



The History of Rasselas: The Prince of Abyssinia

Samuel Johnson

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From *The Quarterly Review* - Volume 216, 1912:

Genius can often manage to escape the dangers of its own age. But the fact that the novel had come to its own in a century given over as none before or since to the criticism of life and manners had its inevitable effect on others. And if we look at two famous stories by two very great men of letters, who, widely as they differed, were both very typical men of the eighteenth century and were the acknowledged chiefs of literature, each in his own country—if we look at 'Rasselas' and 'Candide,' we shall find that, where a man is not a born story-teller, he inevitably yields to the spirit of his age, and his story is buried in criticism of life and discussion of moral ideas. Plot, in fact, is nothing; the interest of character has destroyed it; and, as the life of the novel depends on the union of the two, the story as a story is dead.

We read 'Candide' to laugh with it, and 'Rasselas' perhaps to learn from it, but no one will ever again read either for the story.

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