

Samuel Johnson and Francis Stewart: collection and collaboration in the *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755)

Abstract

Johnson's "single-handed" lexicography remains a commonplace of critical discussion of his work, particularly in relation to his selection of the words and evidence which his *Dictionary of the English Language* contains. Based on a new examination of primary data, this article instead explores the collective and collaborative realities on which Johnsonian lexicography rested. Focusing on the work of Francis Stewart, and the evidence preserved in the seven extant volumes of the edition of Shakespeare that Johnson (and his assistants) used in making the *Dictionary*, it examines patterns of shared reading to challenge conventional expectations about Johnson's data selection (including structural patterns such as phrasal verbs). While the article argues for a significant recuperation of the invisible labor on which Johnson's *Dictionary* depended, it also provides a case study of Stewart's work, between 1746 and 1752, as part of the community of practice in Johnson's dictionary garret.

Keywords: Samuel Johnson; Francis Stewart; eighteenth-century lexicography; phrasal verbs; Shakespeare; amanuenses; script and scribal evidence

In popular Johnsonian scholarship, it is a truth universally acknowledged that Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, published in two folio volumes in 1755, was, as Watkins (1930, 10) affirms, "an amazing and unique single-handed achievement." Similar commendations of Johnson's single-handed lexicography span the eighteenth century to our own. As for Garrick (1755/85), this was, in part, imbricated in discourses of national triumph and set against the collective labor that academies abroad required. "Johnson well-arm'd like a hero of yore/ Has beat forty French and will bear forty more," as Garrick declared in a targeted "puff" that appeared across a range of journals and magazines in 1755. "The World contemplated with wonder so stupendous a Work achieved by one man," as James Boswell (1994, 211), Johnson's most celebrated biographer, later affirmed: it was Johnson "alone [who] executed in England what was the task of whole academies in other countries" (Boswell 1768, xviii-xix). By extension (Considine 2008), Johnson's single-handed fortitude has often been made to underpin his popular (and "Herculean") heroization in ways which draw on, and extend, a range of historical tropes. "How does a man proceed once he has determined singlehandedly to

etymologize, define, and illustrate all the essential words of a language,” as Fussell (1972, 193) has rhetorically demanded.

Elsewhere, however, carefully-expressed caveats by which Johnson is said to work “almost single-handedly” (Lipking 1984, 1) or “remarkably almost completely single-handedly” (Berglund 2014, 5) can acknowledge the inconvenient truth that that some seven assistants were, in various configurations, also working alongside Johnson both before, and after, his move in late 1747 to London’s Gough Square and the dictionary garret where most of the *Dictionary* was composed. As William Macbean (1785, f.1^r) explained, collectively these constituted “the laborious brethren” of the *Dictionary*, and comprised William himself, his brother Alexander, Joseph (V.J.) Peyton, [Charles] Maitland, the poet and writer Robert Shiells, alongside an otherwise unknown Mr. Stockton, identified by Johnson (1992, 74) as “writing for him” in a letter written in December 1746. The seventh is Francis Stewart who, as his surviving contract makes plain, was already employed by June of that year. As Amory (1986, 1) has observed, Johnson’s “single-handed” work, if seen quantitatively, has “a kind of poetic validity, if we can only forget the lexicographical reality that he was the manager of a team of workmen recruited by a group of booksellers.” As William Macbean had earlier made plain, labor was a shared rather than solitary feature of the long process by which the final text of the *Dictionary* came into being.

Seen in qualitative terms, however, as Berglund and Lipking demonstrate, the rhetoric of single-handed exceptionalism can remain prevalent, sustained by what is assumed to be the limited scope and scale of the assistants’ work (as well as by assumptions that multiple workers of this kind were required to keep pace with the Herculean demands of Johnson’s own output). Various identified as amanuenses, clerks, transcribers, or copyists, these were, by definition, vital to a dictionary laboriously produced in pen and ink across its various drafts and iterations. As surviving manuscript material affirms, eighteenth-century lexicography was “laborious” (“Requiring labour; tiresome; not easy”) in quite literal ways. While Johnson (1755, **) can thereby position his own labor in relation to the critical challenges of interpretation, not least with reference to phrasal verbs, that of the assistants has, as for Boswell (1971, 187), repeatedly been depicted in relation to “mechanical” activity in which the passive reproduction of Johnson’s own material and design is central. An amanuensis must “write what another dictates.” as the *Dictionary* confirms. As Thomas Birch explained in a private account of the dictionary garret in

1748, while Johnson did the vital primary reading for the *Dictionary*, selecting entry-words and evidence alike, it was the assistants who, in a secondary and subordinate process, “transcrib’d the Authorities, which he had mark’d for them in the Writers.”¹ The definition of *transcriber* (“copier; one who writes from a copy” (*Dictionary* (1755), s.v. *transcriber*)) reifies the pragmatic division which, in this model, informed Johnson’s working methods. As in Boswell’s influential account in the *Life* (1971, 186-7), it was Johnson alone who was distinguished by his philological acumen (and “superiour mind”). As he added, these qualities were liberally evidenced by the “rich collection of authorities” that Johnson assembled in the course of his work.

Similar accounts have been widely replicated across the *Dictionary*’s history. Nevertheless, as this article explores, exactly how we read (and reread) work in, and for, Johnson’s *Dictionary* is critical for understanding the reality of the *Dictionary*’s underlying methodology, as well as the collaborative practice on which it could depend. While it is, for example, undeniable that the *Dictionary* depended on an intricate reading process, and the construction of a vast hand-written “database” or citation file, it has, as Watkins (1936, 24, Note) affirms, conventionally been “important to know, beyond a doubt that Johnson never left the choices of quotations in the *Dictionary* to his amanuenses, but did all the reading for them and chose them himself.” As for Fleeman (1984, 38), it is equally axiomatic that “once Johnson had read and marked [a] book, it was handed to the amanuenses. Their task was to transcribe the marked passages in to slips of paper and then file the slips alphabetically.” Reading for the *Dictionary* was, in this model, both hierarchical and polysemous. Johnson’s reading was primary, independent, and integral to the collection (and choice) of both headwords and evidence. The reading performed by the assistants was conversely constrained by the process of ancillary marking that Fleeman indicates, and dependent on the pencilled ‘marks’ that Johnson had already inscribed on the books he used as working copies (of which fourteen now remain).

Copies of the surviving marked-up texts often, in fact, draw attention to the salience of Johnson’s hand, and to the working methods that the annotated “marks” might attest. “This book was with several others purchased at the Sale of D^r Johnson’s Library -- & upon comparing the

¹ Thomas Birch to Lord Hardwicke, 6 August 1748. Hardwicke Papers. British Library MS 35-397, f.140^v.

Pencil Initials in the Margins of the Pages, with his Dictionary, it appears that those sentences against which the initials are struck out with a horizontal line are quoted in the Dictionary,” states a provenance note by Samuel Newman, written on the flyleaf of John Norris’s *Collection of Miscellanies, consisting of Poems, Essays, Discourses, and Letters* (3rd edn, 1699). As in Figure 1, taken from Johnson’s annotated copy of William Warburton’s *Works of Shakespear in Eight Volumes* (1747), we can see the ways in which forms selected as potential headwords were underlined while, as Newman notes in his copy of Norris, the relevant “Pencil Initials” were written (in capitals) in the adjacent margin. The beginning (and end) of the quotation to be copied, as for *teene* below (line 2), was meanwhile often (though not invariably) indicated by a set of vertical or diagonal lines.

[TAKE IN FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE]

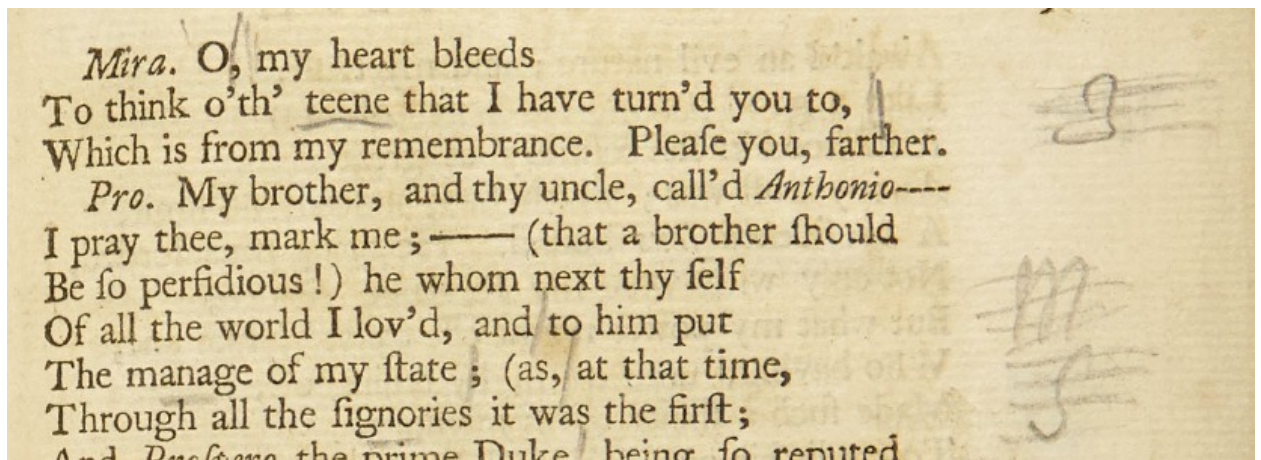


Figure 1. Johnson’s annotations for *teene*, *manage*, and *signory* in Act I, Scene 1 of *The Tempest*. in Volume 1 of William Warburton’s (1747) *The Works of Shakespear in Eight Volumes*. London: J. and P. Knapton.²

As Figure 1 also illustrates, textual interventions by the amanuenses have typically been seen as discrete, being limited to the various strikethroughs that they imposed on Johnson’s marginal capitals in confirming that the requisite copying of evidence and potential entry-word had been carried out. As “laborious brethren,” to return to Macbean’s words, the assistants are hence both distinguished and restricted by the labor they perform. If they read, they arguably emerge as types of the “pragmatic reader” identified by Jardine and Sherman (1994). If they

² All images from the annotated text of William Warburton’s edition of Shakespeare are reproced by kind permission of the University of Aberystwyth.

write, it is not, as Johnson's third sense of *write* specifies, "To produce as an author" but instead, as in sense 1, "To express by means of letters" (*Dictionary* (1755) s.v. *write*) where what is expressed is dependent on Johnson's anterior choices of word, evidence, and citation..

As recent work suggests (Mugglestone, 2025, 2026a, 2026b, 2026c), narratives of this kind can, however, sit uneasily against a re-examination of the existing working copies in which a range of hands are revealed to be at work, alongside Johnson, and in ways that are by no means confined to the marginal strikethroughs mentioned above. Surviving evidence of Francis Stewart's highly distinctive hand, as this article explores, can thereby provide an intriguing test case in which the working processes of Johnson's dictionary garret can be opened to new forms of scrutiny while, by the same token, we can recuperate at least some of Stewart's direct contributions. *Contra* Watkins, for example, Stewart's own role as primary reader, as well as amanuensis, can be overt, here in ways which, even given the limits of the surviving manuscript material, demonstrate both qualitative and quantitative salience in the models of data collection that Johnson adopted. That it was Stewart who emerges as a prime reader of Shakespeare (and the extensive edition produced by William Warburton in 1747) is part of this. Equally significant, as we will see, are the decisive contributions that Stewart made to other key elements of Johnsonian praxis, whether in shaping and reshaping the data to be used, as well as in isolating the particle plus structures which, as for Osselton (1997) and Wild (2010), have traditionally also been regarded as defining aspects of Johnson's work alone. Stewart's attentive marking of phrasal verbs such as *chop on*, *complain of*, *convey out*, *creep in*, *creep up*, *dote upon*, or *drink down* (among many others) in the *Merry Wives of Windsor* can, in this light, present further compelling testimony for the collective labors – and community of praxis – on which the *Dictionary* came, in fundamental ways, to rely.

Francis Stewart: amid the amanuenses

Biographical information on amanuenses in general, as Ann Blair (2023) stresses, is sparse. Writers of this kind are typically the "little people" whose lives remain unobserved and unknown. The printing of a given work swiftly effaces the hand-written contributions they might have made. Direct reference to labors of this kind is routinely elided or anonymized; as in Benjamin Martin's contemporaneous dictionary-making of 1749, we know he used an amanuensis, but we do not know who this was. The same hazards can attend Johnson's

assistants. Whether directly or indirectly, Johnson does not mention them in the *Dictionary* while, apart from their names, we know, almost nothing of Mr. Maitland and Mr. Stockton. “William Macbean wrote to James Dodsley on 13 May 1785, sounding him out on a supplementary volume to *SJ’s Dictionary* ... Nothing else is known about him.” states Marshall Waingrow (2001, 128, Note) in the Research Edition of the *Private Papers of James Boswell*. As Larsen (1985, 16) affirms, it is, across a range of works, Johnson who prototypically forms the “nucleus” while the minor players are rendered “indistinct satellites.” The “daily intimacy” of the dictionary garret and, by extension, of Johnson and the assistants, is part of this habitual neglect.

Such accounts as do appear are often both reductive and dismissive. Seen collectively, poverty rather than intellectual aptitude or ability routinely frames how we are invited to view Johnson’s dictionary assistant such that, as for Bainbridge (2005) and Bate (1978, 243) “compassion rather than reason” informed Johnson’s decision to employ them. They were, Bate writes, “rather like the squad of ragamuffins and waifs (Mouldy, Shadow, and the rest) that Falstaff recruited for battle.” As for Reddick (1996, 2), they have become a “rag-tag group of predominantly Scottish ne’er do-wells.” Seen individually, matters are often little better. Peyton, as Boswell (1971, 187) states, “taught French, and published some elementary tracts.” Robert Shiells is habitually referenced as a hack writer, whose poem *The Power of Beauty* (1750) is (mistakenly) assumed to be in praise of Johnson’s *Irene*. As by Boswell (1971, 187), Stewart himself is economically defined in terms of his Scottish heritage, and his status as the son of an Edinburgh bookseller. An entry for Alexander Macbean in Rogers’s *Samuel Johnson Encyclopedia* (1996, 252) focusses primarily on Macbean’s later poverty (and Johnson’s enabling charity). That for Stewart (Rogers 1996, 378-9) is similar, referencing his father, George Stewart, “a bookseller in Edinburgh,” and a charitable payment (of a guinea) to Stewart’s sister by the elderly Johnson for one of Stewart’s notebooks which had remained in his possession.

“Each Writer should receive his due Proportion of Praise from Posterity,” Johnson stated in a letter to John Nichols in 1784 (1994, 445). The assistants are, we might contend, no different. Like Johnson, many of them were part of the trade in words, and the emerging world of the professional writer. Stereotyping aside, Peyton had published some twenty books, with a geographical spread encompassing France, Germany, the Netherlands, and America as well as

Britain before he died in 1776. As Howatt and Widdowson (2004, 68) indicate, he provided one of the most successful programs for teaching modern foreign languages in this period, while across the 1760s he flourished as private tutor, with a range of elite tutees. William Macbean, too, claims a publication history that, by 1748, spanned works such as *The Constitution of Germany* (1743), *An Historical Account of the Present State and Constitution of Germany* (1745) alongside his *History of Germany*. All provided a secure foundation for his later career as a teacher in a boarding school in Newmarket before he returned to lexicography once more (alongside Peyton), on the *Dictionary's* fourth edition which was published in 1773. William's strikingly multilingual elder brother (fluent in French, German, Dutch, Latin, Greek, and Erse) had meanwhile published his own translation (from German) of Godfrey Rothen's *A Synopsis, or Short Analytical View of Chemistry* in 1743, complete with an eloquent introduction setting out his commitment to scientific and empirical principles in ways which, in linguistic terms, clearly resonated with the work he would perform for Johnson. Even in 1738, however, as Johnson recognized (1992, 22), Macbean's work with Ephraim Chambers on the latter's *Cyclopaedia* had already secured a level of expertise such that the 'elder Macbean' was already well able to produce a dictionary of his own. A published poet, with at least three works to his name by 1750, Shiells, too, was another fluent and professional writer whose literary and historical knowledge informed his five-volume *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland* (published serially in 1752 under the name of Theophilus Cibber). Seen against their historical meiosis, the assistants, we might argue, present a highly literate and multilingual community in ways which, *contra* Bainbridge, clearly rendered their employment an entirely reasoned choice.

Stewart was, even so, arguably distinct. There is, for example, little evidence that he shared the writerly ambitions of the Macbeans, Sheills, or Peyton. Instead, as for Johnson himself, whose father Michael was a bookseller in Lichfield, Stewart's familiarity with the matter of books and book production began at an early age. Unlike Johnson, however, Stewart's experience was of a thriving and prestigious book business, located at the Sign of the Book and Angel in Edinburgh's Parliament Close, and strengthened by his father's links to the London book trade including Thomas Longman and Andrew Miller (both of whom were part of the conger of co-proprietors involved in Johnson's *Dictionary*). As Maruca (2012) explores, eighteenth-century booksellers were, in this, far more like modern publishers. Key figures in the literary marketplace, they were embedded in the business of print, printing and compositors, and

busy “negotiating with writers, managing employees and apprenticeships” (Maruca (2012, 66) or, as George Stewart’s career illustrates, “collaborating with other booksellers in joint or even larger partnerships and publications.” George Stewart’s connections with the University of Edinburgh (to which he was appointed Printer), alongside his close links to prominent intellectual and linguistic figures such as the scholar (and printer) Thomas Ruddiman -- described by Duncan (1965, 1) as “the foremost literary scholar in the Scotland of his day” -- provide further important details of Francis’s formative years. Ruddiman’s working association with George Stewart, as Hildyard (2012, 89) verifies, remained in place for over twenty years. Equally important is the fact the business of bookselling was often a family concern, in which both children and spouses gained the requisite expertise. Francis’s mother, Anne, is exemplary in this respect. Born into a literary family in her own right, she took over her husband’s business after he died.

Born in January 1714, Francis had married, in Edinburgh, in November 1744. By 1746, he would be in London and working for Johnson. The skills provided by his background and family business went with him, including, as a later article in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* suggests, his proven experience in “digesting and arranging Mss for the press” (W.N. 1799, 1171). While the long-standing familial links to Millar and Longman presumably aided Stewart’s transition to the London print trade, they would, importantly, also have provided a direct route to Johnson. Stewart’s self-evident literacy and aptitude for words was, in this, by no means irrelevant. As a surviving transcript of a letter from the dictionary years affirms (Nichols 1782, 229-30), Stewart was a fluent, educated, and cogent writer, eloquent and precise on the page. His surviving contract, now in the Hyde collection at Harvard, would be written, by hand, by Johnson himself. As this confirms moreover, Stewart was not, in fact, appointed as an amanuensis. Instead, as Johnson stated, he was “to assist in the compilation of the Dictionary” in what arguably presented a far broader remit from the beginning. Compiling, as the *Dictionary* made plain, could and did include the act of writing (see *Dictionary* (1755) s.v. *compile*, sense 2). But, importantly, as sense 1 specifies, it also includes the processes by which material was to be “draw[n] up from various authors; to collect into one body.” It intersected, in this light, with the foundational principles of the *Dictionary* and in ways which, for Stewart, encompassed an extraordinary level of primary as well as secondary engagement.

Collaborative reading: Francis Stewart at work

In a period in which all drafting and redrafting was done by hand, lexicography was, as already indicated, a highly labor-intensive business. It was a feature shared with other large reference works; Smollett's assorted "minions," employed in the late 1750s on his *Universal History* and "to whom he prescribed tasks of translation, compilation, or abridgement" (Carlyle 1910, 335), played a vital role behind the scenes. So did Mr. Airey, whose stalwart endeavours as an amanuensis on Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* had him copying "nearly twenty folio volumes, so large as to comprehend materials, if they had been published, for printing thirty volumes in the same size" ('Life' 1785, 5). Johnson's *Dictionary*, as part of its initial design, was, however, particularly demanding in the assistance it required. As Johnson emphasized, the authority of the *Dictionary* depended on the authorities he cited, and the samples of usage that, collectively, they provided.

Some 114,000 quotations or "authorities" appeared in the finished *Dictionary*. The underlying "database" or citation file was, however, undoubtedly far larger. Surviving evidence from the annotated texts used for the *Dictionary* can, for example, easily illuminate the gaps between the citational evidence reproduced in the finished text, and the far more extensive records that were originally collected, including many headwords (such as *ballad-monger*, *antepart*, or *bench-hole*) that were, for various reasons, to be omitted. In full, the underlying citation file must have reached well into the hundreds of thousands. As we have seen, it was Johnson alone who, in the standard model of the methodology he deployed, annotated the relevant primary texts, selecting potential headwords and supporting evidence, in ways that shape not only how we understand the *Dictionary* but have also come to inform popular forms of biobibliography in which evidence is made an expression of Johnson's own thoughts and worldview. "From a strictly biographical point of view, the *Dictionary* furnishes the most reliable evidence of what Johnson read -- and of what passages had especially caught his attention," as Wimsatt (1968, 37) states; even "at the simplest level," he asserts (24) "many ... reflect the character and choice of the Johnson whom we know from other sources." James Murray, editor-in-chief of the first edition of the *OED*, could voice more critical perspectives of the reading processes on which such assumptions rely. Lexicographically, as he argued (1910, f.9'), the stated absence of shared reading, and the fact that Johnson "had not risen to the idea of inviting

the 18th century public to help him with the collection of quotations,” displayed weakness rather than strength.

Scribal evidence from behind the scenes, and embedded in the *Dictionary*'s working processes, can, however, take us far closer to the first-hand documentation on which the *Dictionary* depended, and the collective processes that can, in turn, be revealed. A *hand*, as the relevant entry confirms, is, for example, densely polysemous, able to denote a person employed on a given task (see *Dictionary* (1755) s.v. *hand*, sense 37), as well as, under sense 41, a “form or cast of writing.” As a supporting citation from John Cockburn attests, “there is something peculiar [*scil.* “distinctive”] in every one’s writing” whether “men write court or Roman hand, or any other.” Ductus or the “flow” of an individual writer’s hand, is, in this respect, significant. So is aspect or the incline or slant that a given writer prefers. As contemporary evidence attests, Johnson’s hand was notoriously bad, “written...not in Letters but in pothooks, a kind of Character which will probably cost you some time to decipher,” as John Hawkesworth advised Fulke Greville in 1756.³ This was especially the case when, as so often for the *Dictionary*, he was writing (and reading) at speed. Stewart’s hand was, in contrast, marked by his elegantly flowing capitals, his neat right-facing aspect, as well as his distinctive differentiation of *I* and *J* and, perhaps especially, the floating head stroke which marked *F* and *T*. Paleographical evidence of this kind, preserved in the acts of reading the *Dictionary* required, can, on one hand, unequivocally set Johnson and Stewart apart. On the other, it can inform newfound contiguities, allowing us to locate both Johnson and Stewart at work in ways which challenge the range of narratives and assumptions discussed above.

As Johnson’s working copy of Warburton’s edition of Shakespeare confirms, it was Johnson, for example, who, opening volume 1, began to read *The Tempest*, recording words such as *quicken*, *trumpery*, and *executer*. By extension, if we turn to surviving records by which data of this kind was transcribed, here in what is known as the Sneyd-Gimbel copy of Johnson’s *Dictionary* -- an imperfect and incomplete text of the first edition which, importantly, contains over a thousand “slips” deriving from the reading program itself – we can find Francis Stewart, carefully copying out the evidence for *else* which, in Warburton’s edition, appeared in the

³ John Hawkesworth to Fulke Greville, 14 March 1756. Houghton Library, Harvard. MS Hyde 10 (302).

Tempest Act IV, Scene II.⁴ As closer comparison with the underlying annotated text confirms, however, this does not support the standard model of annotation and reproduction that we might otherwise expect. As Figure 2 indicates, Johnson’s marginal annotations appear on the relevant section, marking out *dalliance* and *good-night*, alongside the supporting evidence each required. If *dalliance* lacked the underlining that we prototypically expect, it was, as the *Dictionary* confirms, clearly copied successfully, being reproduced under sense 1 of *dalliance* (n.), if with some variation of textual accidentals (“Look thou be true: do not give *dalliance*/ Too much the rein: the strongest oaths are straw/ To th’ fire i’ th’ blood”).

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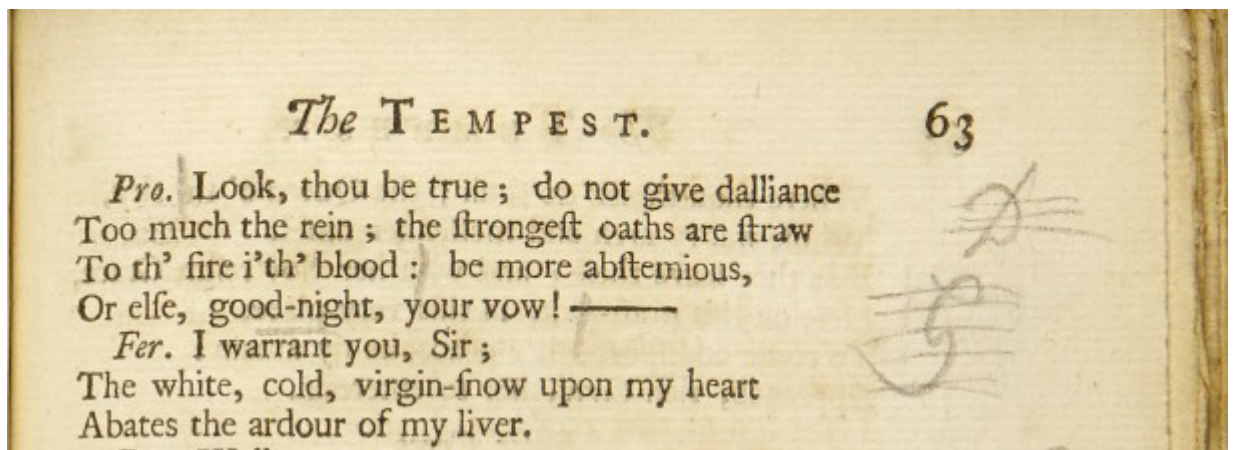


Figure 2. Johnson’s annotations on Act IV, Scene II of the *Tempest*. Taken from Volume 1 of the working copy of William Warburton’s (1747) edition of Shakespeare.

The evidence for *else* (on l.4 of the extract above) is nevertheless more perplexing. As we can see, lacking both underlining and marginal annotation, it does not, in fact, form part of Johnson’s schema of selection. Instead, the completed slip, ascribed to the *Tempest* in Stewart’s careful hand, can be seen as early evidence of his own wider remit in “compiling” the *Dictionary*, in patterns of active supplementation for words that Johnson had omitted and ignored. As I have argued elsewhere (2026b, 2026c), such patterns were, in reality, by no means unusual. Words such as *concrete* and *idea*, or *dispense with* were (among others) all recorded courtesy of hands other than that of Johnson in the annotated copy of Isaac Watts’s *Logick*, a text

⁴ In modern editions, this appears in Act IV, Scene I. The relevant ‘slip’ is tipped into Vol.II (Con-Eyr) of the Sneyd-Gimbel copy of *A General Dictionary of the English Language*. It can be located at image 929 of the digitised copy available at <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2046567>.

which (now preserved in the British Library) advocates empirical scrutiny alongside the value of both annotation and collection. Likewise, in reading Norris, the suggested evidence (and annotations) for *earth-worm* are distinct. Textual interventions of this kind, in non-Johnsonian hands, are clearly significant, drawing attention to the wider interpretative processes that could intervene within the “mechanical” copying we conventionally assume, even where, as in Watts or Norris, Johnson’s hand remains dominant.

The evidence of the surviving working copy of Shakespeare is, even so, both qualitatively and quantitatively distinct -- and particularly in relation to Francis Stewart. On one hand, it remains an extraordinarily rich source of information, comprising over 3,000 pages of annotated text within the seven surviving volumes used for the *Dictionary*.⁵ On the other, it can unequivocally establish shared rather than single-handed processes of reading in ways that can, for example, locate Stewart alongside Johnson in collaborative patterns scattered through plays such as *Troilus and Cressida*, *Cymbeline*, *The Merchant of Venice* or *Henry VI, Part III*. As in Figure 3, for example, we can see two hands, and two readers, both of which are reading for evidence. If both, via the annotations in the margin, record the words that they select, it is Johnson’s hand that annotates *largeness*, *tortive*, and *suppose*, as well as *bias* (among other forms). Meanwhile, Stewart’s hand annotates *jaundice* and *grain*, *fan*, *fineness*, and *affin’d*. Aspect and ductus are distinct. Stewart’s *F* is particularly conspicuous, echoing that used in his signature on the contract he signed in June 1746. His flat-topped *J* (marking *jaundice*) is another reliable marker, as is the unlooped vertical descender of *G*.

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⁵ Volume 6, comprising *King Lear*, *Timon of Athens*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Macbeth* and *Coriolanus*, is currently unlocated.

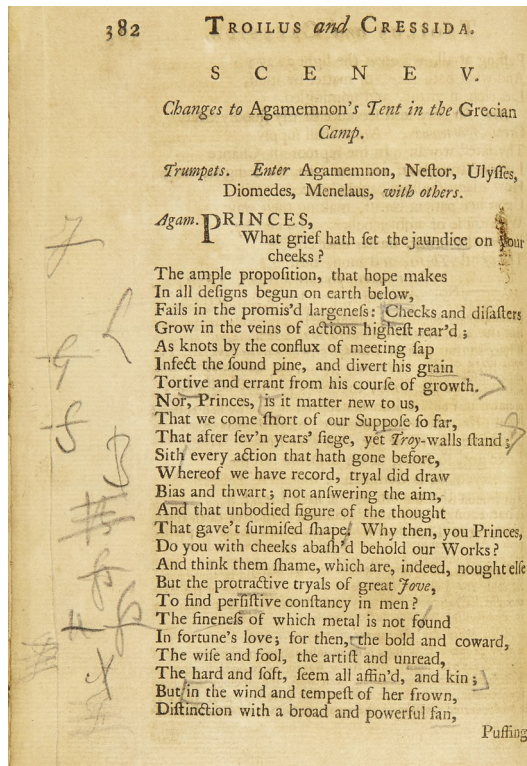


Figure 3. Mixed hands in annotating Act I, Scene V of *Troilus and Cressida*: Francis Stewart and Samuel Johnson. Taken from Volume 7 of the working copy of William Warburton's 1747 edition of Shakespeare.

Positioning of the marginal capitals meanwhile suggests that, on this page at least, Johnson was, pragmatically, the first reader; Stewart's capitals are often forced to the outer edge for want of space. Similar shared praxis can be located at e.g. p.384, where Johnson's annotations (for *untimbered* and *toast*) are decisively outnumbered by Stewart's selection of *brize*, *flexible*, *sympathise*, *give*, *ride*, *knit*, and *return*. Yet, if such 'shared' pages are relatively infrequent, this is, as the annotated text of *Troilus and Cressida* arrestingly confirms, a result of the relatively rare appearance of Johnson's own hand. In 109 out of 121 pages, it is Stewart's hand alone that dominates, recording words such as *imminence* and *empale*, *linger* and *rivet* (n.), or *tickling*, *fraughtage*, *prologue* and *pitch*.

Patterns of this kind are, in fact, replicated across the annotated volumes of Shakespeare. As in *Julius Caesar*, Johnson's hand can make sporadic appearances such that he picks out *conceit* as a verb on p.50, and *legacy*, *prick* (v.) and *unmeritable*, as well as *cut off* fifteen pages later. *Stake*, *bay* (v.), *hand*, *appear*, and *word* receive similar attention on p.67, even if Stewart

decided, on a second reading, that *do* and *salutation* also merited attention. Across the text as a whole, however, Stewart's choices dominate. In precisely parallel ways, Johnson might, in reading *Love's Labours Lost*, annotate a token page, yielding words such as *doter*, *dispraise*, and *doomsday* on p.244, but Stewart reads, systematically, through the rest of the play, annotating as he goes. Johnson is, of course, the prime (if not necessarily exclusive) reader of plays such as *Othello*, the *Tempest*, *Henry IV, Part II*, *Hamlet* and *King John*, or *Two Gentleman of Verona*. But, palaeographically, it is Stewart's hand that, with relatively few exceptions, determines words and evidence alike in the *Merchant of Venice*, *Love's Labours Lost*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Henry VIII* (among other plays). Script can, as here, provide an arresting witness history to the lexicographical processes of the past, as well as firmly destabilizing the familiar narratives with which we began.

Seen collectively, as these annotated volumes make plain, Stewart would prove an extraordinarily conscientious reader. Johnson's habits of partial or selective reading were well-known; "How few books are there of which one ever can possibly arrive at the last page?," as he demanded of Hester Thrale (Hill 1897, I, 322). In contrast, Stewart was clearly a completist by nature. Of the plays for which he takes prime responsibility, very few pages escape annotation (*Love's Labours Lost* was, in this, to be an exception). Unlike the more liberal annotational spacing that Johnson often preferred, annotations in Stewart's hand can, as in *Henry VIII*, often number eighteen or more per page. Twenty-four appear on p. 165 of the *Merchant of Venice*. On p.98, he marked thirty-four – the "highest number of annotations," Thomas (1974, 66) records, "on a single page of any extant marked text" (even if these are, by Thomas, again misattributed to Johnson). Important, too, is Stewart's scrutiny of the "little" words that are so vital to lexicography, and which – as Murray's experience for the *OED* later confirmed – often escaped notice in public reading programs. Stewart, as his attentive reading of *Much Ado About Nothing* attests, instead carefully noted evidence of *howsoever*, *backward*, *onward*, *much*, or modal verbs such as *may*, or prepositions such as *of* and *with*. In reading p.296 of *As You Like It*, Shakespeare's use of indefinite articles as well as prepositions all claim attention (Johnson, reading the same page, picks out *cradle*, *flock*, and *golden*). If, as Johnson (1755, C1') emphasized, Shakespeare's works were themselves ample testimony of "the diction of common life," here, too, Stewart would prove an admirable witness, tracking words such as *doublet* and *smock*, *tooth-ach*, *half-pence*, *mustard*, *supper-time*, *ballad-monger*, and *hobby-horse*, or

colloquial idioms such as *heigh-ho* or *pish*. While, as Thomas (1974, 66) records, the annotated Shakespeare volumes collectively document almost twenty thousand citations, a substantial portion of these must now be understood as deriving from Stewart.

Precisely why such collaborative processes are so prominent in Warburton's edition of Shakespeare, or to what extent these patterns of reading can be assumed to be representative, remains, however, unknown. With reference to the latter, Stewart's confident and systematic annotation suggests what already seems to be a well-established working method for eliciting, and documenting, the requisite linguistic evidence. It would, for a variety of reasons, be unusual to begin as a novice dictionary reader with a text of this complexity. With reference to the former, as the surviving volumes suggest, Stewart's annotations clearly spanned plays which Johnson did not like, such as *Cymbeline*, as well as those he saw as fundamental to Shakespeare's canon, such as *Julius Caesar* or *Henry V*. Such evidence, we might note, impacts significantly not only how we read Johnson (and others) reading for the *Dictionary*, but also on how we prototypically read Johnson reading Shakespeare. As I have explored elsewhere (Mugglestone 2026a), if, as Bronson states (1968, xiii), it was Johnson alone who "turned his concern with Shakespeare to present account by going through the plays and collecting on index cards thousands of passages illustrative of Shakespeare's use of specific words," this, too, now demands reassessment. So do other canonical assumptions by which, as Bronson (1968, xiv), adds, it was Johnson's single-handed reading of Shakespeare that made his writing "the backbone of illustrative usage" while Johnson himself became "the unproclaimed but greatest living authority on Shakespeare's diction."

Phrasal structures and other forms

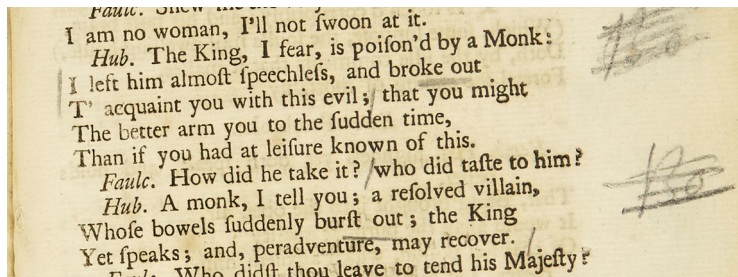
Phrasal verbs were "one area where the monolingual dictionary had hardly even started to evolve a technique before Johnson's time," writes Osselton (1997, 94-5): "there was no technique for dealing with the complexities of the phrasal verbs before Johnson turned his attention to them." For Johnson (1755, B1^v), these were identified as verbs modified in their signification "by a particle subjoined;" examples cited in his Preface include to *fall on* ("to attack"), to *fall off* ("to apostatize"), to *break off* ("to stop abruptly"), to *bear out* ("to justify"), to *fall in* ("to comply") and, among others, to *give over* in the sense "to cease." There were, as he added, "innumerable expressions of the same kind" in English. As Lowth (1762, 128) would confirm in his influential

Short Introduction to English Grammar, the proposition placed “after the Verb, and separate from it, like an Adverb...is no less apt to affect the sense of it, and to give it a new meaning.” Johnson’s work, however, is conventionally seen as an important forerunner, listing phrasal structures (in their own numbered senses) once the main senses of a given verb had been established.

Nevertheless, as Osselton points out, there are important precedents in bilingual dictionaries such as those by Ainsworth and Boyer, both of which Johnson used and in which non-native lexemes were frequently glossed by English phrasal structures. Anterior knowledge of this kind, as Osselton (1997, 103) contends, could conceivably have acted as a “catalyst for Johnson’s literary memory” such that relevant forms in Ainsworth “touched off appropriate quotations from Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden” in Johnson’s work. For the *Dictionary*, as he adds, this arguably reshaped structure and evidence alike within the entries, while providing forms of supplementation that are, as he argues, distinct from the processes of primary reading *per se*. Reddick’s counterargument, that Johnson instead used primary data for phrasal structures, if in ways that might subsequently confuse the assistants (a problems explored by Wild 2010, 41) can, like Osselton, return us to the assumptions of single-handed scholarship with which we began. Here, too, however, we can productively return to the marked-up texts, and the collective evidence that they provide.

On one level, the annotated copy of Warburton’s Shakespeare clearly presents robust (and extensive) testimony for the assimilation of phrasal structures within the working practices of the *Dictionary*. The text itself is, in this respect, clearly the catalyst. Annotating *Henry IV, Part I*, Johnson marked relevant evidence for *break forth* and *break with*, or *fall on* and *fall off*, as well as the trio of *set forward*, *set on*, and *set off* (among many other similar forms). The standard annotational patterns were modified accordingly. As in Figure 4, pencilled capitals in the margin still referred the copyist to the relevant main verb but in each case an accompanying lower-case graph drew attention to the accompanying particle, making plain the multi-word status of the material that was to be recorded.

TAKE IN FIGURE 4 NEAR HERE



Break out and *burst out*. Phrasal verbs annotated by Samuel Johnson in Act V Scene VIII of *King John* in Volume 4 of the working copy of William Warburton's 1747 edition of Shakespeare.

Distribution can, however, vary markedly. Reading *Henry IV Part II*, Johnson notes over ninety examples including *come by*, *come in*, and *come to*, as well as *provide for* and *put forth* (and an extensive listing of forms with *set*). In contrast, none were noted in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Measure for Measure*, *Richard II* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in all of which Johnson was, as the annotations confirm, the prime reader.

While such variability can seem surprising, so, too, is the fact that Stewart was also busy recording forms of this kind. A wide range of structures, including *fight in*, *hew up*, *level at*, *possess with*, *range about*, *revenge on*, *strike to*, *take on*, and *triumph in* were, among others, all recorded in Stewart's hand in the working copy of *Henry VI, Part III*. *Break off*, *bury in*, *determine for* [someone], *fall from*, *harp on*, *tell of*, *trim up* and *wrestle with yield* (among other examples) similar testimony in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Stewart's attentive marking of *Henry VIII* (*deserve of*, *dote on*, *dwell in*, *fall into*, *grieve at*, or *sleep on* (among other examples)) or *Merry Wives of Windsor* are similar. Mapping the shared reading of plays such as *Julius Caesar* in this respect, we can see Johnson picking out *cut off* and *turn off* but it is Stewart who assiduously records *put by* and *put up*, *muffle up*, *stand with*, and *wait for* (among many others). Evidence of non-proximate or discontinuous structures, marked by Stewart in e.g. *labour for* and *beat out* in *Henry VIII* (which derive, respectively, from "That for your Highness good I have ever laboured" and "beaten a long time out of play") meanwhile lend further support for the non-mechanical nature of his work by which wider structures of meaning (and syntax) were included in the careful scrutiny he performed. Here and elsewhere, the salience of collaborative rather than

single-handed work seems incontrovertible. Seen collectively, many of the phrasal structures attributed to Shakespeare in the *Dictionary* derive from Stewart's rather than Johnson's work.⁶

As a final illustration of Stewart's contributions in the dictionary garret, we can, however, move in a slightly different direction to examine the work not of addition or supplementation but of active curtailment. Few dictionaries can, of course, replicate the full range of evidence or sense-division that underlying research may have revealed. Words, senses, and, indeed, phrasal structures could, as for Johnson's *Dictionary*, all be omitted under pressures of space. Indeed, one might argue that the real salience of the marked-up texts in this respect lies in their demonstration of the full range of forms which originally elicited attention, and in which script rather than print preserves an accurate record. The underlying illustrative evidence, on which the *Dictionary* depended in fundamental ways, was no different. As Johnson admits, detraction – defined in the *Dictionary* as “the act of lopping or cutting” – was a further part of the “labour” that lexicography required, such that quotations were often adjusted to fit the available space (here in response to the textual pragmatics of publication) while, as part of the same process, strict textual accuracy could also be sacrificed. As Johnson (1755, B2^v) reassured his readers. the headword “for the sake of which [examples] are inserted,” had, in this, always “been carefully preserved.” Nevertheless, as he added, it was undeniable that, in many cases, the accompanying “examples ...are no longer to be considered as conveying the sentiments or doctrine of their authours.”

The surviving marked up texts can, in this respect, provide further compelling evidence of the processes which took place, whether in comparative analysis of the parameters originally indicated for a given citation in comparison with that it later assumed in print, or in textual forms by which in which detraction could, at times, be inscribed on the citation before it was even copied out (see Mugglestone 2026b). As Johnson's correspondence confirms, however, this was a process that was imbricated in the wider lexicographical praxis of the garret. “I have desired the passages to be clipped close,” Johnson (1992, 73) wrote, for example, to William Strahan -- the printer who had final responsibility for accommodating the matter of the *Dictionary* within the parameters the co-proprietors desired. Johnson's “I have desired” unambiguously indicates

⁶ Other assistants, too, could participate in the same process. The example of *dispense with*, adduced on p.** in discussing non-Johnsonian annotations in Watts's *Logick*, can, on similar paleographic grounds, be traced to Alexander Macbean.

both instruction and the act of delegation in ways which elide (at last by choice) his own agency in processes of this kind. This was, as Johnson adds, a task in which Stewart had, in particular, excelled. “Since poor Stuarts time I could never get that part of the work into regularity, and perhaps never shall,” as Johnson sadly conceded, while incidentally confirming other aspects of Stewart’s systematic (and exemplary) industry. Johnson, as he indicated, might try and fill the gap. “When I have nobody with me, I generally clip it close.” But, as he acknowledged, such occurrences were rare; since the task of making up the sheets devolved mainly to the assistants, there were, he stated, limits to the editorial oversight he might assume. “One cannot,” he stressed, “always be on the watch.” Stewart might therefore have “clipped close” until the first volume of the *Dictionary* was complete. For the second, which Johnson began on 3 April 1753, it was, alongside Johnson, William Macbean and Joseph Peyton who instead assumed primary responsibility for these and other tasks. The garret became a quieter space. Shiells seems to have ceased working by late 1752. He died in early 1753. By that point, Alexander Macbean had also departed to assume a well-paid role as Librarian to the Duke of Argyll. What Stewart did remains, however, unknown. Along with Alexander, as well as Robert Sheills, he was, as Francis Barber (Boswell 2001, 128) attests, still visiting Johnson and the garret in late 1752. But he was, by this point, no longer in Johnson’s employ.

Reclamation: From amanuensis to lexicographer?

If, as McDermott (2005, 2) states, “little is known about what part the amanuenses played in the whole compilation processes of the Dictionary,” Stewart can, as this article has explored, hence provide an arresting counter-example. Spanning reading and the primary selection of data to copying and clipping, he was, in reality, perhaps better seen as an editorial and lexicographical assistant, taking responsibility -- in ways which are interestingly aligned with his own early history -- with the final stages of preparing the material for the press, as well as being active in the ancillary states by which words and illustrative citations were assembled. Stewart’s undoubted prominence across the Warburton text of Shakespeare can, in this, lend new credence to other contemporary -- if neglected -- accounts in which, as the lexicographer Francis Grose (1792, 161) stated, Stewart’s “business was to collect the authorities for the different words.” “Doctor Johnson’s Dictionary was not entirely written by himself,” as Grose firmly countered. He had, importantly, his own working knowledge of the demands that dictionary-making

imposed in which being single-handed might be rhetorically tempting but pragmatically impossible. The *Gentleman's Magazine* (W. N. 1799, 1171) made a similar claim, acknowledging that Stewart was “responsible for collecting the authorities” while, as it adds, also taking on considerable organizational responsibility for the *Dictionary* as a whole.

Whether Stewart fulfils the celebrated criteria that Johnson set out for *lexicographer* (“A writer of dictionaries; a harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the signification of words”) remains a final and interesting proposition. Drudgery -- verified by thousands of annotations in Stewart’s distinctive hand -- is uncontested. If hitherto unobserved, he is, behind the scenes, both writer and reader in ways that, as we have seen, impacted both on the collection of evidence (and the semiotic analysis it enabled) while playing equally valuable roles in shaping evidence and entries such that they met the stringent criteria of the press. Other more extensive annotations in Stewart’s hand -- by which e.g. *sallet*, underlined in Act IV, Scene 10 of *Henry VI, Part II*, is identified as meaning ‘helmet’ as deriving from Spanish *celada* -- clearly demonstrate the interest in “signification” that Johnson’s definition requires.⁷ Stewart’s extensive marking of phrasal structures and the semiotic patterns they reveal is, as we have seen, equally significant in this respect. Yet if Johnson’s definition implicitly returns us to the single-handed focus with which we began, evidence of Stewart’s work is, in reality, intricately embedded in the wider processes in which practical lexicography has its being, and in which dictionary-making is emphatically a collective, and collaborative, act.

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⁷ *Sallet* was, however, omitted in this sense in the finished *Dictionary*.

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