



Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia

by Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

In this enchanting fable (subtitled *The Choice of Life*), Rasselas and his retinue burrow their way out of the totalitarian paradise of the Happy Valley in search of that triad of eighteenth-century aspiration – life, liberty and happiness. According to that quirky authority, James Boswell, Johnson penned his only work of prose fiction in a handful of days to cover the cost of his mother's funeral. The stylistic elegance of the book and its wide-ranging philosophical concerns give no hint of haste or superficiality. Among other still burning issues Johnson's characters pursue questions of education, colonialism, the nature of the soul and even climate alteration. Johnson's profoundest concern, however, is with the alternating attractions of solitude and social participation, seen not only as the ultimate life-choice but as the arena in which are played out the deepest fears of the individual: "Of the uncertainties of our present state, the most dreadful and alarming is the uncertain continuance of Reason."

Total running time: 5:30:43

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