min.

Infamous (2006) directed by Douglas McGrath, written by Douglas McGrath, adapted from the biography by George Plimpton, USA: Jack and Henry Productions Inc./Killer Films/Longfellow Pictures, 110 min.

Kinsey (2004) directed by Bill Condon, written by Bill Condon, USA/Germany: Qwerty Films/American Zoetrope/N1 European Film Produktions GmbH & Co. KG/Pretty Pictures, 118 min.

The Life and Death of Peter Sellers (2004) directed by Stephen Hopkins, written by Christopher Markus & Stephen McFeely, adapted from the biography by Roger Lewis, USA/UK: HD Vision Studios/HBO/BBC Films/Company Pictures/The De Mann Entertainment Company/Labrador Films, 122 min.

Longitude (2000) directed by Charles Sturridge, written by Charles Sturridge, adapted from the book by Dava Sobel, UK/USA: A&E Television Networks/Granada Film Productions, 250 min (2 parts) [TV].

Madison (2001) directed by William Bindley, written by Scott Bindley & William Bindley, USA: Addison Street Films/North Shore Entertainment/Road Pictures, 94 min.

The Madness of King George (1994) directed by Nicholas Hytner, written by Alan Bennett. UK: Channel Four Films/Close Call Films/Mad George Films/The Samuel Goldwyn Company, 107 min.

Marie Antoinette (2006) directed by Sofia Coppola, written by Sofia Coppola, Japan/France/USA: Columbia Pictures Corporation/American Zoetrope/I Want Candy/Pricel/Tohokushinsha Film, 123 min.

Mrs Parker and the Vicious Circle (1994) directed by Alan Rudolph, written by Randy Sue Coburn & Alan Rudolph, USA: Fine Line Features/Mayfair Entertainment/Miramax Films/Park Bench Productions, 126 min.

Mutiny on the Bounty (1962) directed by Lewis Milestone & Carol Reed, written by Charles Lederer, Eric Ambler, William L. Driscoll, Borden Chase, John Gay & Brian Hecht, adapted from the novel by Charles Nordhoff & James Norman Hall, USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/Arcola Pictures, 178 min.

My Left Foot (1989) directed by Jim Sheridan, written by Shane Connaughton & Jim Sheridan, adapted from the autobiography by Christy Brown, Ireland/UK: Ferndale Films, 103 min.

The Naked Civil Servant (1975) directed by Jack Gold, written by Philip Mackie, adapted from the autobiography by Quentin Crisp, UK: Thames Television, 77 min [TV].

Nixon (1995) directed by Oliver Stone, written by Stephen J. Rivele, Christopher Wilkinson & Oliver Stone, USA: Cinergi Pictures Entertainment/Hollywood Pictures/Illusion Entertainment, 192 min.

The People vs. Larry Flynt (1996). directed by Milos Forman, written by Scott Alexander & Larry Karazewski, Canada/USA: Columbia Pictures Corporation, 129 min.

Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl (2003) directed by Gore Verbinski, written by Ted Elliot, Terry Rossio, Stuart Beattie & Jay Wolpert, USA: Walt Disney Pictures/Jerry Bruckheimer Films/First Mate Productions, 143 min.

Pirates of the Caribbean: Dean Man's Chest (2006) directed by Gore Verbinski, written by Ted Elliot, Terry Rossio, Stuart Beattie & Jay Wolpert, USA: Walt Disney Pictures/Jerry Bruckheimer Films/First Mate Productions, 150 min.

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End (2007) directed by Gore Verbinski, written by Ted Elliot, Terry Rossio, Stuart Beattie & Jay Wolpert, USA: Walt Disney Pictures/Jerry Bruckheimer Films/First Mate Productions, 168 min.

Quills (2000) directed by Philip Kaufman, written by Doug Wright, adapted from the play by Doug Wright, USA/Germany/UK: Fox Searchlight Pictures/Hollywood Partners Munich/Industry Entertainment/Walrus & Associates, 124 min.

Ray (2004) directed by Taylor Hackford, written by James L. White & Taylor Hackford, USA: Anvil Films/Baldwin Entertainment Group/Bristol Bay Productions, 152 min.

Shackleton (2002) directed by Charles Sturridge, written by Charles Sturridge, UK: A&E Television Networks/Channel 4 Television Corporation/Firstsight Films, 206 min (2 parts).

Shadowlands (1993) directed by Richard Attenborough, written by William Nicholson, UK: Price Entertainment/Spelling Films International/Shadowlands Productions, 131 min.

Shakespeare in Love (1998) directed by John Madden, written by Marc Norman & Tom Stoppard, USA/UK: Bedford Falls Productions/Miramax Films/Universal Pictures, 122 min.

Shine (1996) directed by Scott Hicks, written by Jan Sardi & Scott Hicks, Australia: Australian Film Finance Corporation/Film Victoria/Momentum Films, 105 min.

Tina: What's Love Got To Do With It (1993) directed by Brian Gibson, written by Kate Lanier, adapted from the autobiography by Tina Turner & Kurt Loder, USA: Touchstone Pictures,118 min.

Titanic (1997) directed by James Cameron, written by James Cameron, USA: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation/Paramount Pictures/Lightstorm Entertainment, 194 min.

Tom Jones (1963) directed by Tony Richardson, written by John Osborne, adapted from the novel by Henry Fielding, UK: Woodfall Film Productions,128 min.

Vera Drake (2004) directed by Mike Leigh, written by Mike Leigh, UK/France/New Zealand: Les Films Alain Sarde/UK Film Council/The Inside Track/Thin Man Films/Ingenious Film Partners, 125 min.

La Vie En Rose (2007) directed by Olivier Dahan, written by Olivier Dahan & Isabelle Sobelman, France/UK/Czech Republic: Légende/TF1 International/TF1 Films Productions/Songbird Pictures/Okko ProductionsCanal+/Sofica Valor 7/TPS Star, 140 min.

W. (2008) directed by Oliver Stone, written by Stanley Weiser, USA/Hong Kong/Germany/UK/Australia: Emperor Motion Pictures/Global Entertainment Group Co./Ixtlan Corporation/Millbrook Pictures/Omnilab Media/Onda Entertainment/QED International, 129 min.

Walk The Line (2005) directed by James Mangold, written by Gill Dennis & James Mangold, adapted from the autobiography by Johnny Cash, and the autobiography by Johnny Cash & Patrick Carr, USA: Fox 2000 Pictures/Tree Line Films/Konrad Pictures/Catfish Productions/Mars Media Beteiligungs, 136 min.

Wilde (1997) directed by Brian Gilbert, written by Julian Mitchell, adapted from the biography by Richard Ellman, UK/Germany/Japan: BBC/Capitol Films/Dove International/Kanzaman.S.A./NDF International/Pandora Filmproduktion/Pony Canyon/Samuelson Entertainment/The Greenlight Fund/Wall to Wall Television, 118 min.

4. Appendix 1

Glossary of Screenwriting Terminology

This section is intended to explain screenwriting terminology for the non-screenwriter, by means of a glossary of the technical terms used in the script and in the thesis, and a breakdown of the three act structure of *Sam J.*

Technical screenwriting terms used in the script

CONTINUOUS – denotes that there has not been a jump in time between this scene and the previous one.

EXT. – denotes that a scene takes place in an exterior location.

INT. – denotes that a scene takes place in an interior location.

MONTAGE – a series of short scenes shown in quick succession, which use a short amount of screen time to show what is happening over a long period of time in the story, and give the audience a sense of the passage of time.

O.C. – denotes that the character is off camera. The character is present in the location of the scene, although he cannot be seen at that moment, but his dialogue can be heard.

V.O. – denotes the use of voiceover. The dialogue is spoken by a narrator or character who is in a different time or place from the scene being shown as he speaks.

Technical screenwriting terms used in the thesis

outline – a short prose version of the main story of the film. This is the first stage in the screenwriting process. The outline is a screenwriter's tool, and she will normally write several of these, to explore different possible ways of turning the material into a film.

script – the text of the film, written in script format using screenwriters' software, in this case Final Draft. Script format separates the action from the dialogue, and is set out so that one page of script represents one minute of screen time.

screenplay – almost synonymous with script, except that 'script' is used at all stages of the project's development, whereas 'screenplay' tends to refer to the final version.

rough draft – the first full-length version of the script. This will often bear little resemblance to the final screenplay, since screenwriting is a process of writing and rewriting many times.

first draft, **second draft**, **third draft**, **fourth draft** etc.... – the subsequent drafts of the script, as it goes through a process of gradual refinement. There is no rule as to how many drafts a project will take, each one is different.

final draft – the final polished version of the script. This is the version of *Sam J* that is included in this volume.

three act structure – the basic paradigm of classic Hollywood screenwriting. Act 1 sets up the protagonist and his world, and asks the main question of the film's story. Act 2 develops the protagonist's story, giving him increasingly difficult challenges and problems to overcome. Act 3 concludes the film's story, and answers the question posed by Act 1.

Breakdown of the Three Act Structure of *Sam J*

Act 1 – set up

Sam is an unknown impoverished poet struggling to make his name, as well as support his wife and pay the rent.
turning point: Sam signs the contract with the Booksellers to write the *Dictionary*.

Question: Will Sam succeed in making his name as a writer?

Act 2 – development

Sam writes the *Dictionary* but his unorthodox methods are of constant concern to the Booksellers.
crisis: Sam sees that he has been writing the *Dictionary* in completely the wrong way.
revelation: Sam makes a great discovery about the language.
Sam wants to start the *Dictionary* again from scratch, but the Booksellers won't let him. He refuses to work for two years.
turning point: the Booksellers allow Sam to write the *Dictionary* the way he wants to.
Sam compiles enthusiastically.
crisis: Tetty dies. Sam stops work, and the Booksellers sack him.

Act 3 – conclusion

turning point: Sam chains himself to his desk and starts compiling.
Sam compiles doggedly, descending into madness.
crisis: Sam seems to be 'dead'.
turningpoint: Sam sits up. He has finished the *Dictionary*.
final battle: The Booksellers criticize the *Dictionary* text, and consider crediting Chesterfield as its author. Sam delivers a great speech in his defence.
The *Dictionary* is published and is magnificent. Sam has been credited as author, and given an honorary degree. Sam defeats Chesterfield with a damning speech, and praises the Booksellers.

Answer: Yes, Sam is now a literary Colossus, his fame assured.

5. Appendix 2

Creative Fact

This appendix is intended to demonstrate how my interpretative approach affects the narrative at the level of the page, where ethical dilemmas arise with disturbing frequency. Which facts should be included in the narrative, and which left out? In *The Art of Biography* (1942, p.197) Virginia Woolf proposes that the biographer select the 'creative fact'. A creative fact is one that is more than just factually correct, but makes a larger contribution to the portrayal of the truth of subject and his life – in my terminology, more than just the first truth type. I have extended Virginia Woolf's concept of 'creative fact' in order to fit my purposes in writing an interpretative biopic.

In writing the film, I have selected those facts which illuminate Johnson's personality and life in accordance with my interpretation of Johnson as Outsider Poet, and rejected or suppressed those which are either irrelevant to my interpretation, or which contradict it. To show how I have done this, I include a sample of annotated pages of script, which identifies examples of creative fact as they arise. These can be divided into four types: selected fact, suppressed fact, altered fact, and made-up fact. The examples below are all taken from the first ten pages of script (a slightly earlier version than the final polished draft), the annotated pages of which are included in this appendix.

Selected fact

The facts in this category perform three major functions, in line with the functions of facts in literary biography identified by Nadel (1984, pp.10- 11):

> To establish information, verisimilitude and truthfulness. The first is the simplest: to convey information and detail; the second is the most evocative and representational, generating a mood or atmosphere; the

> third is the most difficult and perhaps the greatest test of a biographer: establishing a sense of the character and personality of the subject.

The selected facts give the audience the important pieces of information that they need to follow the story, such as the fact that the French had an authoritative standard dictionary, and the English did not 13; that this lack of a dictionary was a matter of concern 15; that a consortium of London booksellers decided to set up and publish a dictionary 18; and that Johnson, a writer, was in need of employment and living in London at the time 27.

The selected facts also help to create verisimilitude, a convincing portrait of time and place. Using works on social history such as Liza Picard's *Dr Johnson's London* (2000) and Roy Porter's *English Society in the 18th Century* (1990), I selected facts which help to build up a picture of 18th century London with its dung-splattered chaotic streets 6, and riotous 10, drunken mob 5. Facts from biographies of writers and booksellers of the day, such as Harry M. Solomon's *The Rise of Robert Dodsley* (1996), as well as biographies of Johnson help to build up a more specific portrait of literary London, with its successful booksellers 12, and underbelly of starving poets 23. Facts from books on linguistics such as David Crystal's *The Stories of English* (2004), Joan Beal's *English in Modern Times* (2004), and Baugh and Cable's *A History of the English Language* (1993) help to build up a picture of the linguistic concerns of the day 15, 17, 25 & 26. Used in this way, facts helped me to create both a convincing and original portrait of the times, and to avoid the pitfall of a clichéd world derived from previous films and television programmes.

The selected facts are also the first steps in building up the portrait of the personality of the subject. The facts that I selected, are that Johnson is an impoverished unknown writer in London 27, who is writing his play *Irene* in the hope of making his dream of literary success come true 30. This portrait of Johnson is very much in line with my chosen interpretation of him.

I see the inclusion of these selected facts as ethically positive, since they provide the audience with correct information about the subject and his life and times.

Suppressed fact

Facts can be suppressed for reasons of condensation and dramatic focus. Given the time constraints of a film, it is vital to restrict the number of characters shown or even mentioned, and for this reason, the number of booksellers in the consortium 19, the number of assistants working on the *Dictionary* 22, and the number of Tetty's children 31 have all had to be reduced. This did not pose me with much of an ethical dilemma, since they all belonged to groups which were represented, and since there was no question of adding more characters in an already fairly highly populated film. (The issue of the inclusion of Frank Barber was a great ethical concern to me, and I explained in chapter 2.)

Another reason for suppressing facts is when they contradict my overall interpretation, as the example of Strachey's suppression of Queen Victoria's later correspondence to maintain his interpretation of her as widow in mourning. In this stretch of script I have suppressed the fact that Johnson knew Dodsley well and was on friendly terms with him, in order to keep Johnson on the outside of the bookselling world in line with my interpretation of him as Outsider Poet. This does give me cause for concern, with regard to my ethical intentions.

My main ethical concern, in this section of the script, centres on suppression of fact which perpetuates myth, specifically the myth that Johnson's *Dictionary* was the very first 14.

Altered fact

Facts are altered for reasons of chronology. Some events which did not happen within the time frame of the story shown in the film, but which the audience needs to see, are shown as if they happened within the time fame of the film, such as the completion of the French dictionary 2, and Garrick's spying on Sam and Tetty through their bedroom keyhole 32.

The second of these does trouble me a little. Although Garrick did do this, it was ten years previously when he was a schoolboy at Johnson's Edial school. The film could be in danger of portraying Garrick as excessively immature. However, Boswell did

witness David Garrick's hilarious mimicking of Tetty (Boswell 1999, p.48), and since the young Boswell's first trip to London was in 1760 (14 years after this scene takes place), we can safely assume that my portrayal of Garrick as a mischievous adult is not too far wide of the mark.

Another reason for altering facts is in the interest of fidelity to my chosen interpretation. For example Sam's assistants were not all poets 21, but I have made them poets in order to comply with my interpretation of Sam as Outsider Poet. Their dramatic function is to show how grim the protagonist's fate will be, if he fails in his literary quest. Similarly, Johnson did not ever live in the literal Grub Street 28, but he did inhabit the metonymical one.

For ethical reasons, I tried to keep altered facts to a minimum, since because they contain some truth, they are convincing as truth, and therefore the most misleading.

Made-up fact

In terms of ethics, these do not trouble me as much as altered facts. The story of the Frenchman's arrival in London 7 is a complete fiction, but I feel that its comic tone and stereotypical characterization help to signal its fictional status. The same is true of having 'zootomie' 4 as the last word in the French dictionary. I doubt that many audience members will think that these are true.

Conclusion

The purpose of this section has been to show how I have manipulated the facts of Johnson's life, and how my interpretative approach affects the script at the level of the page. By focusing on just the first 10 pages, I hope I have illustrated just how many ethical dilemmas arise for the screenwriter as she goes through the process of drafting a biopic.

INT. THE ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE - DAY 1

CAPTION: The Académie Française, Paris

A feather quill. Next to the word "ZODIAQUE" someone writes a dictionary definition on thick paper: n.m. T. d'Astronomie. Zone du ciel, bande circulaire de la sphère céleste[1]...

The quill is in the hand of a bewigged 18th century LEXICOGRAPHER[2].

Pull back to reveal another, then another, then another… 40[3] LEXICOGRAPHERS working away, in a magnificently opulent library, lit by chandeliers. Suddenly, one of them shouts excitedly.

FRENCH LEXICOGRAPHER
Zootomie![4]

He jumps up, waving his paper about.

FRENCH LEXICOGRAPHER (CONT'D)
C'est fini!

There is an outburst of celebration.

EXT. FLEET STREET - AFTERNOON 2

CAPTION: Fleet Street, London, 1746

A row of shops - a chandler's, a chop house, a pawnbroker's, a pub called the Cheshire Cheese. Busiest of all is a seedy gin shop with a drunken rabble outside it[5].

[1] Altered fact. This definition is from the current version of the *Dictionnaire de l' Académie Française* rather than the original, in keeping with my decision not to write the dialogue in 18th century English, but to create a hybrid between 18th and 21st century English.

[2] Altered fact. My script gives the impression that the Académie Française had completed the first edition of their dictionary relatively recently, but in fact the second edition was published as early as 1718 (Beal, p.44). This is an issue of pace. There is no time and no dramatic need for an explanation as to which edition the French are currently on. We just need to know that they are ahead.

[3] Suppressed fact. The idea that the French dictionary took 40 lexicographers 40 years is a myth, derived from a famous quotation of Johnson's (Boswell, p.97). In fact it took 55 years, (Hitchings, p.69) but 40 x 40 is snappier, and I wanted to paraphrase the quotation in the interview scene, and so I kept the myth version.

[4] Made-up fact. I do not know what the last word in the *Dictionnaire de l' Académie Française* is, but doubt that it is 'zootomie'. This is a word I made up as the French equivalent of the last word in Johnson's *Dictionary*, 'zootomy'.

[5] Selected fact. The gin craze and volatile nature of the people of London at this time is well documented (Porter, pp.17-20).

Dung-splattered Fleet Street is teeming with people, animals, and all manner of vehicles - as carts and sedan chairs nip in between wagons, hackney carriages, and a herd of pigs.[6] Caught up in the chaos is a very fine coach.

INT. COACH - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 3

A foppishly dressed FRENCHMAN[7] rides in the coach. He pulls back the plush drapery covering the window, and opens the window. His peace is immediately shattered by the babble of language. He looks out at a scene of Hogarthian chaos[8].

EXT. FLEET STREET - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 4

A rowdy crowd of DRINKERS outside a seedy gin shop. A voice can be made out.

VOICE
You're a banging fellow.

Wham! The sound of a punch. The crowd reacts.

VOICE
(earnestly protesting his innocence)
'Banging'[9] - it means fine, great, excellent. (beat) You muttonhead!

A fight ensues.

INT. COACH - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 5

The FRENCHMAN looks out of the coach window, with the utmost displeasure.

The fight outside the gin shop has turned into a small riot.[10]

[6] Selected fact. Picard (pp.9-34) describes the chaotic state of London's roads and the variety of traffic.

[7] Made-up fact. This is a totally fictional episode -- there was no visit by a representative of the Académie Française to London booksellers. I have created this as the drama's inciting incident.

[8] Selected fact. I have selected facts relating to the theme of chaos. The chaos on the streets, based on fact (Picard, pp.9-34) (Porter, pp.17-20), reflects the chaos of the language (Crystal, pp.365-387), the apparent chaos of Sam's lexicographic methodology, the chaos of Sam's household, and the chaos of his mind.

[9] Selected fact. 'Banging' and 'muttonhead' are taken from Captain Francis Grose's *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (first published 1796), which I have used especially as a resource for Maitland's dialogue. Although compiled some decades later than the time of my film, the society it evokes seems much the same, and the language feels appropriate for the mid century.

Disgusted, the Frenchman puffs perfume over himself.

With him in the carriage are two FOOTMEN, who each bear an identical object which is covered in a fine cloth.

EXT. PATERNOSTER ROW - AFTERNOON, MOMENTS LATER 6

The Frenchman's coach turns into a street. The street sign on one side of the road says "Paternoster Row", and "Pater Nosta Row"[11] on the other.

INT. COACH - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 7

The FRENCHMAN gives a pained shrug. Then he sees the place that he has been looking for, and signals to the driver to stop. The coach comes to a halt. The Frenchman gets out.

EXT. LONGMAN BOOKSELLER'S - AFTERNOON, CONTINUOUS 8

Someone has graffitied on the side of the coach - "Basturd".

The coach has stopped outside a bookseller's shop called "LONGMAN"[12], with a distinctive sign of a ship in full sail. The FRENCHMAN looks at the shop, and smiles a wicked smile.

INT. LONGMAN BOOKSELLER'S - AFTERNOON 9

A bookshop, where four solidly middle class BOOKSELLERS are working quietly.

EDWARD CAVE, mid fifties, from the Midlands, proud and finely dressed, is scrutinizing a copy of the "Gentleman's Magazine". ROBERT DODSLEY, early forties, Scottish, clubbable but canny, is reading a handwritten manuscript. ANDREW MILLAR, early forties, a humourless Scottish bean counter, is going through his accounts. THOMAS LONGMAN, late forties, English, an authority figure and businessman with vision, presides behind the counter.

---

[10] Selected fact. Riots were common in London at this time (Porter, p.17).

[11] Selected fact. The misspelt street sign is device that I have invented to illustrate that orthography was at this time still not fixed (Crystal, p.381). Samuel Johnson and his contemporaries were very concerned about this, feeling that the English language was generally in a dangerously chaotic state (Crystal, pp.365-387).

[12] Selected fact. Longman did have his shop on Paternoster Row, and did have a sign depicting a ship (Wallis, 1974).

The FRENCHMAN comes into the shop, followed by his FOOTMEN, bearing the covered objects.

FRENCHMAN
Monsieur Longman?

Longman looks up.

LONGMAN
Yes, I am Thomas Longman.

FRENCHMAN
Jean-Paul Lafayette. I 'ave come from Paris...

A smug smile plays on his lips.

LAFAYETTE
I 'ave brought something to show you.

He beckons to his Footmen, who put the covered objects onto the counter. Everyone closes in to get a better look.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)
I present ze "Dictionnaire de l' Académie Française"! Voilà!

Lafayette whips away the cloths with a flourish. There is a truly splendid, two-volumed dictionary. The company are all impressed.

Lafayette grins smugly.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)
But...

Lafayette pretends to scan the bookshelves on either side of him, with theatrical exaggeration.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)
Where is ze "Dictionnaire de l' Académie Anglaise"?

The Booksellers are irked. Lafayette is clearly enjoying himself.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)
Ze Spanish have a dictionary -

The Booksellers are rising to the bait.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)
Even ze Italians have a dictionary![13] But you English do not![14]

This insult has found its mark. Longman draws himself up.

LONGMAN
Shakespeare managed perfectly well without one.

LAFAYETTE
Pah! You cannot dine out on Shakespeare for all éternité!

The Booksellers glower.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)
Your language is barbarique!
Your pronunciation is chaotique.
Your spelling is deranged!

Lafayette delivers his killer blow.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)
Ecoutez et répétez: ze English language - c'est fini![15]

The Booksellers stand in stunned silence, as the full horror of this national crisis sinks in.

Lafayette smiles triumphantly[16]. Then he turns and flounces out, in a swish of silk and puff of wig powder, his Footmen following hastily. They leave the offending dictionary as a lingering badge of shame.

Dodsley is the first to recover.

DODSLEY
He's right - it's a national disgrace.

---

[13] Selected fact. It is true that both the Spanish and Italians had academies which had produced dictionaries by this time, whilst the English language had no equivalent.
[14] Suppressed fact. In fact many dictionaries of English had already been written (Beal pp.35-39; Crystal, pp.280-284), but it is true that none of them were adequate for the job or up to the standard of the French (Reddick, pp.15-16).
[15] Selected fact. There was, indeed, a real fear among Samuel Johnson's contemporaries that the English language had descended into anarchy, and was under serious threat (Crystal, pp.365-367).
[16] Selected fact. Whilst my portrayal of the Frenchman is a xenophobic joke, it also reflects the attitudes of the English at the time, as Fougeret de Montbron wrote: '"Before they learn that there is a God to be worshipped, they learn that there is a Frenchman to be detested"' (Porter, p.7).

The others nod, still a little dazed.

LONGMAN
It's all very well for the French - they had massive state funding for their dictionary. England is too interested in trade, slaves, and colonies to care about the language.

DODSLEY
If an English dictionary is to be written, it will have to be a profitable business venture.[17]

MILLAR
A risky one.

CAVE
Yes.

LONGMAN
But a prestigious one.

DODSLEY
I say we do it. But that we work together, as a consortium.[18] [19]

LONGMAN
Yes! For the honour of our country!

DODSLEY
Who would patronize it?

LONGMAN
And who would write it? Not a university department...

MILLAR
Heavens no! We need someone cheap.

---

[17] Selected fact. All attempts to establish an English academy had failed (Beal, p. 91).
[18] Selected fact. The *Dictionary* was published by a consortium of booksellers, including Robert Dodsley, Thomas Longman, and Andrew Millar.
[19] Suppressed fact. There were other booksellers in the dictionary consortium, but I chose to include just three, because it is difficult for audiences to relate to too many characters, and because of the time constraints of film. The Booksellers represent different attitudes to business – Millar is an unimaginative bean counter, Dodsley a more creative risk taker, and Longman the authority figure who holds it all together. I include Cave in an advisory capacity, even though he was not in fact part of the consortium, because he is an interesting character, and a great antagonist to the Booksellers.

CAVE
Well what about poets?[20] [21] [22]
London is full of the wretches, and they are cheap as chops.[23]

OPENING TITLES: SAM J

INT. CHESHIRE CHEESE - EVENING 10

ALEXANDER MACBEAN, a flame-haired Scottish poet in his early thirties, is working by candlelight at a table in the pub, quill in hand. He drains the last of a small beer. Swipe! Glass and candle are swept away by the LANDLADY's hand, plunging Macbean's manuscript into gloom. He sighs.

INT. PAWNBROKER'S - EVENING 11

MAITLAND, a roguish Scottish poet in his late thirties, a bedraggled quill behind his ear, stands at a counter. He hands his shirt to the PAWNBROKER, who slaps one small coin down on the counter. Maitland grins and scoops up the coin.

EXT. GLASS FACTORY - EVENING 12

ROBERT SHIELS, an earnest Scottish poet in his late twenties, has made a bed in a pile of warm ash. Quill in hand, he works on a manuscript, the title page of which reads: "Lives of the Poets..."

EXT. TEMPLE BAR - EVENING 13

A small box on a string hangs in midair.[24]

NATHANIEL (O.C.)
Help a debtor, sir.

But PASSERS-BY ignore this plea.

---

[20] Selected fact. Johnson's assistants were 'a rag-tag group of predominantly Scottish ne'er-do-wells.' (Reddick, p.2).
[21] Altered fact. Sam's assistants were not known as poets, but amanuenses (Boswell, p.98), but I have made them all poets in line with my interpretation of Johnson as 'Outsider Poet.'
[22] Suppressed fact. I have reduced the number of assistants that Johnson had, cutting out Frank Stewart and William Macbean in order to make it easier to differentiate between them.
[23] Selected fact. London was full of impoverished hack writers and poets – "the tunefull starving" (Holmes, 1994, p.84).
[24] Selected fact. A practice called 'angling for farthings' carried out by debtors imprisoned in places such as Temple Bar (Picard, p.86).

NATHANIEL (O.C.)(CONT'D)
Spare a farthing for a poor poet.

The string leads up to the grille of a prison. There is the face of NATHANIEL RICHARDS, a bright, good-looking fellow in his early twenties.

INT. DEBTOR'S PRISON - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 14

Next to RICHARDS, another English poet is struggling to write, despite their grim surroundings. PEYTON, in his early twenties, pale and scrawny, has a naive, childlike air.

PEYTON
Mary, my love, each time we part,
Tis like discordful music in my heart.

Peyton stops, unsure of something.

PEYTON (CONT'D)
Discordful - is that right?

RICHARDS
I think it's discordish. Or maybe discordal... No, discordy.

PEYTON
Discordous? Or discordive?

RICHARDS
Discordsome?[25]

Peyton sighs.

PEYTON
Poets that lasting marble seek,
Must carve in Latin or in Greek.
We write in sand.[26]

[25] Selected fact. This example of 'discord' and all its possible adjectival formations is taken directly from Crystal's (pp.314-315) example of the kind of problems that writers would have had in the days before dictionaries. Peyton's lines of poetry have been made up to accommodate this illustration.
[26] Selected fact. This is a quotation from the poem *Of English Verse* written by Edmund Waller shortly after the restoration, and is cited by Baugh and Cable (p.256) as an illustration of the concern for the language that writers and scholars had in the period 1650-1800.

INT. THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE - EVENING 15

SAMUEL JOHNSON, late thirties, a massive hulk of a man, sits in a theatre box dressed in fine evening wear. Although he is no oil painting, and is almost blind in one eye, he is a manly man with an air of great dignity.

DAVID GARRICK, early thirties, diminutive and dazzling megastar, strides out onto the stage.

WOMAN IN THE AUDIENCE
David Garrick!

Thud! She has fainted.

GARRICK
Good public now that you have seen
The fate of Mahomet and Irene,
Applaud the bard, who with his art
Has spoken true, and from the
heart!

Garrick gestures upwards towards Samuel Johnson's box. The AUDIENCE bursts into rapturous applause.

Sam beams and glows with a massive pride. Next to him his wife, TETTY JOHNSON, twenty years his senior, pretty and genteel, smiles adoringly at him. She is dripping with jewellery, and wearing a beautiful green silk gown.

TETTY (O.C.)
Sam!

INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM, GRUB STREET[27] [28] - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 16

SAM's head bobs forward and... Zzzzzt! He singes the front of his wig on his candle.

TETTY (O.C.)
Sam!

Jolted out of his reverie, Samuel Johnson pulls his head back. The wig is safe, but charred and frazzled. Sam is in fact an impoverished poet in a Grub Street garret, his wife TETTY in bed beside him. He has a candle in one hand

[27] Selected fact. Johnson was living in London at this time, unknown and impoverished, and struggling to earn a living as a writer.
[28] Altered fact. Johnson never lived in the literal Grub Street (Hitchings, p.29), but Grub Street is used as a metonym for the difficult life of the struggling, impoverished writer, which did apply to Johnson in the time before the *Dictionary* (Reddick, p.12).

and a manuscript in the other. The cover page reads: "Mahomet and Irene by Samuel Johnson"[29]. Tetty strokes her hand down his arm amorously. But Sam's attention is on his work. He reads aloud from it.

SAM
To state and pow'r I court thee,
Not to ruin.[30]

INT. SAM AND TETTY'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 17

The furniture and possessions in Sam and Tetty's dilapidated living room are meagre and shabby, with the exception of a fine portrait of a young man in a sailor's uniform[31]. There is a knock at the door. DAVID GARRICK, splendidly attired, and brimful of confidence, strides into the room, holding a manuscript. He hears Sam's voice.

SAM (O.C.)
Smile on my wishes...

INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 18

SAM gets out of bed, play and candle still in hand, and makes his way around the room, still reading. He narrowly avoids tripping over dusty tomes piled up on the floor.

SAM (CONT'D)
And command the globe.

INT. SAM AND TETTY'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 19

GARRICK is about to knock on the bedroom door, when he stops, and listens.

[29] Selected fact. Johnson had begun to write his play *Irene*, also called *Mahomet and Irene*, before he came to live in London (Boswell, p.50), and continued to work on it for many years (Boswell, p.52-56), trying in vain to get it performed (Boswell, p.56). I wove this into a dream scene in order to portray Sam's rainbow – his dream of becoming a successful writer. It sets up the emotional truth of the protagonist in this validation story – Sam dreams of success and acclaim. This is the beginning of my interpretation of Samuel Johnson, and my portrayal of him as a creative intellectual whose dreams and talent are frustrated. This scene really sets up Sam as the 'Outsider Poet' desperate to get on the inside.

[30] Selected fact. Actual lines from *Irene* (p.65).

[31] Suppressed fact. This is a portrait of Tetty's son Jervis, who makes a brief appearance later in the film. In fact Tetty had two sons, both of whom disowned her, and a daughter who accepted Johnson into the family, and lived in Staffordshire with Johnson's mother. Tetty's family has been reduced for reasons of dramatic focus.

INT. SAM AND TETTY'S BEDROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 20

TETTY attempts to seduce SAM.

TETTY
(amorously)
Smile on my wishes... and come back to bed.

Sam puts the manuscript down on the bed, and absent-mindedly tucks a sheet into his britches. He picks the manuscript up again, then moves away, revealing Tetty's naked flesh.

INT. SAM AND TETTY'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING, CONTINUOUS 21

GARRICK is peeping through the keyhole[32], desperately trying not to laugh out loud.

[32] Altered fact. Garrick did spy on Johnson and Tetty through their bedroom keyhole (Boswell, p.48) but this happened some ten years earlier while he was still at schoolboy at Johnson's Edial school.