

John Hawkesworth

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John Hawkesworth was born in Tottenham Court, London on an unknown date to John Hawkesworth, a watch engraver, and Ann, as the second born of three children, and was baptized on 28 October 1720. Hawkesworth was given a modest elementary education in which he studied arts and arithmetic as well as literary texts found in the bible, and he learned the French language from his father who was fluent. At sixteen, he gained an apprenticeship with an attorney in the city, and, while the work was boring, Hawkesworth found interest in literary conversations with John Ryland, a young merchant and a man who would go on to marry his sister Honor in 1742. Hawkesworth married a woman named Mary in 1744, and the couple had no children but did run a boarding school geared towards the education of young ladies that they held in the Thornhill Mansion in Bromley.

Hawkesworth made a name for himself as an essayist, author, poet, and prominent editor for *The Gentleman's Magazine*, starting from when he first published poetry with them in 1741 with the verse fable "The Fop, Cock and Diamond." Hawkesworth wrote over twenty well received compositions between 1744 and 1749 and became acquainted with a long-time contributor to the magazine, Samuel Johnson. During his time contributing to the magazine, Hawkesworth wrote up parliamentary debates, edited the poetry section, and contributed his own essays, reviews, and poems, finally becoming literary editor in 1756.

Through Hawkesworth's connection and friendship with Johnson, they founded a periodical called *The Adventurer* on the side, which ran from 1752 to 1754, and Hawkesworth became one of their main contributors and editors, where his more than seventy submissions gained him much recognition and many friends. Many of his contributions were used to provide moral guidance for the young men living in London, and he wrote blending moral sentiment with exotic trappings and melodrama. Because his works were about domestic life and focused primarily on people living in London, they were very well reviewed, and he remained a force in the world of influential periodicals.

Hawkesworth's poetry was not as well known, but explored themes of morality, death, and human experiences. Hawkesworth's reputation as an impressive literary figure was overshadowed near the end of his life by his involvement in bad editing practices. Notably, his lack of editing in the publishing of *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken in the Southern Hemisphere* by Byron, Wallis, Carteret, and James Cook, which was not well received by critics, and the backlash is said to have shortened his days. Hawkesworth also became a director in the East India Company a few years before his death, but his contributions were slim and he accepted the job offer for the money, not to contribute to the company.

John Hawkesworth died in 1773 in a friend's home after a short illness. Thanks to his contributions to the world of editing, there is a monument to him near his home in Kent, England.

“A Moral Thought” was published in a collection in 1770, and we know very little about its publication or review. The poem was published under the name Dr. Hawkesworth because he had recently been given an honorary Doctorate of Law. The poem is in iambic tetrameter quatrains and explores thoughts and feelings about death.

Further Reading

Abbott, John Lawrence. *John Hawkesworth: Eighteenth-Century Man of Letters*. U of Wisconsin P, 1982.

Abbott, John Lawrence. “John Hawkesworth: Friend of Samuel Johnson and Editor of Captain Cook’s Voyages and of the *Gentleman’s Magazine*.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1970, pp. 339–50.

Williamson, Karina. “Hawkesworth, John (bap. 1720, d. 1773), Writer.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2006.

A Moral Thought²⁵⁶

THRO²⁵⁷ groves sequester'd,²⁵⁸ dark and still,
 Low vales,²⁵⁹ and mossy cells among,
 In silent paths the careless rill,²⁶⁰
 Which languid²⁶¹ murmurs, steals along:

Awhile it plays with circling sweep,
 And lingering leaves its native plains,
 Then pours impetuous²⁶² down the steep,
 And mingles with the boundless main.

O let my years thus devious²⁶³ glide,
 Through silent scenes obscurely calm,
 Nor wealth nor strife pollute the tide,
 Nor honour's sanguinary²⁶⁴ palm.

When labour tires, and pleasure palls,²⁶⁵
 Still let the stream untroubled be,
 As down the steep of age it falls,
 And mingles with eternity.

²⁵⁶ *A Collection of Poems in Four Volumes. By Several hands. Vol. III*, second edition, printed for G. Pearch, 1770, pp. 146-147. *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*.

²⁵⁷ THRO: through.

²⁵⁸ *Sequester'd*: "to separate and reject; to eliminate; chiefly in immaterial sense, to set aside, dismiss from consideration" (OED).

²⁵⁹ *Vales*: valleys.

²⁶⁰ *Rill*: a small stream or brook.

²⁶¹ *Languid*: lacking vitality or strength.

²⁶² *Impetuous*: characterized by having sudden and violent movements.

²⁶³ *Devious*: in winding ways.

²⁶⁴ *Sanguinary*: characterized by feelings full of bloodshed.

²⁶⁵ *Palls*: "to grow weak or faint; to lose strength, courage, vitality, etc.; to fail, fall away" (OED).



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