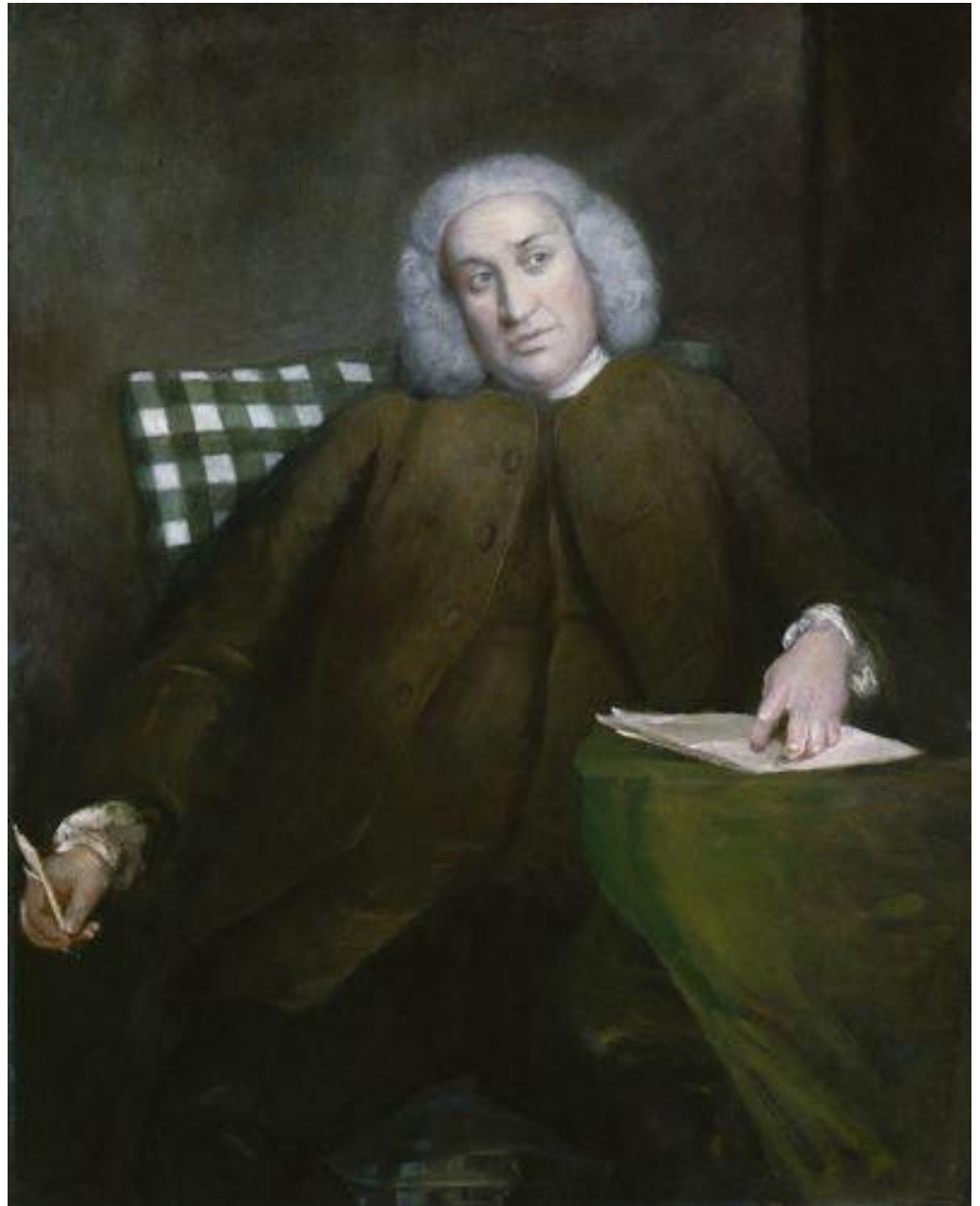


Samuel
Johnson
(1709-84)



Dr. Samuel Johnson

- From his biography in the Norton 2841-2843:
- Crowning achievement: his **English Dictionary**.
- Famous style: “The great generalist”
 - direct, memorable, and sometimes harsh (little patience for elaborate nonsense).
- A famous talker, known for his conversation.
- The subject of the most famous biography in English literature—Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*.

1729: Left Oxford—too poor.

1737-55: Tutoring and “hack writing” in London for money.

1747-55: *A Dictionary of the English Language* (assisted).

1750-52: *The Rambler* (bi-weekly published essays).

1759: *Rasselas* (moral tales, written in one week).

1762: “The Club”—by now, an influential celebrity among artists, writers, intellectuals.

1763: Met Boswell (22), who recorded Johnson’s life.

1779-81: *Lives of the Poets*.

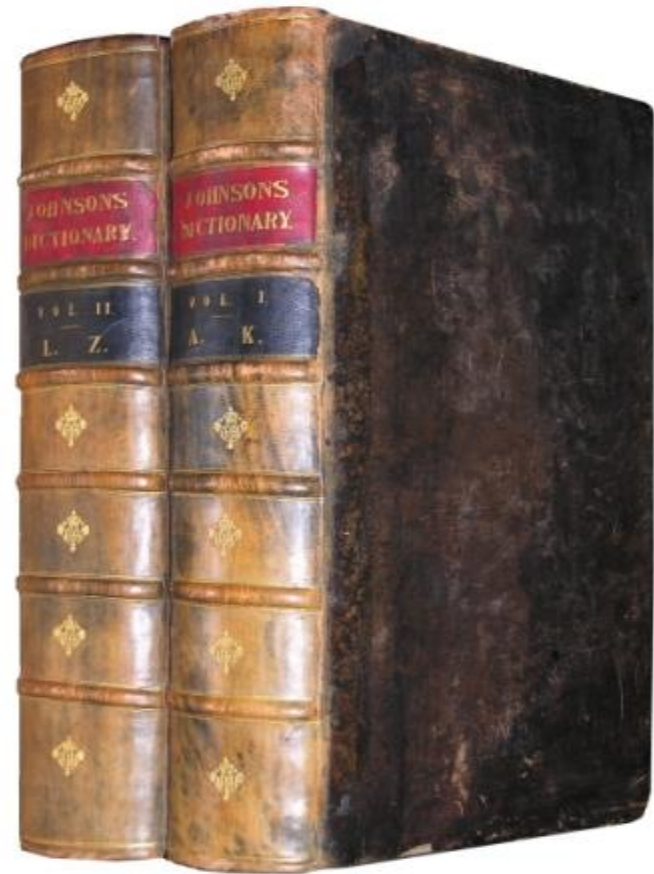
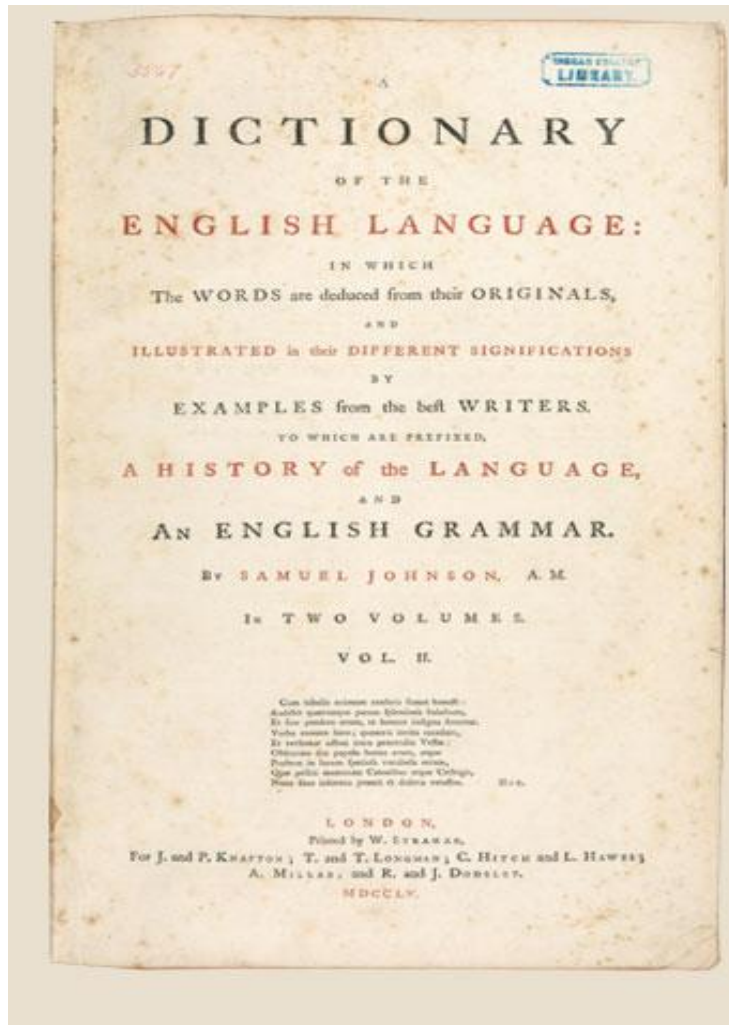


Johnson wrote fast and worked hard.

18th C Writers' Relations to the Reading Public

- Back in the Renaissance, books were the property of the few; books were expensive, and their production (the author's time and the costs to publish them) was often supported by a patron.
- In the 18th C, there was a shift from the patron to the public.
- Books became much cheaper to produce, and an expanding middle class would buy them.
- Pope may have looked down on new reading public, but the new market of readers freed writers from the old model of patronage.
- Reading brief works on contemporary arts & issues flourished. Periodicals emerged—not unlike like today's weekly or monthly magazines. Today we have magazines like *The New Yorker*.
- In the 18th C, instead of *The New Yorker*, there was *The Spectator*, *The Idler*, and *The Rambler*. **Johnson wrote for such periodicals.**
- And Johnson put together a dictionary for the English people.

Johnson's Dictionary



Recently listed for
\$29,500 in New York

Johnson's Dictionary reveals his style and politics

- To **CANT**. verb
 - To talk in the jargon of particular professions . . .
“to dress up ignorance in words of bulk or sound.”
- **PATRON**. noun
 - One who countenances, supports, or protects. Commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery.
- **TORY**. noun
 - One who adheres to the ancient constitution of the state, and the apostolical hierarchy of the church of England, opposed to a whig.
- **WHIG**. noun
 - The name of a faction.
“Whoever has a true value for church and state, should avoid the extremes of whig for the sake of the former, and the extremes of tory on account of the latter.” --Swift

Johnson's Politics

- Like Swift, Johnson was a unique sort of tory.
- Johnson was conservative and was critical of whigs (especially out of suspicion of greedy ventures-- e.g. the slave trade & making quick money off the poor).
- But Johnson did not blindly support the crown
 - He was critical of tories, too.

Some interesting quotes from a unique tory

- "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."
– *Boswell's Life of Johnson*
- On America: "How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?"
– *Taxation No Tyranny*
- "Of black men the numbers are too great who are now repining under English cruelty."
-- *The Idler #87*
- "Here's to the next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies."
-- In conversation with Boswell
- "A decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilization."
– In conversation with Boswell

**The Dictionary was Johnson's crowning achievement;
he had the help of six assistants, who worked here
where Johnson lived in London**





Le Jour ni l'Heure : 17 Gough Square, Londres, jeudi 23 août 2007, 15:30:03



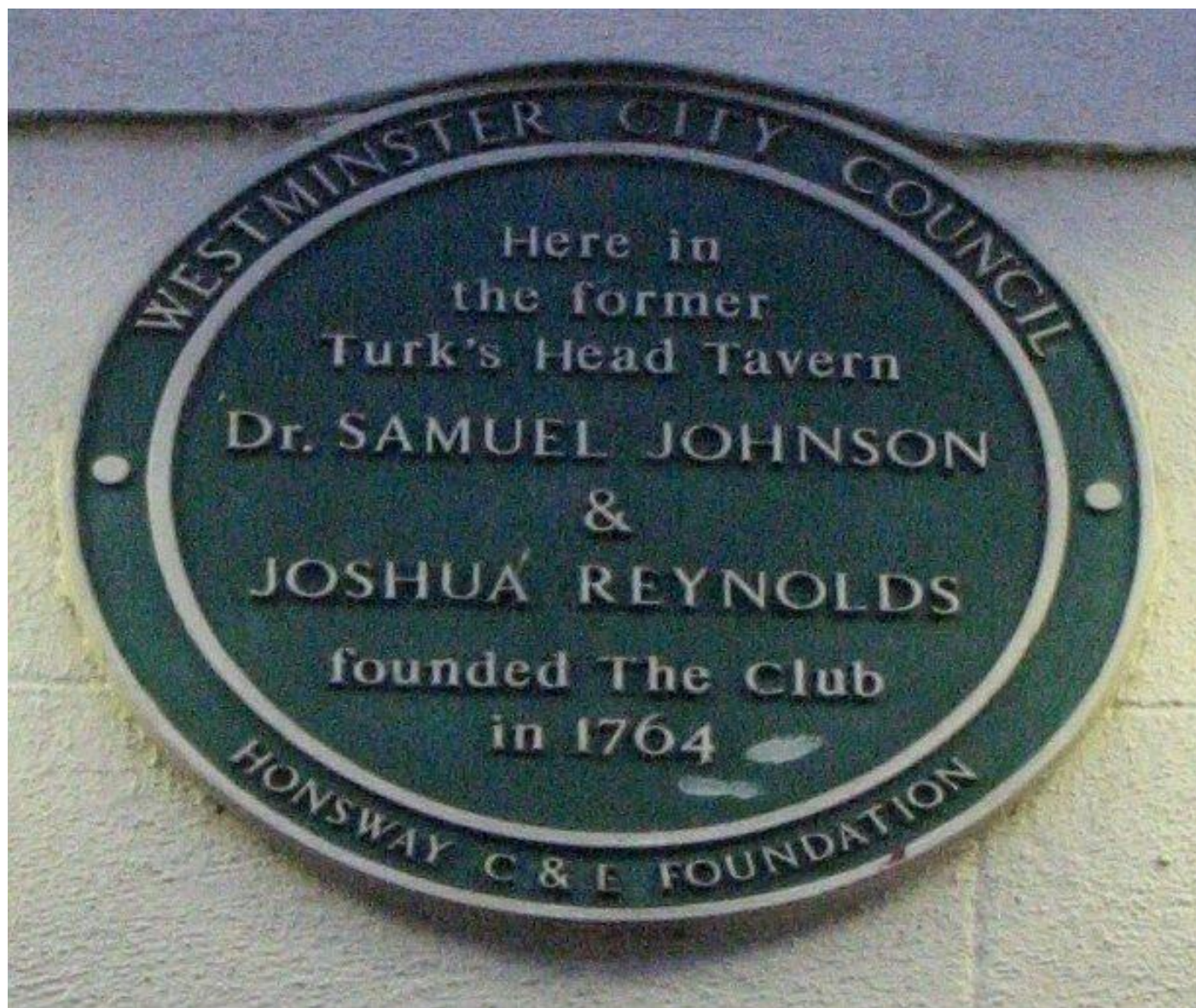
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“The Club”:

Johnson as an influential magnet & intellectual rock star



From left to right: James Boswell, Samuel Johnson, Sir Joshua Reynolds, David Garrick, Edmund Burke, Pascal Paoli, Charles Burney, Thomas Warton, Oliver Goldsmith



WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL

Here in
the former
Turk's Head Tavern

Dr. SAMUEL JOHNSON

&

JOSHUA REYNOLDS

founded The Club
in 1764

HONSWAY C & E FOUNDATION

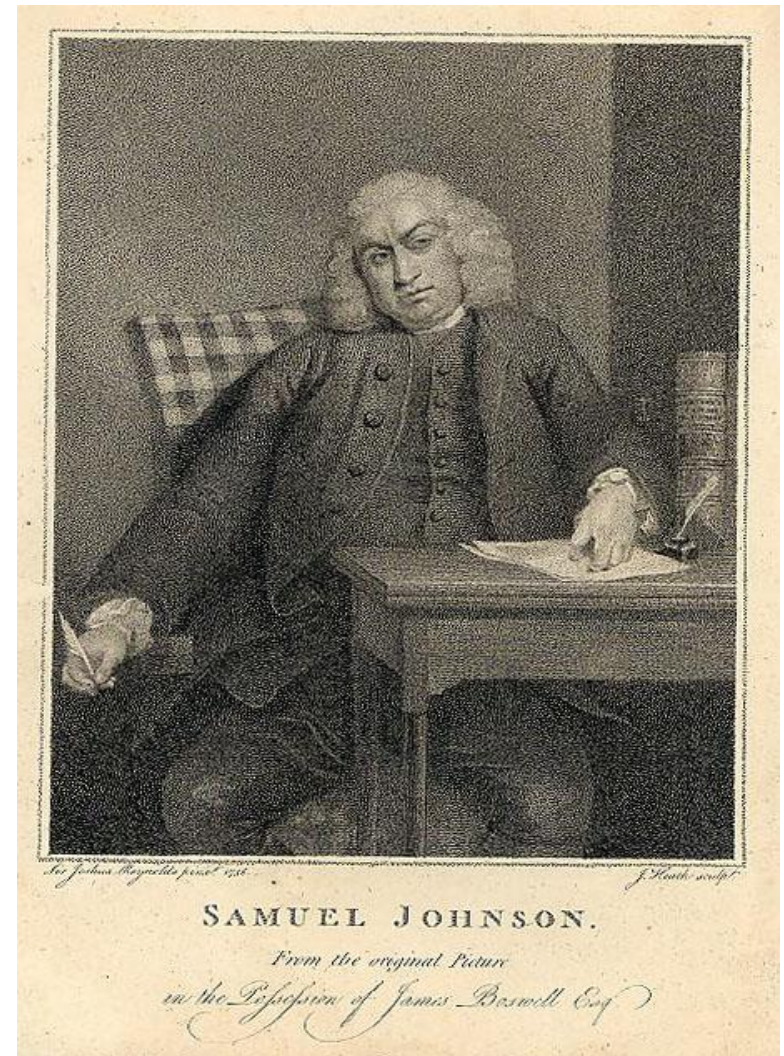
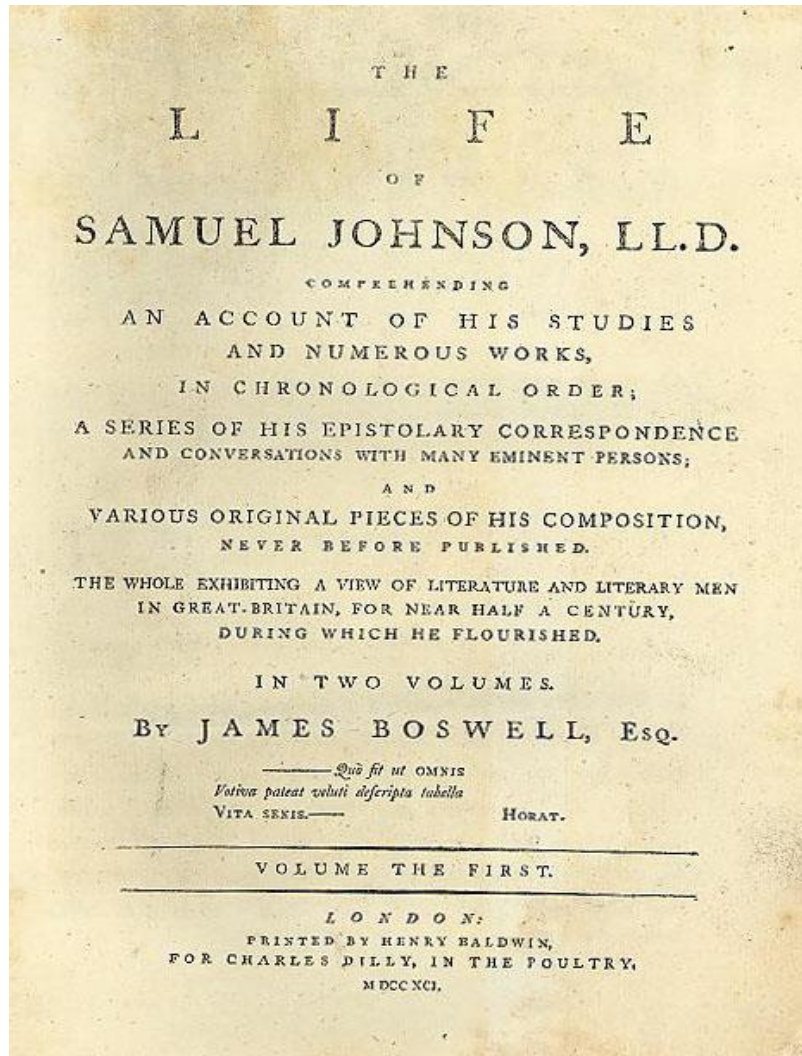
James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*

- Nowadays, it's so common for the artist him/herself to be revered as a person.
- Surprisingly, this is a relatively new phenomenon—and many see Boswell's work as very significant in sparking a new interest in the life of the artist.
- Sure, there were great artists before Johnson (such as Shakespeare) and there were biographies of famous leaders...

The birth of the cult of celebrity

- ...But the artist was viewed as a a sort of messenger—a medium for art, ideas, and entertainment.
- Earlier, the *work* was revered--not the *person*.
- People watched and read Shakespeare's plays (which are about important people—heads of state & noblemen), but it was not Shakespeare himself who was of interest. In fact, we barely know anything about Shakespeare.
- The idea that someone would follow an artist and report on the artist's life, like Boswell did, was remarkably new.
- Today's *paparazzi* were just being invented.

Boswell's *Life of Johnson*



Johnson's *Lives of the Artists*

- Johnson also contributed to this new interest in the artist with his work, which pieced together the biographical information he could find on poets such as Milton, Dryden, and Pope.
- Of Pope he says this: “He examined lines and words with minute and punctilious observation, and retouched every part with indefatigable diligence, till he had left nothing to be forgiven. For this reason he kept pieces very long in his hands, while he considered and reconsidered them” (NA 2957-2958). “Pope is always smooth, uniform, and gentle” (NA 2958).

Other notable interests of Johnson

- He's "pre-Romantic" in his reverence of nature.
 - **Rambler #5 (2852-2854)**
- He proclaims the true artist represents timeless, universal truths:
"He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age and country."
 - **Rasselas #10 (2871)**
- He warns of the dangers of young people reading modern romances. Likewise, some fear Brittany Spears & Hannah Montana.
- Like some, Johnson worried that mass publishing was feeding the new reading public a lot of garbage—a sign of his conservative side.
 - **Rambler #4 (2923-2926)**
- **Johnson also loved his cat...**

Celebrity Pets:

Before there was Paris Hilton and her beloved Tinkerbelle, there was Samuel Johnson and his dear cat Hodge.

