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### Introduction

This essay seeks to discuss a technical theme from the Samuel Johnson's work titled, "Rasselas Prince of Abyssinia", originally known as "The Choice of Life". Johnson wrote the poetic novel following his mother's demise at a time he was still financially underprivileged and stuck in poverty. He was desperately looking for ways of raising funds to be used in his beloved mother's funeral. "Rassela Prince of Abyssia" was a kind of novel that was partly a gentle satire and a moral fable at the same time. It poetically described the escape of Prince Rassela from home in search of the worldly happiness, and his subsequent return, disappointed but a more knowledgeable human being. It is from such basis of life experiences that this essay takes to delve into the realism in the Rassela Price of Abyssia.

### Who was Samuel Johnson?

The story of Samuel Johnson is a sadist tale of a man whose life was characterized by poverty, diseases, hopelessness and tormentors of life. He was born to a bookseller in Litchfield. As he continued with education at Pembroke College, Oxford, his studies were stifled by the sudden death of his father in 1731. With the death

of Samuel's father, life became a living hell for him, as the late father left the family in an abject poverty. He struggled with the little family incomes to get back to college that he never completed due to the very weak financial status of the family (Geller, 80-198).

Johnson later became a Grammar teacher at Market Bosworth from where he managed to publish his first essays in Birmingham Journal. He got married to a widow called Porter Elisabeth who was about twenty years older than him. His inadequate formal education greatly interfered with his ambitions and careers, as in most cases he applied to work in the writing firms, he got rejected for being unprepared well enough to work (Geller, 80-198).

But Samuel Johnson was not ceasing grounds for the importunate failures in his life. He took professionals' advices pretty serious and began working assiduously on an English dictionary. His abridged edition of English dictionary finally got published in 1756 and remained unchallenged until the Oxford English Dictionary came into the publication scene in 1884 (Geller, 80-198).

With time and through his experiences in writing, Johnson became an exceptional prolific writer. He published a variety of topical essays revolving around different themes such as political satires, poetry, criticisms and journalism. It was during this period in time that Samuel Johnson published *Rasselas the Prince of Abyssia*. Samuel Johnson died in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century after publishing numerous books, journals and articles. History informs us that his body was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey (Geller, 82).

He left a legacy for being a celebrity, a pompous and pedantic writer whose views later dominated the 19<sup>th</sup> century publication scene. As a shrewd, influential and gifted author, the works of Samuel Johnson have greatly been accredited by modern classical authors, the likes of T.S.Eliot and Modox Ford (Geller, 82).

#### Emblematic themes in Samuel Johnson's Rasselas

Samuel Johnson presents the readers with a number of themes in his Rasselas novel. Among such exemplified and illustrious themes is that of "Destructive capacities of the human imagination-imagination is the fountain of association" and "Humans need labor, engage in the world" (Johnson, 34-108).

In this work of Rassela, the poetic tale ostensibly assumes the form of an adventure set in a rather exotic locale. The narrative subsequently changes into a genderless platonic discourse, reflecting the informative nature of Samuel Johnson's project rationale (Johnson, 34-108).

#### Rasselas the Prince of Abyssinia

Rasselas the Prince of Abyssinia is irrefutably a very interesting poetic novel revolving around more realistic themes, reflecting the ways of life, and tackling on real life situation issues. The plot of this work is about Rasselas, son of King Abyssinia named after the modern day Ethiopia (John, 36-41). We see Rasselas leaving home in the company of his sister Nekayah and Imlac known as a philosopher. Their bare reason for leaving home is to go out and search for better ways of life, in particular, they are after happiness (Johnson, 34-108).

After their travel adventures across the exotic locations as Johnson describes them, they fail miserably to find what they are desperately looking for. Instead of happiness, they found sadness at the end (John, 36-41).

Rasselas story has been perceived by many as too influential, credit to Samuel Johnson the artistic architecture of the work. Among the admirers of this work is Irvin Ehrenpreis who perceives the aged Johnson as a reflection of lost youth in Rasselas character exiled from home. Rasselas also reflects the Johnson's sadistic projection on the wider world view, as it has been interpreted by others. Many other conceptions and misconceptions have continued to unfold concerning Rasselas the Prince of Abyssia (John, 36-41, & Keymer, 241-20).

In a discontented state of the mind, Rasselas sees himself as unhappy at home. He begins thinking of alternative shortcuts to pursuing at least some happiness (John, 36-41). In a group of three, they are set to leave the happy valleys to seek for happiness elsewhere. On their way they encounter some other people from different cultural and societal backgrounds, some at their worst states of life as they later came to learn. Among them include the wise man, shepherds, a hermit, a young man, families, an astronomer; this least is by no means exhausted.

Rasselas is very determined in the search and believed that the so called happiness must be somewhere they will definitely be able to find it. Well, the search continues, as they encounter many more people, asking each and every individual the whereabouts of happiness. (Johnson, 134-108, John, 36-41, & Keymer, 241-20). Actually, as Johnson and other orators narrate, Rasselas is quite aware of the kind of happiness he is looking for. To the best of his understanding, happiness, as he claims,

is something that is in the solid state and is permanent. Something that has neither fear nor uncertainty .He might finally succeed, in spite of the incessant frustrations of life. These are the wishes of Rasselas and his sister Nekayah (Johnson, 677).Little did they know that in their dissatisfied state of minds, they were prone to more serious frustrations.

At least to some extent, Nakayah, Rasselas sister, seemed to be reasonable enough in her arguments and debates with his adamant brother about the vices of happiness. She describes husbands as imperious and wives perverse, asserting that because it is often very likely to do evil than good, the virtue of wisdom rarely make many people get happiness. This argument makes Rasselas even more confused on whether people should get married in the first place (Johnson, 237-408).

The prolonged debate on marriage takes a momentous tone, as Nakayah explains elaborately and argumentatively that in marriage, there are many pains, but with no pleasure in celibacy (Johnson, 237-408). According to this Nakayah`s remark, either sides of her arguments presents difficulties. The two then compares and contrasts between the traditional and the modern marriage, trying to weigh the burdens and the relief on both sides of the societal marital divides. After their long discussions on marriage, they forcefully settled at a no happiness solution (Johnson, 134-108, John, 36-41, & Keymer, 241-20)

### Realism of Rassela's imagination

The story of Rasselas was such an exceptional masterpiece work by Samuel Johnson, reflecting typical life scenarios. It goes without questioning that every normal human being wants to live a happy life, and so, searching for that happiness becomes part and parcel of our livelihoods.

In the day to day lives, people are in search for the things that can make them happy. If you are that kind of person that has no business with happiness, then that is a rare phenomenon in the society, one of those phenomena associated either with magic spells or vices of the devil. Such a person is often advised to seek for divine interventions, so that he can come back to the common senses of human beings and be happy again.

Rasselas` thirst in finding happiness was never quenched by any water. As the story unveils, we encounter a series of dyadic and platonic bottomless discourse. Bottomless in this case would mean that, of all the conversations geared towards finding a solution to permanent happiness, at least none of them achieved it.

Take the instance of the astronomer in Rasselas. Johnson relates this character to those people who become meditative and secluded in the wilderness of imaginations; to the extent that they are bound to lose sight of observing the very world they live in. Johnson asserts that people must be engaged with the external world; they ought to use their energies to do productive things instead of idling, as it is because of idleness that we begin meditating and imagining all sorts of things, some that are too dangerous to our own survivals on earth (Johnson, 134-108).

To mitigate his case, Johnson further explains that when people are not involved in any sort of labor, their imaginations fester and provoke the inner evil spirits that are the cause of many of our problems. Where there is no labor, there can never be a conducive production, hence a meaningless life that knows no happiness (Johnson, 134-108).

On the theme of marriage in the *Rasselas* story, Johnson significantly discusses the issues of marriage closely concomitant to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century British literatures. *Rasselas* says that marriage is actually the order of nature where men and women make companions of one another, and find means to happiness. His sister Nakayah, however, differs from him in her opinion concerning marriage. To her, the basis of happiness in marriage has nothing to do with affection, but power (Johnson, 134-108).

According to the arguments of *Rasselas*, happiness in life has much to do with togetherness and affection towards each other, it's about love and unity, and that together as one, we may make it in finding the happiness we want. This assertion does not in a way correlate with what Nakayah his sister posits. To Nakayah, you better possess some powers with you, the power to do as you wish, and as long as your wishes do not render you so called power, powerless.

The philosopher Imlac is notably accredited for his philosophical views of life in *Rasselas`* work. Some of his most valued quotes are "Be not too hasty to trust or admire ...", "No mind is employed upon its presents...", and many of such diabolical phrases repeated throughout the text (John, 36-41).

## Conclusion

We have assessed and discussed expansively on how Rasselas and his colleagues viewed life and happiness from different critical angles. Their long and tedious search for happiness acquainted them with the best of life experiences they never had before. They thereafter became well informed, more knowledgeable and less prone to more difficulties.

After learning the vices of life, Rasselas realizes his previous mistakes that made him encounter more troubles than he ever imagined in his mission of finding happiness. Apparently Rasselas and the audience can possibly reach a compromise that there is indeed no shortcut to happiness, but many shortcuts that can lead us to problems.

From Rasselas, happiness is not permanent, but rather a perpetual thing that keeps on changing with the changing circumstances. Though he views happiness as a solid and permanent substance that was never to be the case, as all his sky crow hopes are thwarted towards the end of the story. It was sad that Rasselas fought a losing battle. Reality lesions that we have been challenged to absorb with sober and conscious minds.

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