

Georgia State University

ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

English Theses

Department of English

Spring 5-7-2011

Imitation is the Sincerest Form of Comedy: Finding the Humor in Rasselas through Ecclesiastes

Mary Katherine Mason
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_theses



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mason, Mary Katherine, "Imitation is the Sincerest Form of Comedy: Finding the Humor in Rasselas through Ecclesiastes." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2011.
doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/1963015>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

Imitation is the Sincerest Form of Comedy: Finding the Humor in *Rasselas* through Ecclesiastes

by

MARY KATHERINE MASON

Under the Direction of Dr. Malinda Snow

ABSTRACT

For years, scholars have focused on the serious narrative of Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* and have been unable to reconcile the episodes of ironic humor within the larger serious narrative. By reading *Rasselas* as an imitation of Ecclesiastes rather than an Oriental tale, critics can begin to identify the humor in *Rasselas* through the embellishment of the story of Ecclesiastes. The failures of the character Koheleth in Ecclesiastes become the genesis for the failures of Rasselas and his companions; however, the failures of Rasselas are more elaborate and comedic. How Johnson embellishes these failures to create humorous irony in *Rasselas* becomes clearer for the reader through this new categorization of genre, which can hopefully unite the two opposing views of criticism surrounding this book.

INDEX WORDS: Imitation, Humor, Irony, Oriental tale, Wisdom literature, Eighteenth Century.

Imitation is the Sincerest Form of Comedy: Finding the Humor in Rasselas through Ecclesiastes

by

MARY KATHERINE MASON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2011

Imitation is the Sincerest Form of Comedy: Finding the Humor in Rasselas through Ecclesiastes

by

MARY KATHERINE MASON

Committee Chair: Dr. Malinda Snow

Committee: Dr. Murray Brown

Dr. Paul Schmidt

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2011

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my two favorite people. To my fiancé, Jon Nicholas Ramsey, for his ability to make me laugh even life's worst moments, and to my mother, Joan Quillen Mason, with whom I had my first conversation and with whom I continue to have my favorite conversations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the expert guidance, patience, and knowledge of Dr. Malinda Snow.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
1 Introduction	1
2 Chapter One: A Time to Revise the Genre of <i>Rasselas</i>	9
3 Chapter Two: Analyzing <i>Rasselas</i> and Ecclesiastes in the heterotopic Mirror	20
4 Chapter Three: How the Repetitive Failures in Ecclesiastes are Humorously Imitated in <i>Rasselas</i>	39
5 Conclusion.....	57
Bibliography	61

Introduction

In “The Comedy of *Rasselas*,” Alvin Whitley laments the lost humor in Samuel Johnson’s story: “It would be hard to name another literary work which has been so completely transformed (from critical comedy to lyrical satire!) by bringing extraneous knowledge and considerations to bear upon it” (49).¹ For years critics could not understand the structure of *Rasselas*, and a story where no conclusion is reached confounded scholars; this nebulous analysis forced *Rasselas* into the category of an Oriental tale, where it did not quite belong. The text is tightly segmented, offering forty-nine chapters that can be (and have been) easily extrapolated from the whole work to offer simplified lessons on life. This technique of dissecting the scenes within *Rasselas* provided critics with Johnsonian wisdom literature but disregarded any effort to categorize, and therefore interpret, the work as a whole, correctly.

In the nineteen-fifties, Gwin Kolb, author of “The Structure of *Rasselas*,” re-examined the episodic structure, showing new readers Johnson’s moral aim and moving *Rasselas* into a new arena of interpretation: as moral instruction. Many critics, like Irvin Ehrenpreis, concluded that Johnson was attempting to enforce a Christian view of life upon his readers: happiness can only be found in eternity, as Nekayah concludes herself: “I hope hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity” (175). This “choice of eternity” and “choice of life” conflict within the work set off numerous articles, most arguing that Johnson wants the reader to emphasize “the choice of eternity.”² In the “first full-length study of *Rasselas*,” (1) *Johnson, Rasselas, and the Choice of Criticism*, Edward Tomarken likens the choice of eternity to the religious moral interpretation

¹ Whitley’s article, published in 1956, is one of few that address the humor of *Rasselas*.

² As recently as 2005 Michael Korounas’s article “*Rasselas* and the Riddle of the Caves: Setting Eternity in the Hearts of Men” asserts this position.

and the choice of life as a secular view, and critics have loyally followed this statement for years: “After nearly two and a half centuries of almost continuous dispute, critics are still unable to decide whether *Rasselas* is a novel, Oriental tale, or apologue and whether it is to be seen in religious or secular terms” (5). Tomarken accurately relates this dispute over the nature of the religious tone in *Rasselas* to the confusion over the genre of the story. If we begin to better understand the genre of *Rasselas*, we could begin to see how the work is relating to and reacting with the religious tone.

One of the aspects of “extraneous knowledge” that Whitley addresses is the parallel between the biblical book of Ecclesiastes and *Rasselas*. Both works relay similar compartmented stories of how characters questing to find worldly happiness and knowledge fail at every point; additionally, both works structurally serve as wisdom literature. In biblical wisdom literature the reader gleans didactic knowledge concerning life experiences without having to personally encounter such trials—archetypal gems of knowledge are buried beneath the often grim and terse statements concerning life’s sour situations. Ecclesiastes is often regarded as the ultimate example of wisdom literature, where the main character and narrator Koheleth attempts to find the meaning of life. As Harold Bloom attests within his recent book *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found*, “[A] Book on wisdom and literature must brood upon Koheleth, for it first comes to mind whenever wisdom literature is mentioned” (22). These stories have more in common than only similarities that exists within the text. The same confusion arising from the competing religious and secular tones that has frustrated scholars of *Rasselas* has frustrated commentators of Ecclesiastes as well: “Commentators were confused by the startling contradictions in which the book [Ecclesiastes] abounded, the cool skepticism of one passage followed by apparently impeachable orthodox sentiments in the next” (Gordis 3-4).

When analyzing Samuel Johnson's writings, a student must be familiar with biblical literature. Expecting much the same from his readers, Johnson frequently studied the Old and New Testaments. Most Johnsonian scholars would agree that modern students should approach Johnson with an appreciation for his biblical knowledge and, at least, a basic grasp of biblical literature themselves. More broadly, Northrop Frye came to the same conclusion in his introduction to *The Great Code* writing, "I soon realized that a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads" (xii). Noted Johnsonian Arie H. Sachs echoes this same sentiment in his book *Passionate Intelligence* regarding Johnson: "None of his work can be understood apart from his faith" (xv). While I intend to better understand *Rasselas* through the similarities with Ecclesiastes, I do not attempt to label myself a biblical scholar and will rely on biblical scholars to analyze Ecclesiastes. The main focus of my thesis will be the analysis of *Rasselas*, partly through a comparison between translations of Ecclesiastes and commentaries by actual biblical scholars who may also be Johnson's contemporaries. I will show that Johnson's Christian faith and his reading of Ecclesiastes influenced *Rasselas* not merely in a serious manner but also in comedic embellishments. I will consult the Authorized Version (AV), sometimes also called the King James version, of Ecclesiastes, like Samuel Johnson and his contemporaries, along with more modern commentaries on Ecclesiastes.

Johnson's contemporaries, including his biographer James Boswell, have noted the basic comparisons between *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes. Contemporary critics continue this conversation through contextual readings with various commentaries on Ecclesiastes that Johnson would have read and may be mimicking in *Rasselas*. Thomas R. Preston follows this method in his essay "The Biblical Context of Johnson's *Rasselas*" arguing that Johnson was engaging in a "re-

formed school” view of Ecclesiastes by following Bishop Simon Patrick’s commentary that endorsed such a view: “it [Ecclesiastes] taught us not to despise the pleasure[s] of the world but to enjoy them” (274). I find the comparison between such commentaries compelling (I plan to look at Patrick’s commentary during my research), yet I have found no critic that effectively explores the seemingly homogenous elements within both texts or the ways in which *Rasselas* differs from Ecclesiastes within the similar scenes. The overarching goal of my thesis will be to find these parallels within the text of Ecclesiastes, not just in the commentaries but through the AV and modern Hebrew commentaries, and to explain why Johnson engages in what I argue is an eighteenth-century imitation of Ecclesiastes: to create humorous irony. By analyzing the “extraneous knowledge” that *Rasselas* is similar to Ecclesiastes, knowledge that is often used as evidence for a serious Christian moral in the story, I will show how placing *Rasselas* in the genre of an imitation of Ecclesiastes makes this similarity not only relevant knowledge but showcases the best way to understand the divergence in critical opinion surrounding *Rasselas* and the humor in *Rasselas*.

Critics often find in this biblical similarity further proof of Johnson’s serious moral instruction through *Rasselas*; if the devout Christian Johnson relays morals from the Bible, it is hard to imagine a comedic aim. Scholarship on *Rasselas* has been divided into two camps: the small group who see the humor and the larger group who see the moralizing. Most of the scholarship on Johnson’s use of Ecclesiastes within the text falls into the second category. Again, Sachs has written numerous works that deal with Johnson’s use of spirituality within *Rasselas*, sometimes addressing the parallels with Ecclesiastes. Sachs’ “Samuel Johnson on ‘The Vacuity of Life’” addresses the failed nature of the *Rasselas*’ quest: “it is the nature of earthly hope—which is the supreme manifestation of initial vacuity and craving—to be frustrated by reality in

the end” (348). This certainly is a theme for Ecclesiastes and *Rasselas*, and through the critical lens so far neither seems comical. Repeated failures of recall happen to the characters Rasselas, Nekayah, Pekuah, and the Koheleth of Ecclesiastes.

On the irony in Ecclesiastes Harold Bloom remarks, “The irony of one era or culture is not likely to be that of another, yet irony always tends to say one thing while meaning something else” (4). The general irony within Ecclesiastes is somber; a believer in God struggles to find evidence of the wisdom behind his belief and is continually confronted with his lack of knowledge and the vanity of human life. This believer, Koheleth, bestows a lesson on the reader about failed quests through his own specific failures. Also, Koheleth will continue his quest in similar situations he has already deemed inappropriate. For example, Koheleth attempts to find proof of his wisdom, yet on his quest comes to the conclusion that there is no man or woman that possesses wisdom; the quest should be over since he asserts no one can possess wisdom, yet he continues.³ Both these same ironic failures, both the failure of the goal and a failure to recall, occur within *Rasselas*, but *Rasselas* is an imitation of Ecclesiastes, and Johnson is playing dress-up to show readers a more comedic irony within the same situations. As Bloom points out, the ironies of the ages differ. Johnson revisits the hidden wisdom of Ecclesiastes with *Rasselas* and relies on readers’ previous knowledge of Koheleth’s story. Through the imitation and his embellishments to the situational and dramatic irony, readers can now laugh at the characters from a safe distance and enjoy a forgotten truth about human nature. While Carey McIntosh has explored the dramat-

³ For the scope of my research I will not be arguing comedic elements within Ecclesiastes, though I believe such elements exist. I will simply be defining the similar elements of failure in both works as ironic and exposing how Johnson creates more accessible humor within the irony of *Rasselas*.

ic irony in *Rasselas* in his book, *The Choice of Life*, no critic has explored how Johnson engages comedic elements in *Rasselas* through parallels with the more serious Ecclesiastes. The reader can access the humor within *Rasselas* without undermining the validity of the biblical book, something that critics rightly assert that Johnson would not condone. Johnson anticipates that his readers will recognize the wisdom literature present in Koheleth's story of *Ecclesiastes* and be able to transpose this knowledge into the similar story of *Rasselas* (which is magnified threefold by his two female companions' failed quests). In essence, I propose that both schools of *Rasselas* criticism are correct. Johnson's story is comical and deals with a Christian moral lesson on life. Ecclesiastes provides a primer, of sorts, on how to read *Rasselas* as a comedy and unite the opposing schools of criticism.

I am building upon Duane Smith's article "Repetitive Patterns in Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*" where he examines the repetitive patterns of failure. Here, Smith reasons through the repetitive themes of failure and the criticism that the work is espousing a morality on life: "While on one level Johnson confirms traditional moral values and truths, the pattern of repetition on another level denied the very possibility of truth. The problem for the reader is somehow to negotiate this apparent contradiction" (634). Since Smith never explores the similarities with Ecclesiastes, I believe a study of these will allow the repetitive themes of failure to simply exist as comedy without moral responsibility and allow the greater context of Ecclesiastes to bear the weight of "moral values" and "truths." These patterns of failure that Whitley (briefly), Smith, and Robert Folkenflik explore are the central elements of humor within *Rasselas*.

Along with the humorous failures is the more serious overall narrative of Ecclesiastes and *Rasselas*. Michel Foucault's idea of the heterotopia of illusion helps explain the similarities between both narratives. The similar quests do offer some moral instruction for the readers of both

works since the narratives offer a heterotopia of illusion that allows the readers to successfully navigate the moral lesson inside these spaces and transfer the impossible, constructed journeys back to their own lives. The heterotopia of illusion explains how many critics continue to argue for a serious Christian interpretation for *Rasselas* by either instinctively knowing or actually examining its similarities with the narrative of Ecclesiastes.

Within the larger narratives are the previously discussed scenes of failure, and these scenes are present in both Ecclesiastes and *Rasselas*; however, these scenes are comically embellished within *Rasselas*. My thesis will focus on the failures of recall that are present in both Ecclesiastes (more serious) and *Rasselas* (more comedic). The failures of recall occur when the characters repeat mistakes they should have already learned from experience to avoid. An example of such a mistake occurs when Rasselas, Nekayah, and Pekuah believe they will find happiness from a hermit, and the fact that they continue to believe happiness can be found in cloister is ironic since the cloister mirrors their own experience in the Happy Valley: this is a failure of recall. When compared to Koheleth's failures of recall, the failures within *Rasselas* clearly show Johnson embellishing the irony to make these failures more comedic and to help the reader sense both the irony and humor. In relations to the idea of heterotopia, these scenes of failure become a different type of heterotopia: the heterotopia of compensation. The way these two heterotopic elements operate together in both stories solves some of the critical dispute about the genre of *Rasselas*, the biblical tone of Johnson, and the humorous irony in *Rasselas*.

Overall, I plan on creating a unique study arguing *Rasselas* is an imitation of Ecclesiastes and examining some of the specific situations in *Rasselas* that are paralleled in Ecclesiastes. After establishing these similarities, I will examine how Johnson embellishes the irony to make these failures easier to observe as obvious failures and, thus, more comical within *Rasselas*. I

plan to address Whitley's article and show how categorizing *Rasselas* as an imitation of Ecclesiastes and following Johnson's definition of the authorial goal of fiction can expose the comedic goals within the work. In my first chapter, I will discuss Oriental tales and literary imitations in eighteenth-century Britain, asserting that *Rasselas* is an eighteenth-century imitation of Ecclesiastes while addressing how the story deviates from the category of Oriental tale. The second chapter will begin with a discussion about the heterotopic spaces (according to Foucault) within *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes and will concentrate on the functions of the heterotopia of illusion both the characters and the readers. The final chapter will examine how these failures, as heterotopias of compensation, differ specifically to create humorous irony within *Rasselas*.

Through my research I hope to explore in more depth the similar scenes within Ecclesiastes and *Rasselas* while arguing that *Rasselas* is an imitation of Ecclesiastes; moreover, I will explore the ways Johnson exaggerates the specific failures from Ecclesiastes within *Rasselas* to create humorous situations. I hope my thesis will earn a place amongst the few critics who explore the humor within *Rasselas* and help the assertion of humor to become more commonly understood and accepted. It is not my goal to diminish the vast number of scholarly works acknowledging the serious subject matter of *Rasselas*, but to tip the scale slightly to acknowledge Johnson's undervalued humorous techniques that can be best understood through his embellishment and adorning of Koheleth's story.

Chapter One: A Time to Revise the Genre of *Rasselas*

I: How *Rasselas* is Not an Oriental Tale

In “The Structure of *Rasselas*” Gwin J. Kolb, writing in the 1950’s to an audience enamored with Johnson’s wisdom but confused about the literary worth of *Rasselas*, explains that *Rasselas* is a different type of Oriental tale meant to thwart the normal reader’s expectations. In Kolb’s view *Rasselas* is utilizing only the barest oriental influences to make his contemporary audience anticipate the usual result within an Oriental tale and then collapse these assumptions. *Rasselas* “possesses enough points of contact to make us more or less aware of the model but reminds us constantly that it has nothing to do with exciting adventures, beautiful women, romance, and the happy conclusions in oriental tales” (707). Yet, Kolb does not explore the implications for the story if Johnson is using this counterintuitive technique on his readers. If Johnson is reversing all the common tropes of the oriental tales then it becomes imperative to decide what factors remain to make *Rasselas* an oriental tale itself.

Kolb acknowledges that difficulties arise out of labeling *Rasselas* an Oriental tale: “Practically everyone has recognized that the tale is not a tale of the sort represented by (say) those in the *Arabian Nights*” (713) but “we are faced with the problem of connecting *Rasselas* to a body of heterogeneous compositions over which the term ‘oriental tale’ has been spread” (714). I find that much of the scholarship labeling *Rasselas* as an Oriental tale admits both the difficulty required to make *Rasselas* fit in the genre and the necessity to do so. At times, the categorization of Oriental tales will be altered to include *Rasselas*, and, as Kolb points out, the term Oriental tale clothes a vast amount of literature, but the term Oriental tale never quite fits when spread over *Rasselas*. More often than not, the story becomes the exception to the rule and the categori-

zation becomes an example of how *Rasselas* is less an oriental tale than a tale with limited oriental elements.

Kolb cites Martha Pike Conant's book *The Oriental Tale in England in the Eighteenth Century* as one of the definitive sources labeling *Rasselas* an Oriental tale and as an example for why we feel compelled to "connect" *Rasselas* to this body of work. Conant explains that the oriental tale "falls naturally into the four groups,--imaginative, moralistic, philosophic, and satiric" (xxvi) even though most works in the philosophic grouping are short works by Addison and Johnson that contain too much philosophic rhetoric to be placed in the moralistic category, where most of Addison's and Johnson's work is located in her book. Conant, whose work was originally published in 1908 and republished in 1966, calls *Rasselas* the "most important philosophical oriental tale" (126), but this category is "in number far smaller" (112) than the other groupings, comprising, besides *Rasselas*, of a few periodical publications by Addison and Johnson (the bulk of these still remains in the moralistic group), an imitation of Johnson by Goldsmith and Hawkesworth, and three works from Voltaire. Thus, for Conant, *Rasselas* is simply a watered-down version of an oriental tale, what Conant calls a "thoroughly Anglicized oriental tale" (227) where the use of oriental influences is "extremely simple" (152) and "[t]he language...is seldom orientalized" (151-2). If *Rasselas* is both anglicized as an Oriental tale and thwarts the expectations of an Oriental tale, we are again left wondering what traits make *Rasselas* an Oriental tale.

Ros Ballaster, in her essay "Narrative Transmigrations," has recently categorized the eighteenth-century oriental tale as a hybrid construction, and "[b]y the 1760s English fictions were not only adopting plots and structures from oriental tales, but also incorporating plots, structures, themes, from the 'English' novel into oriental tales, whether translations or imitations" (76). I feel that Ballaster, who does not explore *Rasselas* in her research, provides a great

example to explain how Johnson's story could be aligned with these hybrid Oriental tales explaining its reluctance to fit in the garb of a traditional oriental tale, and possibly an example of how critics keep finding way to attach this label to the story. The only flaw is that *Rasselas* is a loosely constructed, highly segmented work with an "[e]mphasis on philosophizing rather than on narrative" (Conant 153). J. Paul Hunter points out that Johnson would be loath to incorporate elements of the English novel of his day in his works, and that Johnson specifically "offered in *Rasselas*...a narrative alternative that had very different features from the novels he criticized" (27). So, *Rasselas* is not simply a blend of oriental elements with British novel plots and structures, but, rather, branching out into different, philosophic territory.

Conant relies heavily on the philosophic subject matter within the story to link *Rasselas* with a *philosophic* Oriental tale, but by grouping philosophic characteristics as a separate and the smallest category in the groupings of Oriental tales, she cannot claim that philosophic elements alone make a story an oriental tale. In fact, while exploring the philosophical aspects of *Rasselas* she is forced to allude to *Candide*, which is one of the works most similar to *Rasselas* but, she concludes, could in no way be categorized as an Oriental tale (144-52). The locations of Abyssinia and Cairo along with the characters' nationalities and names are left as the only evidence that makes *Rasselas* an oriental tale through this type of analysis. Again, this categorization is problematic since the location and nationalities lend very little to the philosophical study of the work that Conant says is "to the author the most important" goal (141).

While we now appreciate *Rasselas* as a work of literature and are no longer defending the consistency of the narrative, we are still labeling *Rasselas* an Oriental tale. In his introduction to the 1990 Yale edition of *Rasselas*, Kolb again categorizes *Rasselas* as an "oriental philosophic tale" (xxxv) in order to find similarities with other oriental tales, mainly the middle-section of the

Persian Tales, particularly the story of Bedridden, but admits, much as in his previous article, that even though some similarities exist these similarities do not unite the genres, and “it is certain that the genres exemplified by the two books are completely distinct” (xlii). Perhaps we continue labeling *Rasselas* as an Oriental tale, often in a sub-category of philosophic, because we have no other genre of the same specificity that fits the story. Simply calling it a philosophic fiction could be viewed as a step back in criticism. The categorization of *Rasselas* as an Oriental tale is alluring mostly because of “the vogue of oriental tales in England during the eighteenth century” (Kolb, “Structure” 703).

Another well-documented reason for categorizing *Rasselas* as an Oriental tale is how Johnson’s translation of Lobo’s *Voyage to Abissinia* served as an inspiration for *Rasselas*. Lobo’s *Voyage to Abissinia* fits nicely in the category of oriental travel books, a very popular genre in the eighteenth century, and the argument that Johnson used Lobo’s description of Abyssinia to mold the surroundings of the Happy Valley and the sequestering of Prince Rasselas presents strong evidence of the oriental local in *Rasselas*.⁴ I will agree that Johnson likely was influenced by Lobo’s descriptions and elements (it is not within my scope to address which elements may have been employed in *Rasselas*) but the description of the Happy Valley, while aiding the plot, is hardly a defining factor or of much importance to the goal of the narrative.

Johnson does not choose to examine the exotic differences between the cultures of Britain and Africa, a common trope in Oriental tales. Rasselas and his companions could easily have been British citizens released from sequestration in a manor house instead of a palace, cruising

⁴ Johnson’s contemporaries James Boswell and William Cooke make this claim in their biographies both titled *Life of Samuel Johnson*. Later critics, like Donald M. Lockhart continue to debate how much influence came from Lobo’s work.

down the Thames instead of the Nile, and admiring Stonehenge instead of the Great Pyramid. Even Conant reinforces this claim, stating that even though “[Johnson’s] scene is laid far from contemporary Europe” the Happy Valley “might be a valley anywhere” (151). No one would argue that the goal of *Rasselas* is to acquaint the reader with the local flavor of Africa; instead, as Kolb asserted in his essay, Johnson is most likely utilizing simply a few oriental elements, mainly location, to stir a response from his readers, and I believe this response is reflected in Johnson’s descriptions about the goal of literature.

One of Johnson’s most famous maxims, in his *Preface to Shakespeare*, clearly elucidates that such generality is an authorial goal: “Noting can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature” (420). In this adage, praising the universality of Shakespeare’s storylines and characters, the importance of general mimetics in fiction is paramount. In *Rasselas*, Johnson has Imlac echo the same sentiment in his description of the goal of poetry as “exhibit[ing] in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recal the original to the mind” (44). These prominent and striking features, which could be seen as the oriental locale in *Rasselas*, must bow to an original, much like Plato’s mimetics where an actual chair only hints at the ideal form of a chair. Imlac’s quote is interesting in the way it takes a general Johnsonian maxim, the importance of universal human behavior in fiction, and adds a somewhat incongruous element, the idea of an original. If we see the oriental elements in *Rasselas* not as a definition of its genre, but as an adorning of an original, we are still left wondering what could be the original for the tale of *Rasselas*. The first response may be to place the British reader’s quest for happiness as the original, which is being adorned with an exotic locale through the story of *Rasselas*. The obvious problem with this interpretation is that an original implies an earlier stage, not a simultaneous one, as Johnson indicates in his own *Dictionary*’s definition, stating “that

from which any thing is transcribed or translated” (225). The quest for an oriental original has directed critics to many different works, all which fall short of a definitive connection with the story of *Rasselas*. Since I have shown that the current label of Oriental tale does not fit *Rasselas*, I would like to address what I will show is the only original for *Rasselas*: the book of Ecclesiastes.

II. *Rasselas* as an Imitation of Ecclesiastes

Johnson’s contemporaries, including his biographer James Boswell, have noted the basic comparisons between *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes; both works relay similar compartmentalized stories of how characters questing to find worldly happiness and knowledge fail at every point; additionally, both works structurally illustrate wisdom literature. Wisdom literature is often associated with the biblical books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, but for many scholars Ecclesiastes stands apart for the same reasons that *Rasselas* refuses to conform to the previously discussed genres. Biblical and Hebraic scholar Michael V. Fox sums up this similarity nicely, describing Ecclesiastes as “the closest the [B]ible comes to philosophy, which is the intellectual, rational contemplation of fundamental human issues, with no recourse to revelation or tradition” (xi). Both *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes share a similar structure, a similar overarching goal, and a similar nexus of philosophical ideas. Since Ecclesiastes is one of the most well-known examples of ancient wisdom literature, and, according to Fox, “[w]isdom literature was widespread in the ancient Near East, where it was cultivated in literature and sophisticated scribal circles”(xi) there is a connection to oriental elements in the comparison between these two works. For instance, the textual history surrounding Ecclesiastes with its many influences, along with the symbolism of Solomon’s temple within the narrative of Ecclesiastes, encourage oriental descriptions and locations, and if Johnson was writing an imitation of Ecclesiastes he would use a Middle Eastern

or African location, yet keep his focus on the general philosophical quandaries of mankind. Until recently, due to a segregation of literary criticism and textual study from the books of the Bible, critics easily overlooked this connection as simply the calling card of an oriental tale. In the first few pages of her book on the Oriental tale, Conant draws a similar line between any Oriental and Hebraic connections:

To the Western mind today, the Holy Land occupies...a unique position somewhat apart from other oriental countries, a position which is of course due to the inherited traditions of Christianity. In the eighteenth century this feeling was more pronounced than it is in these days of modern scholarship; and therefore, from the eighteenth century consideration we may legitimately exclude Hebrew literature and its imitations. (xvi)

This segregation of Hebrew wisdom literature from oriental literature was also noticed by scholars of Ecclesiastes, such as Rabbi Robert Gordis in his monumental exploration of Ecclesiastes, *Koheleth—The Man and His World*. Gordis calls this segregation a “splendid isolation” (9) although “Hebrew Wisdom did not arise in a vacuum (13). To return to Kolb’s assertion that *Rasselas* thwarts its reader’s expectations regarding a typical oriental tale, we can now add a final twist—that Samuel Johnson is imitating the story of the Koheleth in Ecclesiastes through the characters of Rasselas, Nekayah, and Pekuah.

The genre of literary imitation came in a few varieties in eighteenth-century Britain. The so-called neoclassical period saw a return to the Greco-Roman literature through a series of literary imitations of Virgil, Horace, Juvenal and many others. Although there has never been a time when a culture’s literature has not been influenced by its predecessors, the literary imitation became an acknowledged act in the eighteenth century and more questioned by the readership. In *A Letter to Mr. Mason; on the Marks of Imitation*, Richard Hurd plays the role of detective

trying to gather evidence to convict a poet of imitation: “You require me to turn to the poets; together a number of those passages I call Imitations; and to point to the *circumstances* in each that prove them to be so. I attend you with pleasure in this amusing search” (14). The fact that such an undertaking was solicited to show the intricacies of imitation shows how popular and nebulous the attention devoted to imitations was at the time. Imitation without admittance seems to have a negative connotation by the accusatory language of Hurd who wants to “convict” (4) poets of imitation. Of course Hurd concentrates on imitation in poetry, mainly taking a modern poet such as Ben Jonson or Alexander Pope and tracing elements in his poetry back to the Greek poets who “might be Original” (7).

This method attracted negative attention from Edward Capell who challenged Hurd with his response to *Letter* titled *Reflections on Originality in Authors*. In his rebuke of Hurd, Capell often pokes fun at what may constitute an imitation to Hurd, writing on the imitation of descriptions on the night within poetry that “is so very obvious to thousands that never heard of Poets or Poetry, is this what detected an Imitation?” (25). Capell takes issue with Hurd’s method of concentrating on small comparisons that may overlook the lack of similarities between the meanings in both works. His complaints follow the categorization of *Rasselas* as an oriental tale since only through vague references and locations can *Rasselas* be deemed oriental; similarly, Hurd’s reaching to find evidence of imitation in works leaves Capell to write that “[n]othing can be so preposterous as to urge that [small resemblance] as an imitation, where there is not the most distant resemblance to the principle point in question” (26). However, at times he merely disagrees with Hurd by degrees, such as his remark concerning Pope’s imitation of Milton, which Hurd saw as an improvement, but Capell observes “once and for all that Mr. *Pope* never was possessed of such Talents great enough to improve on *Milton*” (19).

While the writings of Hurd and Capell prove the genre of imitation was evolving and debated within the eighteenth century, many works proudly proclaimed their status as imitations. Johnson's "London" and "Vanity of Human Wishes" are both titled as imitations of Juvenal's satires, so Johnson was proficient not just with the use of the term, but also with employing the act of imitation within his poetry. While imitations in poetry were the most common, the genre of imitation included prose as well. In addition to Greco-Roman imitations, there were also an abundance of religious imitations. Robert Dodsley's "The Art of Preaching: in Imitation of Horace's Art of Poetry" went through several editions, and imitations transcended into the spiritual with works like Watt's *The Christian's Patter: or a Treatise of the Imitation of Jesus Christ* were popular for decades. Conant's segregation of Hebrew writings from oriental writings due to the reverence readers did, and still do, attach to Hebrew writings as a precursor to the Bible, not only shows how Johnson's audience would have valued Hebrew and Christian writings more than oriental elements, but also how the audience would quickly be able to make an association with biblical works from Hebrew writings. Johnson's own "common reader" would have easily made the connection between the similar subject matter in *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes, which is a far stronger connection than any oriental category, whatever anglicized elements dilute the exotic tropes of the Oriental tale.

The only issue that may arise out of labeling *Rasselas* an imitation instead of an Oriental tale is Johnson's own remarks regarding imitation in *Rasselas* and *Rambler* 154. Since Johnson criticizes literary imitators, I could see how critics may not immediately make a similar connection for *Rasselas*, but Imlac's assertion that "I soon found that no man was ever made great by imitation" refers back to Imlac's desire to acquire fame from "repeat[ing] by memory" the great poets of Mecca (41). Johnson is not criticizing the genre of imitation, rather, to put it in Johnso-

nian terms, imitation for imitation's sake. *Rasselas* as an imitation of Ecclesiastes is not merely a retelling of Koheleth's story but adds new embellishments and amplifies the story threefold in its characters. Instead of assuming that the "great cham of literature" thought the moral of Ecclesiastes needed be told again through fictional characters, I believe that Johnson creates in *Rasselas* an exaggerated version of Koheleth's story—an eighteenth-century imitation of the biblical book. Looking back at Johnson's comments on fiction in his *Rambler* 3, we can see Johnson affirm this technique:

The task of an author is, either to teach what is not known, or to recommend known truths by his manner of adorning them; either to let new light in upon the mind, and open new scenes to the prospect, or to vary the dress and situation of common objects, so as to give them grace and more powerful attractions, to spread such flowers over the regions through which the intellect has already made its progress, as may tempt it to return, and take a second view of things hastily passed over or negligently regarded. (11)

I do not think Johnson would argue he is "teach[ing] what is not known" in *Rasselas*, so I assert that Ecclesiastes is being adorned through *Rasselas*. Johnson takes Ecclesiastes, a book of which he had extensive knowledge, and imitates the philosophical dilemma in a more accessible way but still at a safe distance from his contemporary audience, using the locations of Abyssinia and Cairo and African characters. As Kolb explains, *Rasselas* may incorporate oriental locations in order to sway the reader into believing they are reading an oriental text, but quickly shifts such assumptions with the structure and aim of the work. The foundation that remains is not loosely intertwined oriental elements, but the same structure and subject matter as Ecclesiastes, which Johnson slyly presents to his readers in a "new light" to impress the meaning of the original work.

Understanding *Rasselas* as an imitation of Ecclesiastes opens up a new way to approach the text with comparisons to the actual biblical text. Previous critics like Thomas R. Preston have examined the similarities between *Rasselas* and various commentaries on Ecclesiastes. In “The Biblical Context of Johnson’s ‘Rasselas’” Preston tries to prove a relationship between *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes through an examination of Bishop Patrick’s *Paraphrase upon the Book of Ecclesiastes*. His ultimate scope is to argue that Johnson’s story “follows the thematic structure attributed to Ecclesiastes by the ‘reformed school,’” which I will address in my next chapter (274). Understanding *Rasselas*’ similarity to Ecclesiastes within the commentaries of the time is important, but if we agree *Rasselas* is an imitation of Ecclesiastes, perhaps more critics will approach the similarities within the AV and various Hebrew translations of Ecclesiastes as well. In this method, we can see how Johnson recommends the “known truths” in Ecclesiastes by varying certain elements in the story, always cognizant of the goal but altered in certain degrees not just to express certain religious beliefs of the time, but also to exaggerate the failures to find happiness in life.

Chapter Two: Analyzing *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes within the Heterotopic Mirror

As my introduction explains, most critics view *Rasselas* as a serious, Christian work that emphasizes a choice of eternity over any “choice of life.” The few critics who find humor in *Rasselas* have been unwilling to introduce any of the biblical similarities since the biblical tone presumably emphasizes a somber choice of eternity, which is not humorous, while the humorous elements occur during the quest for a choice of life and appear to be more nihilistic because they lead to a confusing conclusion, as the last chapter showcases with its title, “The conclusion, in which nothing is concluded” (175). The humor exists in the characters’ failures while the Christian morality is present in the reader’s comprehension of these characters’ failures. The issue surrounding these seemingly opposing views is how the reader can see these failures as humorous if Johnson meant to endorse a somber Christian morality.

This segregation of the biblical reverberations in *Rasselas* from the scholarship that explores the humorous elements in the story is counter-productive. By understanding that *Rasselas* is an imitation of Ecclesiastes, we can see how both schools of criticism on *Rasselas* can be correct. The only modern critical work to examine any textual similarities between *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes is Thomas Preston’s “The Biblical Context of *Rasselas*.” Although Preston never uses the term imitation and only concentrates on Bishop Simon Patrick’s commentary rather than the actual biblical text of Ecclesiastes in order to examine biblical similarities in *Rasselas*, my assertion that *Rasselas* is an eighteenth-century imitation of Ecclesiastes owes much to Preston’s article, and I would be remiss not to examine how Preston’s technique influences my own. Preston’s article unintentionally provides a basis to examine the divergence in criticism on *Rasselas*. As Preston’s article shows, the same type divergence in critical opinion regarding *Rasselas* is evident in the scholarly discussion of Ecclesiastes centuries earlier. If we can begin to grasp that

the two opposing views regarding both *Ecclesiastes* and *Rasselas* can be justified by the similarities within the texts of these narratives, we can see how the larger narratives of both works emphasize what Michel Foucault calls a heterotopic mirror that emphasizes the moral lesson for the reader while the repetitive scenes of failure in both texts represent the comedic failures of this heterotopic mirror for the characters, not the reader. This chapter's first section will explore how Thomas Preston's article inadvertently exposes that the critical disagreement in *Ecclesiastes* is the same as the critical disagreement regarding *Rasselas*, further proof that *Rasselas* is an imitation of *Ecclesiastes*. After this examination of Preston's article, I will direct my focus to the two heterotopic functions within the texts. The first heterotopic function of illusion explains how the larger narrative of *Ecclesiastes* and *Rasselas* can be serious and espouse a Christian moral. The second function explains how the failure of the heterotopia of compensation for the characters creates humor and is more humorous in *Rasselas* than *Ecclesiastes*. The second section of this chapter will explore the function of the heterotopia of illusion in the larger narrative of both *Ecclesiastes* and *Rasselas* as its imitation.

I. Uniting the General and Specific within the Narratives of *Ecclesiastes* and *Rasselas*

Thomas Preston relies on the commentary of Bishop Simon Patrick in order to show how Johnson imitates elements from *Ecclesiastes* in *Rasselas*. Specifically, Preston argues that several passages in Patrick's commentary influenced Johnson's scope in *Rasselas*.⁵ The main crux of

⁵ In his *Life of Johnson*, Boswell notes that Johnson recommended the commentaries of "Lowth and Patrick of the Old Testament" (388), indicating that Johnson had read Lowth and Patrick. Recently in "A Clergyman's Reading: Books Recommended by Samuel Johnson," Paul Tankard challenges Boswell's claim, examining Johnson's *Letters* to find that in some instances Johnson only recommended Lowth not Patrick, which indicates that Johnson was not as enamored with

Preston's argument, which shows how Johnson mimics certain scenes in Ecclesiastes, is Patrick's "reform view"⁶ of Ecclesiastes, which Patrick reveals in the Preface to his paraphrase of Ecclesiastes as not the normal reaction to the sobering truth of the book where "hearing all was but vanity, they [mankind] might condemn everything as hateful and hurtful; and declaim too bitterly against this world" (410). The "normal reaction" is a traditional view of Ecclesiastes, which a reform view would be a reaction against. In a traditional view, many preachers, priests, and theologians would emphasize the vanity of all worldly pursuits and emphasize that in Ecclesiastes, God is showing the reader that worldly pursuits are without any merit unless these pursuits bring you to heaven. This traditional view is similar to the view of scholars arguing that *Rasselas* is a devout Christian tale or embracing the choice of eternity within *Rasselas*. The reform view would be similar to the view of the few critics arguing comedic elements or showing the failure of the choice of life within *Rasselas*. In this comparison, the only difference is that the critics who argue for the humor in *Rasselas* have not examined the biblical similarities while the reformists still embrace the Christian message of Ecclesiastes, but deny the bitter declamation against the world. If critics arguing the humorous elements in *Rasselas* accept that *Rasselas* is an imitation of Ecclesiastes, these critics will begin to understand that only through the biblical imitation of Ecclesiastes can the level of humor in *Rasselas* be deduced.

Patrick as Boswell indicates, but no one argues Johnson had not read and was not influenced by Patrick.

⁶ This is Thomas Preston's term, which I will continue to use. Patrick did not use this term for his views, much like the metaphysical poets who did not refer to themselves by that title. Patrick did attempt to embrace a new view on Ecclesiastes that veered away from a more traditional view.

During the Reformation, Ecclesiastes “provoked two Christian schools of interpretation”: a traditional view and a reform view (Preston 274). In a traditional view of Ecclesiastes, which Preston links with “St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, and St. Augustine” (274), the reaction to this neither/nor conclusion would be almost nihilistic in regard to worldly matters, as we can see from the remark in Patrick’s Preface, but this nihilism could not move into the spiritual realm. Since all worldly matters are full of vanity, we should concentrate on the life to come rather than embrace life on Earth. Instead, Patrick argues for a “reform view,” arguing that Ecclesiastes exposes the readers to the utter vanity of all sublunary desires in order to “persuade all men to be content with things present, to give God thanks for them, to use them freely with quiet minds: living as pleasantly, and taking as much liberty, as the remembrance of a future account will allow” (410). Embrace life here on Earth for what it is: an enjoyable diversion until “a future account.” Bishop Simon Patrick was one of the most notable proponents for a reform view of Ecclesiastes whose writings found a place on Johnson’s shelves. In recent years, Northrop Frye has followed this reform view in his own eloquent remarks regarding the vanity in Ecclesiastes, writing, “The statement ‘There is nothing new under the sun’ applies to wisdom but not to experience, to theory but not to practice. Only when we realize that nothing is new can we live with an intensity in which everything becomes new” (124). This is a realization that the characters in *Rasselas* never can make. Thomas Preston links the reform view of Ecclesiastes to *Rasselas* by examining Imlac’s observation that while “making the choice of life, you neglect to live” (111). Preston implies that *Rasselas*, Nekayah, and Pekuah display the same confusion Bishop Patrick speaks of in his Preface since they have trouble reconciling the vanities of the world and continue to seek out new ventures that mimic previous failures. In the end, only Imlac and the astronomer are “contented to be driven along the stream of life without directing their course to any particular

port” (176) which seems to be an attitude that embraces life in a way similar to the previous passages from Bishop Patrick. However, Preston’s comments about Ecclesiastes have more in common with *Rasselas* than Preston discusses in his article.

The whole examination of a reform versus traditional view in regard to Ecclesiastes can be seen in the critical reaction to the narrative of *Rasselas*, as well. James Gray has examined how Johnson mimics William Law’s *Serious Call* in his sermons since “Johnson adopts a variation of the either-or formula by which Law presents this commitment” (55). I believe an *either/or* formula is deconstructed within the narrative of Ecclesiastes into a *neither/nor* conclusion. The story of Ecclesiastes follows Koheleth on a quest to find wisdom in the ways of mankind, and his quest initially follows the *either/or* expectation; for example, *either* older men *or* younger men attain wisdom. This quest ends with a Derridean *neither/nor* conclusion: *neither* older men *nor* younger men attain lasting wisdom. In my opinion this neither/nor conclusion could have led to the divergence in biblical commentary on Ecclesiastes. Johnson writes *Rasselas* in order to mimic Ecclesiastes’ either/or expectation that becomes a neither/nor conclusion. *Rasselas* follows this same initial quest for an *either/or* expectation; for example, *either* old men, *or* young men are happy with their choice of life. However, this expectation is deconstructed in the conclusion the exact method as in Ecclesiastes: *neither* old men *nor* young men are happy in their choice of life. The responses to this neither/nor conclusion in *Rasselas* mimic those of a traditional or reform view of Ecclesiastes as well; critics believe that in *Rasselas* Johnson either views life as a depressing march to eternal judgment (traditional view) or as an ironically enjoyable diversion (reform view).

Thomas Preston’s argument that Johnson was not advocating a choice of eternity over any earthly fulfillment is the beginning of a new surge of commentary in the scholarly field, ad-

vancing towards the discovery of the complexity in Johnson's technique not merely to instruct towards a moral Christian goal but to imitate the goal of wisdom literature in Ecclesiastes. However, this commentary was never adequately met by other scholars. Noted Johnsonians continue to discount the humor within the choice-of-life narrative in *Rasselas*. Arie Sachs has examined Johnson's traditional Christian views on death and eternity in regard to *Rasselas* and, at times Ecclesiastes, in *Passionate Intelligence*, where he states, "*Rasselas*...is, I shall try to show, a deeply Christian book" (xv) and aligns this Christian tone with Johnson's rather depressing spirituality. Also, in "Reason and Unreason in Johnson's Religion," he argues, "Living in terms of the 'choice of life' (i.e. as if we were immortal) thus appears as the most widespread of 'fallacies', the most prevalent of 'imaginative deceptions'" and advocates a more traditional view emphasizing the choice of eternity in *Rasselas* like other scholars have argued for Ecclesiastes (524). This view is still prevalent. Currently, Sarah Jordan's "Samuel Johnson and Idleness" continues exploring Johnson's depressing spirituality. Some critics who argue that Johnson is exploring life as an enjoyable diversion, besides Thomas Preston, are Duane Smith, whom I will discuss in the next chapter, and Alvin Whitley, who is mentioned in this introduction and will be further discussed in the next chapter.

After comments by Donald M. Korte, Preston himself had to defend his article's claim arguing that the directionless drifting of Imlac and the astronomer is not "'passivity' as Mr. Korte maintains, but 'submission' to the fact that 'all is vanity'; it simultaneously suggests a 'purposiveness' denied by Professor Korte, namely a commitment-to-life itself rather than to a specific or 'particular' way of life (port)" (Preston "Johnson's" 313). Korte could not stomach the idea that Johnson would argue a reform view since Korte's own reading of the text coincided with a traditional view. The fact that Preston was defending his article against Korte's accusa-

tions of oversight within two years of its publication shows the divergence of opinion surrounding the comparisons with *Rasselas* and a reformed view of Ecclesiastes; however, Preston acknowledges that the comparisons of *Rasselas* to Ecclesiastes, and even to Bishop Patrick's paraphrase itself, elicit "no disagreements," and Korte's arguments against Preston's articles are grounded in this similar fact (Preston "Johnson's" 312). Despite the overwhelming agreement of this relationship, Preston's article is the last scholarship that examines specific instances in the story with either the biblical book or contemporary commentaries. This type of disagreement like Preston and Korte's between a traditional or reform view still exists in current scholarship surrounding *Rasselas*, although these disagreements usually are not identified with Ecclesiastes, but rather emphasize either the choice of eternity or choice of life identified in the text.

Patrick's Preface identifies the confusing response to the structure of Ecclesiastes in a similar way that critics like Gwin Kolb have responded to attacks on the structure of *Rasselas*: "For many men imagine it [Ecclesiastes] to be a confused discourse, which doth not hang together: and therefore have explained this Book, only by giving an account of the meaning of each verse, as if it were a distinct sentence, independent of the rest" (410). This same method of analyzing the text in miniature applies to *Rasselas*. Even Preston's article outlines specific scenes of similarities within *Rasselas* and Bishop Patrick's paraphrase, namely comparing the Preacher's⁷

⁷ I will refer to the speaker of Ecclesiastes as Koheleth (sometimes spelled Coheleth), since most contemporary biblical commentators will refer to the Hebrew text; however, many literary scholars before the 1980's will refer to the speaker as Preacher—a more common Christian translation and the term used in the AV during Johnson's time and today. Many contemporaries of Johnson will directly name the speaker Solomon although current scholars attribute Ecclesiastes to the so-called J writer of the biblical texts, who is unknown.

garden to the Happy Valley. Bishop Patrick elaborates on the scenes that would exist inside such an appointed garden, and Preston notes how these flowing descriptions of bounty could have influenced Johnson's descriptions of the Happy Valley; this evidence takes up a hefty portion of his article. Bishop Patrick's biblical commentaries perform the same function he critiques in his Preface "by giving an account of the meaning of each verse" along with similar accounts of the rest of the work. Preston's article attempts to connect *Rasselas* to these commentaries in much the same way, a juxtaposing of scenes separate from the whole. I am not criticizing this method, nor will I assert that my analysis will use a different method; instead, I believe this common trope of analyzing *Rasselas* in miniature can be explained by the way Johnson forms *Rasselas* to be an imitation of Ecclesiastes, which is also analyzed verse-by-verse or even scene-by-scene by all biblical commentators. Both *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes attempt to relay a story of specific instances, the journey through all life's occupations by observation, in such a universal manner that a reader could understand the universal implications within their own life, wherever that might be. This scope fits Michel Foucault's idea concerning the function of the heterotopic mirror, which I argue is the same function of the narrative of *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes.

In his essay "Of Other Spaces," Michel Foucault distinguishes the heterotopia from a utopia as a "counter-site" that is "outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate [its] location in reality" (24). Abyssinia and Cairo are such locations in *Rasselas*, as is Solomon's kingdom in Ecclesiastes; though we can locate these sites on a map (recent archeologists continue to unearth sites that correspond to the evidence for Solomon's temple), they are hardly represented with any realism in either story—either by today's standards or those of the eighteenth century—nor are these locations of great interest to the narrators. Morton Bloomfield remarks on the "international character" of biblical wisdom literature writing, "The notion of Israel

is not central in these books. Nor are these books historical although they may be attributed to a historical figures such as Solomon,” and Ecclesiastes follows his guidelines precisely (24). The real interest in both narratives is allowing the reader to confront the sobering truths about life at a safe distance. To this end, Foucault explains that a mirror can function as a heterotopia:

From the standpoint of the mirror, I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there....it [the mirror] makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surround it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (24)

In this respect wisdom literature is very similar to the mirror’s function as a heterotopic space. The goal is to relay a story that is universal, but different in location, to a reader who will begin to see the similarities within his own life in a “virtual point” and preserve this knowledge when the gaze is directed back and the “absolutely unreal” location dissipates.

James B. Misenheimer has broadly described Johnson’s goal at writing literature, especially *Rasselas*, but his description is unknowingly identical to the function of a heterotopic space: “Literature [for Johnson] can deepen and extend the process of human experiences so significantly that the awareness which stems from the elucidated experience can influence ‘men and manners and morals’” (151). Misenheimer was merely commenting on the universal scope of Johnson’s writing, but his meaning touches the same function of a heterotopic space. I find that Misenheimer’s example is interesting when examining *Rasselas* as an imitation of Ecclesiastes because Misenheimer accidentally signals out *Rasselas* not only as the best example of this type of heterotopic technique but also as emphasizing the moral instruction of Johnson. Again, we are reminded that there is an instructional goal in Johnson’s writings. The heterotopic function

in *Rasselas* directs the reader to a new insight on “men and morals and manners” although critics cannot decide whether this instruction is depressingly serious or somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Certainly, this aim could be applied to the author of Ecclesiastes, as well, and we would still be left with the same debate regarding a traditional or reform view.

As I asserted in my last chapter, I believe that *Rasselas* enhances the story of Ecclesiastes, so understanding *Rasselas* as an imitation of Ecclesiastes shows how the emphasis of morality in *Rasselas* is reflected back to Ecclesiastes. The scope of *Rasselas* imitates the same heterotopic space that Ecclesiastes exemplifies in its narration, allowing the readers at once to view themselves in an exotic location and refract a new understanding to their present lives through a lens of a heterotopic analysis. Recalling the discussion of oriental elements from the previous chapter, we can see that the heterotopic goals in *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes both employ oriental elements to emphasize the “over there” heterotopic spaces and to allow an enlightening experience for the reader. This heterotopic function provides an explanation for these sparse oriental elements in *Rasselas* and for why the story does not fit in the oriental dress of the time.

The segmented way of analyzing both Ecclesiastes and *Rasselas* calls to mind this heterotopic function. Foucault explains that a heterotopia will “have a function in relation to all the space that remains” (27) which he sees working in two opposing ways. The first function of the heterotopia of illusion would be similar to the mirror example from before, which I call the textual goal of *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes: “Their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory” (27). For the reader, the narratives in *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes connect to the space of reality in this very way. They attempt to “expose every real space” as “illusory” since Koheleth “gave [his] heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under the sun”

(AV, Eccles. 1:13) just as Rasselas seeks “to judge with [his] own eyes of the various conditions of men,” (56) and both succeed in these lofty goals of hefty observation only to find no sublimary applicable truths within their quests, leaving any worldly wisdom an illusion. More importantly, these narratives expose the real space the readers occupy as illusory since this observation could only take place in extraordinary circumstances from a retrospective view. There must be a person able to accomplish such a survey and to possess the intelligence to assess all mankind, something not realistically possible in our world. What has been classified as the Christian moral instruction of *Rasselas* and aligned with the choice of eternity within the work is similar to the heterotopia of illusion in Ecclesiastes and *Rasselas*. The larger narratives expose a moral lesson by exposing the possibility for such a quest as an impossible illusion in the real space of the reader, and this realization is somewhat depressing and enforces a moral only attainable in the written works.

In the next function of the heterotopia of compensation, Foucault describes the character motivation for these surveys: “Their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation” (27). While the narratives of *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes are heterotopias of illusion for the reader, the characters’ quests begin as quests of heterotopic compensation, which are doomed to fail. The characters of *Rasselas* cannot find a “choice of life” that would grant constant happiness, anymore than the Koheleth of Ecclesiastes can find meaning and wisdom in the actions of man. Both Ecclesiastes and *Rasselas* seek to project a reader to a different space, and the narratives are sprinkled with repetitive scenarios of failure within the larger heterotopia of illusion. Within the spaces of the stories, the quest to see “all the works that are done under the sun” (Eccles. 1:14) is a heterotopia

in itself, one which fails to allow the characters to see themselves in the mirror “connected with all the space that surrounds it” and see themselves instead absent.

These scenes of failure become the most interesting and most commented upon scenarios within both *Ecclesiastes* and *Rasselas*, in my opinion, because the heterotopic structure of the books—the relationship to space—succeeds for the reader where it fails for the characters. Readers can see themselves in the space within *Ecclesiastes* and *Rasselas* on a quest for a choice of life and can understand how to use the heterotopia of illusion to reflect back the life lesson to a space where such a quest could never happen. Meanwhile, the characters within the story fail to create a heterotopia of compensation, and the characters within *Rasselas* fail to a larger and more comical degree than the Koheleth. The function of the heterotopia of compensation in both texts is best analyzed through a more segmented analysis in these scenes of failure and coincides with what has been a more secular or nihilistic view of the text or what criticism that focuses on the failure of a choice of life more than the choice of eternity option. Also, analyzing the heterotopia of compensation within the failures of both books helps to highlight how a mention of failure in *Ecclesiastes*, which may be only in one small line, is expanded within *Rasselas* to a much larger, more elaborate, and more comical scene. I will begin this analysis on my next chapter.

The analysis of *Rasselas* vis-à-vis these scenes of failure by its characters has led critics to assume a failure on the part of *Rasselas*’ structure for the reader, but understanding that the larger heterotopic function of the book is different from the failing of the characters’ heterotopic quests helps us as critics to analyze the scenes within *Rasselas* not, as Patrick condemned, “as if it were a distinct sentence, independent from the rest” and not as if these scenes must explain the whole structure of the story. By analyzing the whole narratives of both *Ecclesiastes* and *Rasselas* from the viewpoint of a heterotopia of illusion, readers can more clearly see the way Johnson

imitates Ecclesiastes and understand the function within the spaces within the narratives. Then, when we analyze the characters' failures within their quest to find a heterotopia of compensation we can see how the Koheleth of Ecclesiastes is comically reiterated by Rasselas, Nekayah, and Pekuah, possibly even Imlac and the astronomer as well, for an audience who is familiar with Ecclesiastes. When the burden of congruent application to the narrative whole is lifted from the analysis of these failures, these scenes can be analyzed as various examples of the characters' failures at understanding their relation to the space around them—at viewing themselves in the heterotopic mirror while on their quests.

II. Analyzing the Heterotopia of Illusion in Both Narratives

The spaces within *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes are not utopic or dystopic since the spaces they present are no better or worse than our own. On the contrary, the spaces they present in all their observations are realistically akin to our own space, wherever that may be, since the narratives prefer the general over the specific. As previously discussed, these spaces are more heterotopic than utopic or dystopic since they form a counter-site real enough to transport the reader to a location that does exist in our own world, but the narratives do not attempt to make these spaces realistic in their relation to the physical world. Instead, these are spaces we could never physically discover ourselves since these spaces exist only in our ability to see ourselves transported there. After we undergo this transportation into the narrative heterotopic spaces within Ecclesiastes and *Rasselas*, what remains is the heterotopia of illusion, which exposes our own world's illusory nature.

Within the larger narratives of Ecclesiastes and *Rasselas* are various similarities that draw attention to the same structural conventions. Most of these conventions find their antecedents in biblical wisdom literature. All these similarities begin the process of creating a heterotopia of

illusion. Both narratives begin with an outside narrator describing the main character who will function as the initiator for the survey of mankind. The first lines of Ecclesiastes introduce “[t]he words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem (1:1). This description is what led many biblical commentators to identify the Koheleth of Ecclesiastes as King Solomon. Once the narrative is turned over to this character, he affirms this royal designation: “I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem” (Eccles 1:12). Johnson employs this same technique in the opening lines of *Rasselas* where an outside narrator commands the reader to “attend to the history of Rasselas prince of Abissinia” who is “the fourth son of the mighty emperour, in whose dominions the Father of waters begins his course” (7). The narrators both present the main characters, their royal lineages, and their kingdoms. While the “words” of Koheleth become a “history” in *Rasselas*, both hint that we are retracing a past quest where the Koheleth “was king over Israel” and Rasselas has already lived a life worthy of being labeled a “history.” These narratives take place in marked time where the events will be presently relayed, and this finality cannot be traced back to our own space where this universal quest through life is still taking place. This synchronic marker of time in Ecclesiastes is imitated in *Rasselas* and emphasizes the diachronic nature of the reader’s place in life’s course within the space outside the narratives.

The royalty of the characters is another factor that further distinguishes the space within the narrative from the space that the reader occupies and creates a heterotopia of illusion. Recently biblical scholars have begun to discuss the reason the author of Ecclesiastes chose to hint that the Koheleth is Solomon but to never name him. Michael V. Fox discusses this quandary at length:

Though modern scholars do not think that Koheleth was Solomon almost all of them believe that the author wants us to make that identification. The author’s intention,

however, appears more subtle. After all, if he wanted the reader to think that the speaker really was Solomon, he could have called him by that name, as do several other Jewish writings (the biblical Proverbs, and Song of Solomon). (x)

The author of Ecclesiastes does explicitly specify the royalty of Koheleth, his admired relationship with the Jewish people, and his prominence in Jerusalem, so there is an agenda associated with these distinctions. Robert Gordis was one of the first scholars to examine how this lineage relates back to the scope of the narrative: “Any lesser figure might be charged with being an incompetent witness” when commenting on a survey of all mankind (40). The reader must believe that Koheleth could accomplish this task and have the means to do so—economically, mentally, and spiritually. Fox comes to the same conclusion that “the author wants us to conceive of the persona’s wisdom, power, and prosperity as Solomonic in quantity and quality...without necessarily trying to make us believe Koheleth truly was Solomon” (x). A connection to such a prominent and powerful figure is another device that emphasizes the inability to enact such a quest in our own lives. If Solomonic traits are required to survey mankind, as they are in the heterotopia within the narrative, then this reflects back an inaccessible lesson to our own space.

Rasselas himself follows this same thought process when Imlac describes “the business of a poet” (43) which includes such aggrandized tasks as “must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as being superior to time and place” (45). This description leads Rasselas to finally exclaim, “Thou hast convinced me that no human being could ever be a poet,” (46) but these impossible qualities Imlac associates with a poet are the qualities of the Koheleth of Ecclesiastes. In the narrative of *Rasselas*, these qualities are not given to just one human being, but are split among several. Rasselas possesses the history worth telling along with the royal title

and desire “to see the miseries of the world” (16) in order “to make deliberately my *choice of life*” (56). Prince Rasselas and Princess Nekayah possess the royal prosperity that allows such a journey, such as “jewels sufficient to make them rich” (61) that “procure us access to all whom we shall desire to know” and to “see all the conditions of humanity” (63).

To match Koheleth’s wisdom and ability to be a competent witness, Johnson presents the sage Imlac who has already lived his own “history” (31) observing the many conditions of humanity. Imlac’s first quest and subsequent decision to embrace the “perpetual confinement of the Happy Valley” (54) coincides with Koheleth’s account that informs the reader in the first chapter of Ecclesiastes, “Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem” (1:16). At the end his first quest, Imlac returns to “[his] native country” (52) to share his acquired wisdom with his countrymen only to find “that my thoughts were vain” and “of my companions the greater part was in the grave, of the rest some could with difficulty remember me” (53). This is an imitation of Koheleth’s assertion regarding wisdom and the wise man in chapter two of Ecclesiastes: “For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come all shall be forgotten” (2:16). This similarity proves that Imlac possesses enough wisdom to come to the same conclusions as Koheleth, and it foreshadows the result of the future quest of Rasselas. Again, the level of wisdom in both characters necessary to assess the lesson further creates a heterotopia of illusion where any such possible quest in the readers’ space becomes an illusion.

In addition to the similarities between the first lines of both works, the conclusions reflect a similar attention to the unrealistic construction of the narratives’ scopes. Much has been written about the last chapter of *Rasselas* “The conclusion, in which nothing is concluded,” and most has been negative. The story ends with the circular journey of its travelers revolving back

to Abyssinia, for Imlac a double return, because the “various schemes of happiness” (175) they found throughout their observations are merely imaginary, and “[o]f these wished that they had formed they well knew that none could be obtained” (176). Since the characters acknowledge a defeat and return back to Abyssinia, many critics assume that the characters return to the Happy Valley, although no such statement exists in the text. Critics also remark on the occurrence of the phrase “choice of eternity” before this confusing conclusion and usually claim this switch from the phrase “choice of life” to “choice of eternity” is the true resolution of *Rasselas*, where the characters must learn to embrace God and sacrifice in this world to receive true happiness in the next. The tone of the final chapter is one of a necessary wrap-up, like the opposite of the fairy tale convention “they all lived happily ever after.” This claim is not far-fetched since the placement of Nekayah’s resolution “to think only on the choice of eternity” (175) is only a few lines before the concluding chapter, but in the conclusion Nekayah returns to her fantasy choice of life: “to found a college of learned women” (175). In fact, all the characters return to a fantasy choice of life and do not return to the topic of a choice of eternity. When they return to Abyssinia, the resulting assumption based on the text should actually be that they will seek out these fantasy choices of life more than any choices of eternity.

The reason for the confusion over conflicting statements is that Johnson is imitating the forced conclusion of Ecclesiastes. Just as with *Rasselas*, many scholars have commented on the awkward ending of Ecclesiastes. In chapter 12 verses 9-14, which is sometimes referred to as the epilogue, the voice of the narrator overtakes Koheleth. First, the narrator begins to describe how Koheleth turned into a teacher, writer, and ecclesiastic citizen; next, the narrator suddenly wraps up the narration with a declarative plea for a conclusion which turns out to be as dogmatically conservative as Johnson’s choice of eternity: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole mat-

ter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty*” (12:13). The narrator does not acknowledge that Koheleth has learned this conclusion, rather he tells the reader to “be admonished” of “making many books” and “much study” since “these” are the practices of Koheleth (12:12). Gordis remarks on this contradiction that “the editor is fearful lest the reader be led away from the eternal verities and he calls upon him, having heard everything, to hear God and keep His commandments” (118). Similarly, in his imitation Johnson returns to the “eternal verities” with the choice of eternity, but his characters, like Koheleth, do not return to these more eternal beliefs and instead continue to think that relaying wisdom to a select audience within a sort of kingdom is not vanity.

We can see the same qualities of Koheleth imitated in the fantasy choices of life of Pekuah, Nekayah, and Rasselas. Pekuah desires to “become the prioress of a convent” which she “wished to fill with pious maidens,” while Nekayah “would preside” over her college to continue “the acquisition and communication of wisdom” to the “next age” and Rasselas seeks “a little kingdom” to “administer justice in his own person” (175). All these fantasy occupations mimic Koheleth’s “wisdom, power, and prosperity” from the beginning of Ecclesiastes and at the end when Koheleth “still taught the people knowledge; yea he gave good heed, and sought out, *and* set many proverbs” (12:9). The narrative of *Rasselas* moves from a cluster of characters that make up the Solomonic traits of Koheleth to separate versions of Koheleth’s Solomonic traits.

Viewing the conclusion of *Rasselas* as an imitation of the conflicting epilogue of Ecclesiastes frees critics from deciding whether a choice of life or a choice of eternity is the right conclusion. This either/or way of analyzing *Rasselas* can become a neither/nor situation. The opposing statements remind us of the assertion in Ecclesiastes that “of making many books there is no end,” (12:12) and at times the scope of a text could linger on forever, but in order to move

onto the next narrative there needs to be an end. The editor's interjection solves this issue in *Ecclesiastes*, as does Nekayah's choice of eternity in *Rasselas*, and functions as a heterotopia of illusion by alerting the reader to the obvious construction of the narratives and the necessity for such a construction to examine these universal scopes.

Through my examination of *Rasselas* as an imitation of *Ecclesiastes*, I have also examined the similarities between the opposing critical discussions surrounding both works: in *Ecclesiastes* a reform or traditional view and in *Rasselas* an emphasis on the choice of life or the choice of eternity. Thomas Preston's article exploring the reform view and traditional view of *Ecclesiastes* attempted to argue the reform view within *Rasselas*, but, as I have shown, this aim is simplistic because both views have merit and can simultaneously exist for *Ecclesiastes* and *Rasselas* as its imitation through Foucault's explanation of heterotopias. By re-examining the comparisons between *Ecclesiastes* and *Rasselas* within the functions of two types of heterotopias, I have analyzed the ways in which *Rasselas* imitates *Ecclesiastes* in narrative scope in regard to the heterotopia of illusion. In my next chapter, I will explore the heterotopia of deviation within the repetitive scenes of failure in both works, which become ironically comedic in *Rasselas*.

Chapter Three: How the Repetitive Failures in Ecclesiastes Are Humorously Imitated in *Rasselas*

In this final chapter I will examine how Johnson embellishes the failures of Koheleth with the characters' failures in *Rasselas*. Ultimately, all these characters fail at the initial goal of their quest of human observation: to find worldly wisdom or lasting happiness. Yet, the larger narratives are designed to offer religious or moral instruction not for the characters but the reader. The reader learns through the failure of the quest that these goals are not achievable, even as the characters continue trying to find new ways to accomplish their quests. As the last chapter explored, the larger narratives of both texts function as a heterotopia of illusion that will call attention to an illusory construction that could not exist outside fiction. However, the reader can glean the insight provided by this illusory location. Within these larger narratives are episodes that undermine the moral instruction. The characters' quests are a heterotopia of compensation that the reader is informed will fail. However, these heterotopias of compensation fail for the characters multiple times in both texts. These episodes take the form of repetitive failures in both Ecclesiastes and *Rasselas*. The scenes of failure in *Rasselas* are usually the source of the commentary exploring the comedy in the story, and critics analyze these episodes scene by scene, but I have not discovered any critic who understands that the scenes of failures are the source of the comedy in *Rasselas*.

I must acknowledge my debt to Duane H. Smith's article "Repetitive Patterns in Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*" for his similar examination of the repetitive failures in *Rasselas*, although Smith does not examine the humorous elements within these failures, nor does he examine or even mention Ecclesiastes. Smith's main thesis is that "[b]y focusing on the repetitions in the narrative...Johnson affirms the value of the narrative as entertainment even as he denies its value

as a moral tale” (624). He follows this claim by examining the failures as a “Nietzschean pattern” of “potential panacea, test, failure” and shows that “this subversive pattern permeates the text” (629), and he sometimes acknowledges how these failures are ironic. Rather than rely on a Nietzschean pattern of failure, I assert the failure of the heterotopia of compensation helps to show the categorization of these failures in relation to the larger narrative. Smith’s association of these failures as following the pattern of “potential panacea, test, failure” does help to influence my exploration of the failures of recall. I will show how this irony becomes comedic within *Rasselas*.

The first and most famous scholar to examine the humor in *Rasselas* was Alvin Whitley, who also, along with Gwin Kolb, certified the value of *Rasselas* as literature worthy of scholarly discussion. While Whitley blazed a trail that is still only lightly trodden regarding the humor in *Rasselas*, he would have not been likely to examine the humor in *Ecclesiastes* and *Rasselas* because any critical views admitting its broad similarities with *Ecclesiastes* were grounded in a serious moral tone. At the time, and for a long time since, any attempt to examine the humor in *Rasselas* would skirt the issue of the biblical similarities. Whitley follows this logic writing only briefly in the beginning of his essay, “It [*Rasselas*] has been called a modern version of *Ecclesiastes*, an embodiment of the tragic sense of life,” and this tragic sense of life is aligned with the view which discounts or fails to recognize the humor Whitley argues is prevalent throughout *Rasselas*. To argue that Whitley should have made any connection to the humor in *Rasselas* through *Ecclesiastes* is a fallacy, and I will not try to make this awkward assertion. His brave validation of the humorous irony in *Rasselas* was certainly a bold critical move in 1956. However, despite sixty years of further scholarly discussion concerning *Rasselas*, critics have only superficially explored the comedic tone, and no one has yet embraced, or even investigated, how

a tragic narrative could possess the comedic elements and still acknowledge a relationship to Ecclesiastes. I will explore how through allusions to Ecclesiastes, Johnson allows these two seemingly incongruous tones to coexist and how Johnson humorously elaborates Ecclesiastes in *Rasselas*.

Both the narratives transport the readers to an archetypical location where they can realistically view themselves in this literary location while simultaneously highlighting the narrative as an unrealistic construction that could never occur in a real space. Through this larger heterotopia of illusion, the reader can best access the same biblical moral and emphasis on the choice of eternity in both texts. The humor of *Rasselas* is embedded within the larger narrative and as Whitley points out is available “by way of contextual ironic implications which are only rarely explained outright” (50). The “contextual ironic implications” within *Rasselas* occur in repetitive scenes of failure that find their genesis in Ecclesiastes as well. Irony is almost never “explained outright,” and the irony in *Rasselas* is inferred by the reader in the form of what Whitley will classify as dramatic irony. This dramatic irony can further reinforce how Johnson imitates Ecclesiastes.

Through the imitation of Ecclesiastes, a story the readers of Johnson in the eighteenth century would be familiar with, Johnson creates dramatic irony. As contemporary readers of Johnson read *Rasselas*, they would already be familiar with the failures of Rasselas and his companions, not only because of Imlac’s narrative and the first sentences letting the reader know this quest will fail, but also because the reader has already experienced this same failure while reading Ecclesiastes. When the reader perceives the similarity with Ecclesiastes they will sense the familiarity, and this familiarity creates an inter-textual dramatic irony that supercedes the dramatic irony only in the text of *Rasselas*. The subtlety of this technique could be argued. Perhaps the

reader makes this connection easily, or perhaps the reader's connection is more unconscious; nevertheless, a connection exists that influences how the reader expects these failures of the characters in *Rasselas* from an experience with Ecclesiastes. I will classify these failures as the failure of the heterotopia of compensation for the characters because a heterotopia of compensation attempts "to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled," which is precisely what the characters in both works continually fail to do (Foucault 27). The comedy emerges not so much in the initial failure, but in the repetitive nature of these failures.

In the beginning of both texts the reader is informed that these quests have already taken place and, in the case of Ecclesiastes, told outright the failure of the quest: "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of the spirit" (1:14). In *Rasselas*, failure is implied when the reader is informed in the opening lines that any assumptions that "the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow" or "phantoms of hope" will be dispelled presently. These are the initial failures that do contain a serious, moral tone and correspond to the larger narrative. However, once the characters encounter the initial failures, they fail to recall the information, and these failures of recall create repetitive humorous scenarios in *Rasselas* while these scenes are simply failures of the heterotopia of compensation in Ecclesiastes⁸.

In Ecclesiastes, the repetitive failures are hinted by the repeated phrase "I returned" (4:1, 4:7, 9:11) which does not imply, like the return in the conclusion of *Rasselas*, a return to his

⁸ I will not be arguing comedic elements within these scenes in Ecclesiastes, although I think this argument could be made, because this thesis is concerned with how the humor in *Rasselas* can be discovered vis-à-vis these embellished scenes of failure from Ecclesiastes.

kingdom after a survey of Jerusalem, but a return to the fray within his quest to catalogue experiences. After several revelations that all is vanity, Koheleth continues to venture back on his quest to find examples where activities in life are not in vain. During the first discovery that all is vanity Koheleth should understand that any other attempts would only lead to this same conclusion, yet he fails to recall the earlier discovery. This same situation is imitated by Rasselas. Imlac has already attempted the entire quest Rasselas wishes to undertake and has relayed the failings to Rasselas, yet Rasselas desires to see with his own eyes in order to find a situation Imlac may have overlooked and to prove there is an ideal choice of life. As Imlac informs Rasselas, "Human life is every where in a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed" (50). This comment reinforces the comedy behind the dramatic irony that Rasselas is continually surprised to find this view true during his quest. During this survey, Rasselas and his companions continue to seek out similar situations that have already proven fruitless, much as Koheleth does. The difference is that these failures are more numerous and embellished in *Rasselas* when compared with the failures in Ecclesiastes.

Whitley explains how, during the course of reading *Rasselas*, "The reader who remembers the story of Imlac and reflects on the endless, futile repetitions of human experience will smile more bitterly at the story of *Rasselas*," (57) which is even more true for the reader who recognizes the similarities with Ecclesiastes that common readers of Johnson—actually almost any British reader in the late eighteenth century—would be easily able to connect. Whitley examines the claim that a large portion of the comedic irony in *Rasselas* is dramatic irony: "The reader, like the spectator at a play, stands apart, seeing and knowing more than any participants in the action" (50). This dramatic irony increases only for the reader who is able to make the connection with Ecclesiastes and implicitly knows such a quest is doomed to fail. This enhanced dra-

matic irony makes the failures in *Rasselas* more comedic and allows the failures in Ecclesiastes to remain serious while enforcing a Christian moral that earthly pursuits are not satisfying in the souls of mankind, which desire God's gift of immortality. One of the first examples of this dramatic irony that finds its genesis in a more serious example from Ecclesiastes is Rasselas's encounter with the mechanic. In Ecclesiastes, Koheleth begins his narration describing the circular course of the elements—writing about the sun, wind, and waters, and the wind takes up the largest commentary: “The wind goeth toward the south; and turneth about unto the north; it whirlleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits” (1:6). This description highlights a failure of the heterotopia of compensation because the space cannot be “well arranged” or “meticulous” since it cannot be elementarily controlled. On an obvious level, we can see the elemental course outside human control imitated in the Nile's course and descriptions within *Rasselas*, but the exaggeration and comedic irony lies in the mechanic's attempt to control the wind with his flying device.

The mechanic has already built several devices in the Happy Valley that manipulate the elements such as “a wheel, which the stream turned, [to force] the water into a tower” or “instruments of soft musick...which some played by impulses of the wind” but all these applications are viewed more for “recreation” (23). When the mechanic explains his idea for a flying device to Rasselas, the goal of the flying device is different from the previous inventions for comfort: “man might use the swifter migration of wings; that the fields of the air are open to knowledge, and that only the ignorant and idleness need crawl on the ground” (24). The use of wings would not be as recreational as these past inventions but would be associated with the enlightened quest for a choice of life. Whitley calls this episode the “first encounter with impractical theorizing” (56). While many critics see that Rasselas would want this device in order to

escape the Happy Valley, few critics realize that Rasselas would want the wings because, as the mechanic explains, of “what pleasure a philosopher, furnished with such wings, and hovering in the sky, would see the earth, and all its inhabitants, rolling beneath him, and presenting to him successively, by its duration, all countries within the same parallel” (260). This manner of observation has a direct correlation to the survey of human livelihood in both *Ecclesiastes* and *Rasselas*, and this serious manipulation of the earthly elements in order to gain knowledge and wisdom is one of the first notable failures in *Ecclesiastes* that begins explaining the futility of trying to control the elements, specifically the wind.

When the wings fail, the reader who is familiar with *Ecclesiastes* is not surprised, and the severity of the failure is comical since the inventor, “in an instant dropped into the lake” and emerges “half dead with terrour and vexation” (28). Again, the words “terroure and vexation” are chosen specifically to recall the language of *Ecclesiastes* to the readers’ minds. Carey McIntosh points out that the irony in this situation is standard situational irony as well: “Irony here, of course, depends on our seeing that these wings designed for air, perform satisfactorily only in water, and that the mechanist is in more danger . . . from ‘terror and vexation’ than from any great altitude” (182). Here, again, the real danger and the ultimate result from trying to control the wind is “vexation,” certainly the exact same conclusion in *Ecclesiastes* and used by Johnson on purpose for this imitation. McIntosh also points out, “This episode is comic as well as ironical; we are made witness not of the much heralded and long-awaited sublimity of flight, but of prat-fall” (182). The whole scene has an element of comedic bathos since Rasselas has waited “a year” (28) while the mechanic fashions the wings, only to witness a moment of failure.

This same timing issue is another example of failure that is mimicked in *Rasselas* in a more comedic way than in *Ecclesiastes*. Koheleth follows a similar course in meditating on his

plans to survey ways of living before he puts these plans into action. Koheleth will often ponder his next venture with phrases like “I gave my heart,” (1:13, 1:17) “I said in mine heart,” (2:1, 2:15, 3:17, 3:18) and “I turned myself ” (2:12) which are all followed by infinitives, implying internal action instead of external action. Koheleth will procrastinate his next observation before actually acting on his desires. He fails at comprehending the natural progression of time and how human pursuits should operate in a timely fashion as well. These episodes of contemplation, rather than action, mainly occur around the most well-known section of Ecclesiastes regarding time, which was made famous by The Mamas and the Papas’ song “Turn, Turn, Turn.” This famous passage begins, “To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (3:1). Again this failure is repetitive because natural seasons relate back to the attempt to control the elements from the episode in the first chapter of Ecclesiastes, except here the failure is not acting at the appropriate time. Koheleth has again failed at creating a heterotopia of compensation, and, instead, has uncovered the messy nature of timing.

These returns and timings imply a failure at understanding time since Koheleth’s quest up to this point has been mostly contemplative and one of the only pursuits he has accomplished was having “increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem” (2:9) in riches, servants, and palaces⁹ which parallels the situation of Rasselas in the Happy Valley when he begins “to be entangled in imaginary difficulties” since he cannot encounter these situations in the rich and sequestered Happy Valley. Rasselas passes twenty months in a similar state of procrastination once he resolves to leave the Happy Valley, and when he realizes his failure of wasting twenty

⁹ This episode in Ecclesiastes is the embellished scenario in Bishop Patrick’s commentary about the Preacher’s garden that Thomas Preston uses to compare to *Rasselas* with regard to the location and riches of the Happy Valley.

months, “he past four months resolving to lose no more time in idle resolves” (20). Obviously, the phrasing is constructed to elicit an ironically humorous response since these two contradictory ideas appear in the same sentence, and the second part negates the “resolve” which is set out in the participle of the predicate of this remark. McIntosh further argues that with this scenario “Johnson has made something like a comedy of mechanism out of the mechanics of procrastination” (179). Johnson elaborates Koheleth’s procrastination and inability to connect time and cycles into a time for action and a time for introspection with Rasselas in the Happy Valley, and the failure in this imitation in *Rasselas* is fleshed out in order to be more overtly comedic than the original from Ecclesiastes.

Koheleth, who we know is royalty in Jerusalem even before this quest begins, chooses to replicate a sequestered royal setting as his first arena of observation: “I made me great works” (2:4), “I made me gardens and orchards” (2:5), “I got *me* servants and maidens” (2:7), “I gathered me silver and gold” (2:8), and “So I was great and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem” (2:9). Thomas Preston asserts Johnson embellishes this passage with his descriptions of the Happy Valley. Certainly, the reader familiar with Ecclesiastes will understand that the Happy Valley is reminiscent of Koheleth’s attempt to create a sequestered world filled with gardens, servants, riches, and lasting happiness. Also, the readers of Johnson’s day would be familiar with Koheleth’s failure: “Then I looked on all [these] works...and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of the spirit, and *there was* no profit under the sun” (2:11). However, Koheleth’s quasi-kingdom is not the only failure; Koheleth, who is already wealthy royalty in Jerusalem, begins his observation by creating the same privileged, isolated environment he has already experienced. Even though Rasselas and his companions can similarly find no happiness in the sequestered royalty of the Happy Valley, when they leave they immediately attempt to

recreate these same conditions in order to survey mankind. When Imlac leads the crew to Cairo, he immediately sets up shop and uses Rasselas' and Nekayah's wealth to isolate them from the general populus and sequester them amongst the richer inhabitants: "I will act as merchant...it will soon be observed that we are rich; our reputation will procure us access to all whom we shall desire to know" (63). Rasselas, Nekayah, and even Pekuah are uncomfortable not viewing others from a superior position and must establish this ethos before they can begin their observation, which is similar to Koheleth. The travelers cannot handle a gaze that views them as universal equals, and "they wondered to see themselves pass undistinguished along the street, and met by the lowest of people without reverence or notice"(64). This is a repeated failure and actually more similar to Koheleth's repetitive failure in his mock-kingdom because Rasselas, Nekayah, Pekuah, and Imlac should not wish to replicate the same wealth and distinguished status that afforded them no happiness in the Happy Valley. The readers can appreciate the humor here because they can remember Rasselas' previous desires "to see the miseries of the world" (16) that Rasselas has apparently forgotten and could not be accomplished from a wealthy position. While Koheleth mimics his initial wealth and sequestered privilege more elaborately than Rasselas and his companions, the characters in *Rasselas* fail more elaborately in their inability to comprehend such a mistake and more humorously repetitively in their attempts to recreate the same environments that have already proven unfruitful.

Rasselas and his companions attempt to recreate the sequestration of the Happy Valley again when they attempt to find happiness in the life of a hermit. The chapter is even titled "The happiness of solitude" (80), which has already proved impossible by these characters through the unhappy isolation in the Happy Valley. Even the "hermit's cell" (80) is physically similar to the Happy Valley that is enveloped in a valley that is "surrounded on every side by mountains, of

which the summit overhangs the middle part” (8). The dwelling is “a cavern in the side of a mountain, over-shadowed with palm trees” (80), offering the same rocky entrapment, albeit only on one side, and a similar overhang inhibiting a view of the horizon. Rasselas and his companions, including Imlac, are unaware of these physical similarities or even the irony of trying to find happiness in a voluntary sequestration after their experience in the Happy Valley; however, the reader can recognize the humor through the dramatic irony that these characters have forgotten their own previous failure and continue to repeat the same failures. Only when the hermit admits his own unhappiness with his solitude and his desire to have no imitators do the characters understand this way of life cannot offer lasting happiness, and even then “they heard his resolution with surprise,” which further embellishes the humor in their ignorance of any failure (83).

These various episodes of failure complement Rasselas’ attempt to find out “what it is to live according to nature” (87). These various failures seem to correspond to Koheleth’s and Rasselas’ inability to comprehend how to accept natural limitations whether by trying to control the elements or to engaging in life in the natural order of time, and the famous passage from Ecclesiastes advocates living life according to these natural rhythms. In *Rasselas*, a philosopher advises this exact lifestyle:

“The way to be happy is to live according to nature, in obedience to that universal and unalterable law with which every heart is originally impressed; which is not written on it by precepts, but engraved by destiny, not instilled by education, but infused at our nativity. He that lives according to nature will suffer nothing from the delusions of hope, or importunities of desire” (85-6).

Here “the universal and unalterable law” is never named, confusing Rasselas and prompting him to ask the philosopher for clarification on how to live life according to nature, which is clarification that the philosopher cannot give. Rasselas appeals to this philosopher: “I doubt not the truth of a position which a man so learned has so confidently advanced. Let me only know what it is to live life according to nature” (87). The explanation he receives from the philosopher is problematic; in fact, any explanation would negate the philosopher’s previous statements since to live life according to nature is a concept impressed on human hearts and cannot be “instilled by education.” Nevertheless, the wordy philosopher supplies an answer:

“To live life according to nature, is to act always with due regard to the fitness arising from the relations and qualities of causes and effects, to concur with the great and unchangeable scheme of universal felicity; to co-operate with the general disposition and tendency of the present system of things” (88).

This explanation is neither informative nor concise. The infinitives in the answer lead to no specific tasks or instructions, and the philosopher’s statement is a failure to explain what life led according to nature would look like in application, but neither Rasselas or the philosopher even comprehends that any such explanation is impossible.

This exchange with the philosopher is immediately relevant to Ecclesiastes because it undermines a passage that occurs after the section discussing natural timing. In the statement regarding life led by nature, the philosopher alludes to writing on the hearts of men that allows a person to understand how obedience to nature leads to happiness. In Ecclesiastes, quite the opposite is true because what has been written on the hearts of man is not a desire to live life according to nature, but a desire to escape natural limitations: “he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end” (3:11). In

many translations, the word “world” within the context of this passage means eternity.¹⁰ In this context, God has bestowed man with a desire for eternity, and this desire frustrates any attempts to understand the natural order. Human beings cannot live life according to nature because their hearts are impressed with a desire for timelessness, not a desire for natural timing. I want to stress that all the commentators of Ecclesiastes that I have researched the word “world” to mean “eternity” in this passage; however, even if we take away the context of eternity from the word “world,” we are still left with a concept that contradicts what the philosopher in *Rasselas* says is written on the hearts of men. If “world” meant the natural world and, as Fox notes that some commentators erroneously do claim, we “take the sentence to mean that God implanted in humans a desire to possess or understand the natural world” (Fox 23) these desires produce only an inability to understand God’s work and natural timing, and we are left with no real understanding of God’s plan.

Koheleth and *Rasselas* fail to understand that a life led according to nature, whether in Ecclesiastes or *Rasselas*, can never be explained and must only be lived much like Imlac and the astronomer at the end who are “contented to be driven along the stream of life without directing their course to any particular port” (176). In Ecclesiastes, Koheleth comes to a similar conclusion “that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God” (3:13) which is a direct answer to Koheleth’s first question that prompts his quest: “What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?” (1:3). Koheleth has discovered that human happiness can be found only in living life according to nature and accepting natural

¹⁰ For further reading on how this verse relates to *Rasselas* in an entirely different context than the context that this thesis explores, see Karounas’s article previously cited article. The similarity discussed here, in relation to the philosopher and nature, is not explored by Karounas.

limitations, but he continues on his quest seeking a more specific way of life that affords eternal profits. Koheleth's failure occurs immediately after his revelation, but Rasselas does not even experience such a revelation. He cannot comprehend what a life led according to nature would look like, nor can the philosopher explain this life. Accepting a life led according to nature would be a failure of the heterotopia of compensation since the heterotopia of compensation creates a world that can be controlled and constructed, the opposite of a life led according to nature. This failure is more comedic in *Rasselas* since it is not only Rasselas who fails to understand this fact, but also the philosopher who incorrectly explains what is written on the hearts of man. Here the failure is exaggerated to a comedic proportion in the exchange where "The prince soon found that this was one of the sages whom he should understand less as he heard him longer" (88), which is humorously ironic since the explanation Rasselas seeks for clarification only confuses, and he understands less when the philosopher explains more.

Rasselas and his companions have already encountered a profession that depicts living life according to nature and have rejected this occupation before Rasselas is, again, swayed by the philosopher's speech: the pastoral life of a shepherd. On the way to visit the hermit, the crew stops to view a group of shepherds tending their flocks, whom they question in order "to tell their opinion of their own state," yet the same class elevation that they acquired upon arrival in Cairo inhibits any real dialogue between them and the shepherds, whom they find "rude and ignorant" while the shepherds "considered themselves as condemned to labour for the rich, and looked up with stupid malevolence towards those that were placed above them" (77). Any actual dialogue between these groups is not even recorded. Here the poor class of the shepherds makes the pastoral life too realistic and less romantic, but these are the wrong reasons to reject this life. Rasselas has already rejected this life when in the grounds of the Happy Valley he would watch "the kids and

the lambs chasing one another [and] I fancy that I should be happy if I had something to pursue” (16). In his observation of animals in a natural setting Rasselas feels only want and unsatisfaction. Any belief that the occupation of a shepherd, who *must* watch sheep, would yield happiness is again a repeated failure. Nekayah’s plea showcases the inability to find the real reason the pastoral life would be inadequate. She believes the life of a shepherd could lead to true happiness if “the time would come, when, with a few virtuous and elegant companions, she should gather flowers planted by her own hand, fondle the lambs of her own ewe, and listen, without a care, among brooks and breezes, to one of her maidens reading in the shade” (77). Any of these tasks could occur in the Happy Valley, and all are desirable to Nekayah only because they suppose the sequestering of any offensive or poor people, the same conditions that brought her no happiness in the Happy Valley. Nekayah’s vision of pastoral life is another heterotopia of compensation that highlights this episode’s similarity to all the other repetitive attempts by these characters to sequester themselves, after escaping sequester. Again, Rasselas and his companions seek sequestration to create happiness and continue to fail to recall the previous lessons while the reader is presented with such a repetition that the humor of this repetition becomes overt.

Immediately following the encounter with the shepherds, Rasselas and his companions encounter a rich man whose very wealth has forced him into hiding. This entire situation should serve as an example for the characters that wealth can become a burden and can offer no lasting happiness and may possibly even force a rich person into isolation. The rich man is forced into exile because of his wealth: “My prosperity puts my life in danger; the Bassa of Egypt is my enemy, incensed only by my wealth and popularity....I know not how soon my defenders may be persuaded to share the plunder with Bassa” (79). Here wealth itself has become a form of se-

questration, just as the wealth in the Happy Valley came with constant confinement. The rich man is fearful enough of a riot to have “sent [his] treasures to a distant country” (79). This scene shows how Nekayah’s vision of a pleasant pastoral life could actually be a disaster, yet while the characters “joined in lamenting his danger, and deprecating his exile; and the princess was so much disturbed with the tumult of grief and indignation, that she retired to her apartment” (80), that characters all happily move onto visit the hermit and again seek out sequestration. Their heterotopic visions of compensation continually fail, and these failures repeat themselves because of the characters’ inability to learn the lesson. Again, the reader remembers these previous failures and can navigate the repetitive scenes with an understanding that these characters have been in these situations before. Through this dramatic irony, a serious reaction, like Nekayah’s to the rich man’s dilemma, becomes comical not only because these characters continue to forget previous failures, but also because their reactions are so confused and emotive without understanding. In this way Johnson elaborates Koheleth’s failures, which are never so lengthy or so overtly comedic.

In both works there is convincing evidence that life led according to nature would be both happy and wise, and the philosopher almost succeeds in convincing Rasselas that this is the correct choice of life, but no one can explain how to accomplish living this way. Rasselas’ inability to live life according to nature without instruction is a failure since living life according to nature should be self-explanatory because a person should merely follow natural patterns instead of trying to control these circular seasons or courses, like the emerging and retreating hermit whose cyclical story prompts the philosopher’s praise for a life according to nature. Again, this failure is elaborated in the character of Rasselas to a more comical degree than in Koheleth’s failure to understand that he should embrace the natural course.

In Ecclesiastes this failure to explain how to live life according to nature is attributed to man's desire for eternal life, which is possibly the most important attribute that elevates humans from other animals, but wisdom in Ecclesiastes means understanding that this elevation is possibly untrue. Within the same chapter as the previous realization, Koheleth explains that any distinction between man and beast is vanity since "that which befalleth the sons of man [death] befalleth beasts....All go unto the grave....who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of beast that goeth downward to the earth" (3:19-21). Koheleth acknowledges that any difference between a man and an animal is useless since both die, and no one can assert that humans encounter a different fate in death than animals. Accepting that the same fate happens to both humans and animals is another failure within the quest for a heterotopia of compensation. The heterotopia of compensation in this quest attempts to create a perfect space where the distinction between humans and animals is clear and humans have access to an afterlife while animals do not. This conclusion takes away any compensation that elevates man above beast because they all meet the same conclusion: death.

In *Rasselas* the same heterotopia of compensation that elevates mankind above animals is enforced, but Rasselas' failure to recall this division almost dismantles the compensation. For the philosopher, a life led according to nature is best imitated by "consider[ing] the life of animals, whose motions are regulated by instincts" (87). However, Rasselas has already rejected this understanding in the beginning of the book when observes animals grazing in the fields and addresses them stating, "Ye...are happy, and need not envy me" (14). Rasselas separates his happiness from the happiness of animals: "I am, like him [an animal], pained with want, but I am not, like him, satisfied with fulness" (13) since man's desires are different than the desires of animals. This observation immediately offers him "some solace of the miseries of life" (14). Ras-

selas fails to recall this observation when faced with the solution of living life according to nature—which is living as any other animal—and he is initially swayed by the idea of living life with the instinctual needs of an animal even though he has already seen this happiness and dismissed this solution. The quickness with which Rasselas forgets his realizations makes his realizations appear simplistic and further comically embellish the failures of Koheleth. As McIntosh explains, “It is difficult to feel sympathy for a person who is so easy to cure” and the trial and tribulations of Rasselas are far more comedic than serious (178).

One of the first observations Koheleth makes is that “That which is crooked cannot be made straight” (1:15), and Rasselas and his companions continually try to make straight what is crooked and repeatedly fail. Just as Koheleth fails to recall his previous conclusions that wealth and isolation inhibit lasting wisdom and accomplishments, Rasselas, Nekayah, Pekuah, Imlac, and, later, the astronomer continue to seek out sequestration in various ways, always expecting a different result than the resulting displeasure in the Happy Valley. The difference lies in degree. The repetition of failure in *Rasselas* is far more numerous than in Ecclesiastes, and these scenes are lengthy and exacerbated by the numerous characters. Also, the story is an imitation. Readers in Johnson’s time would be familiar with the scope of the story and the expected failures through their reading of Ecclesiastes, so any moral obligation is delegated to the biblical book while the imitation becomes an exaggerated and comical retelling. The larger narrative is the same while the scenes are embellished to enhance the dramatic irony and allow the reader a time to laugh about serious matters.

Conclusion

Samuel Johnson continues to bear the reputation of a didactic moralist and, at the same time, a progressive critic. This juxtaposition is mirrored in Ecclesiastes. Rabbi Victor E. Reichert has remarked that in the pages of Ecclesiastes, “Faith and Reason write one upon the other in the palimpsest of our past” (105). This delicate blending of passages where either faith or reason writes more darkly is imitated in *Rasselas* by Johnson’s deft hand, which holds faith, reason, and a trace of comedy. Indeed, the scholarship surrounding *Rasselas* has been palimpsestic at best. The strongest lines of writing in this conversation have emphasized the serious faith of Johnson in *Rasselas* while the faintest writing highlights the secular sardonic humor. Where these two critical scribbles intersect is communal territory, or, to address Reichert’s concept again, “our past.” I have addressed this intersection in my thesis. The history of *Rasselas* is a communal history because *Rasselas* has been the discussion of much debate after the story’s publication. Baffling as *Rasselas* was to early commentators, critics today find the work laudable but are still confused by this palimpsestic interplay between play and prayer. A stronger genre than Oriental tale can bolster our comprehension of *Rasselas*.

Looking to the early twentieth-century understanding of Oriental tales, we can see that *Rasselas* does not fit in this category as they have been described, and Johnson is more likely imitating wisdom literature, namely Ecclesiastes. Perhaps the category of Oriental tale could be expanded to include biblical wisdom literature now that the Bible is examined through a literary lens, and this categorization may eventually work for *Rasselas*, but, for the moment, this integration has not happened. This same type of partition that removes Judeo-Christian writings from Oriental categorization works to segregate the undercurrent of ironic humor in *Rasselas* from the larger serious narrative. I have found that Foucault’s heterotopic functions show how these two

tones complement *Rasselas* as an imitation of Ecclesiastes and how the reader succeeds within the larger narrative and the humor at the characters' failures. This dramatic irony where the reader as the audience knows more than the characters is amplified since *Rasselas* is an imitation of Ecclesiastes, and Ecclesiastes has told this same story already. This embellishment relays the eternal truths of Ecclesiastes again, but when the same failures occur in *Rasselas* these become larger scenes with enhanced comedy.

My hope is that this type of analysis will finally unite the opposing critical opinions surrounding *Rasselas* and bring about a renewed interest in the comedy within the story. Viewing *Rasselas* as an imitation of Ecclesiastes solves much of the confusion regarding the goal of the narrative and the conflicting tones. Also, through much research I have found that this observation is unique, and while many critics generally acknowledge the similarities between *Rasselas* and Ecclesiastes, no critic has categorized *Rasselas* as an eighteenth-century imitation of Ecclesiastes. If my observation is the first to recognize this claim, then any future scholarship has room to explore this claim. This thesis could lead future discussions to highlight more commonalities between Ecclesiastes and Johnson's writings, such as the overlap between religious views. Johnson was of the opinion that having religious doubts was healthier than merely accepting a tranquil lukewarm belief (Gray 136). This is the same religious opinion that Koheleth asserts in Ecclesiastes, which Gordis explains: "Koheleth is stressing the need of understanding rather than conforming piety, which he attributed to fools" (45). While a select few critics have already explored a similarity between Ecclesiastes and *Rasselas* rather generally, critics may begin to evaluate the relationship between Ecclesiastes and Johnson's writings in a more complex way where this relationship can be enhanced through theoretical discussion and textual evidence. Specifically relating to *Rasselas*, the assertion that *Rasselas* is an imitation of Ecclesiastes could

help shed light on the environment within which *Rasselas* was written during Johnson's mother's illness and subsequent death. That Johnson would engage in an imitative exercise involving a book of the Bible often read in verses at funerals to comfort loved ones during the time around his mother's illness makes sense, especially if the book was written in only a week to help pay for her medical costs/funeral expenses, which is a view certain critics uphold and Boswell supplies in the first volume of his biography: "I have to mention, that the late Mr. Strahan the printer told me, that Johnson wrote it, that with the profits he might defray the expense of his mother's funeral costs....He told Sir Joshua Reynolds that he composed it in the evenings of one week" (280-81). Understanding the story as an imitation could also explain this quick composition.

There are possibly numerous examples of how the scenes of failure in *Ecclesiastes* are imitated more humorously in *Rasselas*. This thesis has attempted to provide the context to explain why this method is critically viable and to enact a brief catalogue of some of these scenes. I hope that this study will encourage others to view the text as an imitation of *Ecclesiastes* and follow this categorization either to find similar examples of comedy, or, perhaps, to refute my findings. The largest possible scope of this thesis is to continue the critical conversation of *Rasselas*, and introduce a new method to continue this discussion. I hope my analysis will open dialogue on the topics discussed such as what truly categorizes an Oriental tale, how biblical wisdom literature influences modern fiction, the function of heterotopic spaces for the readers in eighteenth-century fiction, and the controversial comedic elements in literature that maintains a serious narrative. As a scholar it is my wish that the narrator's claim in *Ecclesiastes* is true and that "of making many books there is no end" (12:12) and my hope is that the humorous elements in *Ecclesiastes* will begin to be explored not separate from the religious context but within this context.

The largest contribution from my thesis may be that by examining how the very critical exploration of *Rasselas* deserves revision, not merely to critique the views from before, but to embrace that both views regarding *Rasselas* are correct. Even though Johnson has always been esteemed as a critic and literary mind, perhaps we can now begin to appreciate the same mental complexity within his fiction as well. The intricacies of genre, tone, and scope within *Rasselas* has been much debated in the same neither/nor fashion as the conclusions in *Ecclesiastes* and *Rasselas*; however, I believe our conclusion for *Rasselas* should follow a more inclusive approach where we can acknowledge the complex pattern that marks Johnson's craft, a weaving of comedic irony and serious narrative in the style of the wisdom literature before. Again, both critical discussions are correct in different ways, and the neither/nor exclusions have left the recent students of Johnson likely to continue the most darkly written words within this palimpsestic conversation. This palimpsest is more connective than we previously thought, and I have shed new light on the way we view our past critical understanding of *Rasselas*, alone and through *Ecclesiastes*.

Bibliography

- Ballaster, Ros. "Narrative Transmigrations." *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture*. Eds. Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. Print.
- The Bible: Authorized King James Version*. Eds. Robert B. Carroll and Stephen Prickett. New York: Oxford UP, 1997. Print.
- Bloomfield, Morton W. "The Tradition and Style of Biblical Wisdom Literature." *Biblical Patterns in Modern Literature*. Eds. David H. Hirsch and Nehama Aschkenasy. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984. 19-30. Print.
- Boswell, James. *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* Vol. I. Dublin: John Chambers, 1792. *ECCO*. Web. 15 April 2011.
- . *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* Vol. II. Dublin: John Chambers, 1792. *ECCO*. Web. 23 Mar. 2011.
- Capell, Edward. *Reflections on Originality in Authors: Being Remarks on A Letter to Mr. Mason on the Marks of Imitation*. London: R. Horsfield, 1766. *ECCO*. Web. 3 Jan. 2011.
- Conant, Martha Pike. *The Oriental Tale in England in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: Octagon Books, 1966. Print.
- Ehrenpries, Irvin. "Rasselas and Some Meanings of 'Structure' in Literary Criticism." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 14.2 (1981): 101-17. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Mar. 2010.
- Folkenflik, Robert. "'Rasselas' and the Closed Field." *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 57.4 (1994): 337-352. *JSTOR*. Web. 12. Mar. 2010
- Fox, Michael V. *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ecclesiastes*. Philadelphia: JPS, 2004. Print.

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." Trans. Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 22-7.

Print.

Frye, Northrop. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. New York: Harcourt Brace

Jovanovich, 1982. Print.

Gordis, Robert. *Koheleth—The Man and His World*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951. Print.

Gray, James. *Johnson's Sermons: A Study*. New York: Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1972.

Hunter, J. Paul. "The Novel and Social/Cultural History." *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*. Ed. John Richetti. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996. 9-40. Print.

Hurd, Richard. *A Letter to Mr. Mason on the Marks of Imitation*. Cambridge: W. Thurlborne and J. Woodyer, 1757. *ECCO*. Web. 15 Dec. 2010.

Johnson, Samuel. "Rambler 3." *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* Vol. 2. London: AMS Press, 1970. 11-15. Print.

---. "The Vanity of Human Wishes." *Samuel Johnson: The Major Works*. Ed. Donald Greene. New York: Oxford UP, 1984. 12-21. Print.

---. *The Works of Samuel Johnson*. Vol. 16 *Rasselas and Other Tales*. Ed. Gwin J. Kolb. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990. Print.

Jordan, Sarah. "Samuel Johnson and Idleness." *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual*. Eds. Paul Korshin and Jack Lynch 11 (2000): 145-76. Print.

Karounos, Michael. "Rasselas and the Riddle of the Caves: Setting Eternity in the Hearts of Men." *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual*. Eds. Paul Korshin and Jack Lynch. 16 (2005): 39-58. Print.

- Kolb, Gwin. "The Structure of *Rasselas*." *PMLA* 66 (1951): 698-717. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Mar. 2010.
- Lockhart, Donald M. "'The Fourth Son of the Mighty Emperor': The Ethiopian Background of Johnson's 'Rasselas.'" *PMLA* 78.5 (1963): 516-528. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Apr. 2011.
- Misenheimer, James B. "Samuel Johnson's Christian Humanism and the Function of Literature." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 3 (1973): 148-60. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Mar. 2010.
- McIntosh, Carey. *The Choice of Life: Samuel Johnson and the World of Fiction*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1973. Print.
- Patrick, Simon. *A Paraphrase Upon the Books of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon with Arguments to Each Chapter and Annotations Thereupon / By Symon Patrick*. London, 1700. *EEBO*. Web. 22 Mar. 2010.
- Preston, Thomas R. "Johnson's *Rasselas* Continued." *PMLA* 87.2 (1972): 312-14. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Mar. 2010.
- . "The Biblical Context of Johnson's 'Rasselas.'" *PMLA* 84 (1969): 274-81. *JSTOR*. Web. 18 Feb. 2010.
- Reichert, Victor E. and A. Cohen. "Ecclesiastes." *The Five Megilloth*. Ed. A. Cohen. London: Soncino Press, 1971. 104-91. Print.
- Sachs, Arie. *Passionate Intelligence, Imagination and Reason in the Work of Samuel Johnson*. Baltimore: Josh Hopkins Press, 1967. Print.
- . "Reason and Unreason in Johnson's Religion." *The Modern Language Review* 59.4 (1964): 519-26. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Mar. 2010.
- Smith, Duane H. "Repetitive Patterns in Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 36 (1996): 623-39. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Mar. 2010.

Tankard, Paul. "A Clergyman's Reading: Books Recommended by Samuel Johnson." *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Journal* 11 (2000): 125-43. Print.

Tomarken, Edward. *Johnson, Rasselas, and the Choice of Criticism*. Lexington: Kentucky UP, 1989.

Whitley, Alvin. "The Comedy of *Rasselas*." *ELH* 23 (1956): 48-70. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 Mar. 2010.